

Oral Statement on Rural Women's Right to Adequate Food and Nutrition

Submitted by FIAN International, Center for Women's Global Leadership (CWGL), Geneva Infant Feeding Association (GIFA), International Collective in Support of Fishworkers (ICSF), International Union of Food Workers (IUF), International Women's Rights Action Watch Asia Pacific (IWRAW), National Fisheries Solidarity Movement (NAFSO), Coordination Nationale des Organisations Paysannes du Mali (CNOP), Programme on Women's Economic Social and Cultural Rights (PWESCR), and World Forum of Fish Harvesters and Fish Workers (WFF)¹

To the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women
On its General Discussion on Rural Women
56th Session, 7 October 2013

FIAN International, on behalf of 14 organizations that advocate for the economic, social, and cultural rights of women in rural communities, would like to thank the Committee for the opportunity to provide this oral statement in addition to the written statement we have already submitted.

Rural women face unique challenges when attempting to realise their human right to adequate food and nutrition. To address these, as a first step, we would like to ask the Committee to explicitly recognise the right to adequate food and nutrition in its forthcoming General Recommendation. This human right is central to the realisation of all other human rights of rural women. We ask the Committee to hold States accountable to respect, protect, and fulfil the right to adequate food and nutrition of rural women in an integrated manner by ensuring that all structural causes of hunger and malnutrition are addressed all along the food chain – from access, control, management and ownership of land, seeds, forests and water bodies, to food processing, marketing and promotion, protection in the workplace, and to decent income and consumption patterns, up until the very moment in which food is effectively consumed as a needed element for nutrition and health, individually or in community with others across their respective life spans.

In this context, we also ask the Committee to clearly articulate the need for national economic policies that place the human rights of rural people, especially women, at the heart of national action plans. The current neoliberal trajectory of the global economy encourages an agribusiness-dominated food system, which views rural populations and their natural resources as production banks resulting in rural-to-urban migration, dependency on foreign direct investments and reduced regulation, therefore weakening the ability of States to hold third parties accountable for human rights violations within the economic sector. Without national economic policies that place people at the center, the human rights of rural women in local, rural livelihoods around the world will continue to be threatened and violated.

More specifically, we would like to highlight five key areas that should be addressed by the General Recommendation:

1. The livelihoods of rural women producers who depend on farming, fisheries, livestock rearing, gardening and the gathering of forest food are continuously being threatened. Access, control, management and ownership of natural resources by rural women, be it in collective or individual tenure systems, often lack recognition and support by the State, the natural resources on which they depend are threatened by climate change, and land grabbing and other forms of natural resource grabbing severely undermine rural women's food and nutrition security and food sovereignty. To make things worse, efforts that aim to respond to the degradation and over-exploitation of natural resources often ignore rural women's role and dependence on these resources for their livelihood, as well as their culture and traditional knowledge systems. **Access, control, management and ownership of all natural and productive resources on which rural women depend should be guaranteed and rural women's knowledge, culture, traditions and practices in relation to their role as food producers should be valued and protected.**

¹ In addition to the listed drafting organisations, this oral statement is additionally endorsed by the International Baby Food Action Network (IBFAN); South Asian Feminist Alliance for ESCR (SAFA), Association de Défense des Droits des Aides Ménagères et Domestiques du Mali (ADDAD – Mali) and Asia Pacific Forum on Women, Law and Development (APWLD).

2. Difficulty in accessing decent work is especially pronounced amongst rural women workers, affecting rural women's ability to access social protection systems, their sexual and reproductive health and rights, as well as their ability to adequately care and provide for their children, families and communities. ***Decent work for rural women workers should be guaranteed based on existing international instruments and implemented in a non-discriminatory manner in order to realise rural women's right to adequate food and nutrition.***

3. Rural women face particular difficulties in their ability to make informed decisions related to their sexual and reproductive health and their own nutrition and that of their children and families, with intergenerational and community-wide repercussions for the right to adequate food and nutrition. These difficulties are further exacerbated by interference from commercially-motivated non-state actors. Furthermore, rural girls, women in the role of grandmothers, indigenous and First Nations women and rural women workers face additional and specific obstacles related to the realisation of their human right to adequate food and nutrition and that of their families. ***The "intertwined subjectivities" of mother and child during pregnancy, childbirth, and breastfeeding need to be recognised and framed through the lens of women's rights throughout their lifespan in order for all rural women and their families to realise their right to adequate food and nutrition.***

4. The global food economy has been both gender-blind and male-biased. Women are involved in all aspects of production, processing and distribution; however, their voices have remained marginal in macroeconomic policy decisions in this area. While the global economic crisis has further aggravated rural women's access to food, cuts in spending have increased gender inequalities as key services and social protections became and remain unavailable. ***Women's roles in land use, production, processing, distribution, market access, trade, investment, price volatility, and food availability should be recognized, valued and protected.***

5. Discrimination against women both exacerbates and perpetuates the precarious situations in which rural women find themselves. Rural women suffer multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination in law and in practice. The resultant marginalisation and deprivation of livelihood of rural women, through discrimination in their access to land and other natural resources, financial opportunities, and within the household, among other forms, renders rural women's human rights to be more likely threatened and violated. ***An adequate legal and constitutional framework for the realisation of rural women's fundamental rights and freedoms based on the principles of equality and non-discrimination should be guaranteed.***

We respectfully request that the Committee address these five areas related to rural women's right to adequate food and nutrition in its General Recommendation and look forward to continuing to contribute input to the Committee throughout the process of drafting the General Recommendation.