

## Joint Written Submission to the 62<sup>nd</sup> Session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW 62) on Rural Women's Right to Food and Nutrition

FIAN International<sup>1</sup>, as Secretariat of the Global Network for the Right to Food and Nutrition (GNRTFN)<sup>2</sup>, together with the endorsing organizations listed below are grateful for the opportunity to make a written contribution<sup>3</sup> on **rural women's right to food and nutrition (RTFN)** to the Commission on the Status of Women and welcomes the Priority Theme of its 62<sup>nd</sup> Session: Challenges and opportunities in achieving gender equality and the empowerment of rural women.

### I. The global food economy has been both gender-blind and male-biased.

Gendered threats to rural women's RTFN are inextricably intertwined with the pervasive patriarchal norms and practices that discriminate against women and girls, as well as the current economic and development model, which is generally known to be rent-seeking, exploitative of people and natural resources, and highly growth-oriented.<sup>4</sup> 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, results in rural-to-urban migration, and weakens the ability of States to hold third parties accountable for human rights violations within the economic sector.<sup>5</sup> While women are involved in all aspects of production, processing and distribution of food, their voices have remained marginal in macroeconomic policy decisions in this area.<sup>6</sup> Cuts in spending – particularly in the context of the global economic crisis – has further aggravated rural women's access to food and increased gender inequalities as key services and social protections became and remain unavailable. While the formal adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development marks the beginning of a new phase of monitoring development as all countries work to translate the SDGs – including Goal 2 on Zero Hunger and Goal 5 on Gender Equality – into their respective national contexts, monitoring systems need to maintain human rights, the structural causes of hunger and malnutrition, and the effective participation of women directly affected at the center in order to overcome these threats to women's RTFN.

### II. The livelihoods of rural women producers are particularly under threat.

Access to resources by rural women producers who depend on farming, fisheries, livestock rearing, gardening and the gathering of forest food often lack recognition and support by the State,<sup>7</sup> the natural

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.fian.org/>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.righttofoodandnutrition.org/>

<sup>3</sup> The present document is based, *inter alia*, on the joint FIAN International submission to the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women for its General Discussion on Rural Women during its 56<sup>th</sup> Session in October 2013<sup>3</sup> and highlights the structural causes for violations of rural women's right to food and nutrition and related human rights.

<sup>4</sup> For example, please see the case of Hidrosogamoso (<http://www.fiancolombia.org/fian-colombia-trabaja-en-comunidades-2/>) in Colombia, where women are the most affected by the impacts of an hydroelectric megaproject that has destroyed women's economic independence and caused fishers and peasants to have to seek out employment as domestic workers and in other precarious employment where sexual violence and trafficking are rampant. Furthermore, women are also the ones who are more prominently in the frontlines against company activities without the political recognition.

<sup>5</sup> For example, please see the case of Kimsacocho (<http://www.fian.org/what-we-do/case-work/ecuador-kimsacocho/>) in Ecuador, where national policies facilitate the entry of mining companies into the country with severe repercussions for rural women's RTFN in spite of women being the primary front of resistance against the extractivist companies.

<sup>6</sup> [http://www.righttofoodandnutrition.org/files/rtfanw-2017\\_eng\\_0.pdf#page=38](http://www.righttofoodandnutrition.org/files/rtfanw-2017_eng_0.pdf#page=38)

<sup>7</sup> For example, even though women are responsible for nearly 80% of Guinea's food production, they do not have the right to inherit land; only a small percentage owns land and they obtain user rights to agricultural land through their husbands and sons ([http://www.righttofoodandnutrition.org/files/rtfanw-2017\\_eng\\_0.pdf#page=41](http://www.righttofoodandnutrition.org/files/rtfanw-2017_eng_0.pdf#page=41)); See also

resources<sup>8</sup> on which they depend are threatened by climate change, and land grabbing<sup>9</sup> 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 roles and dependence on these resources for their livelihood.

**III. Rural women workers are employed in all sector of the rural economy, yet lack access to decent work.**

While rural workers are often denied access to even the most basic of rights covered in the ILO's core conventions<sup>10</sup>, in particular to freedom of association and the right to bargain collectively, the situation of rural women workers is even more detrimental as rural women's jobs are usually seasonal, part-time and low-wage.<sup>11</sup> While the unequal division of care work<sup>12</sup> is a result of the patriarchal norms and practices that discriminate against women, it continues to serve as the backbone of the formal economy without any of the needed social and legal protection systems in place that would enable rural women to adequately care and provide for their children, families and communities.

**IV. Sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) are central in women's RTFN.**

The gender dimension of poverty – 60% of chronically hungry people are women and girls<sup>13</sup> – and its interlinkages with food and nutrition security and SRHR cannot be dismissed.<sup>14</sup> Discrimination against women results in all rural women facing difficulties in their ability to make informed decisions related to their SRHR and in their own nutrition and that of their children and families, with intergenerational and community-wide repercussions for the RTFN. These difficulties are particularly serious among rural girls and are exacerbated by interference from commercially-motivated non-state actors who introduce industrial/corporate diets that lead to non-communicable diseases, and push the corporate-driven narrative that emphasizes medicalized technical solutions to structural problems of a political, economic, and social nature.

**V. Indigenous women and girls are most vulnerable and marginalized in many countries of the world, where they make up an important part of the rural population.**

Progress on the rights of indigenous women and girls is central to the reduction of poverty, food security and nutrition, access to land and natural resources, and the protection of traditional knowledge, among others. While the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples celebrates its 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2017, its implementation is lagging behind and today, indigenous communities continue to suffer higher rates of poverty, discriminatory support policies and health services. For example, breastfeeding rates are the lowest in First Nations communities in Canada, in aborigines' communities in Australia or Maori communities in New Zealand. In isolated communities and on reserves, reproductive health services,

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the case of the Colombian afro-descendent peasant women from the Consejo Comunitario Campesino Palenque Monte Oscuro (CCCPMO) who for years have been making demands to the Colombian State to grant them access to their lands after these were lost as a result of the expansion of the agro-industrial sugarcane sector ([http://www.fian.org/en/news/article/colombian\\_afro\\_descendant\\_peasant\\_women\\_make\\_demands\\_to\\_un\\_com\\_mittee/](http://www.fian.org/en/news/article/colombian_afro_descendant_peasant_women_make_demands_to_un_com_mittee/)).

<sup>8</sup> Following the CEDAW General Recommendation No. 34 and the draft UN Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and Other People Working in Rural Areas, rural women's right to seeds should be recognized as a fundamental human right.

<sup>9</sup> For example, please see from Zimbabwe on the impact of land grabbing, see [www.righttofoodandnutrition.org/files/rtfanw-2017\\_eng\\_0.pdf#page=41](http://www.righttofoodandnutrition.org/files/rtfanw-2017_eng_0.pdf#page=41)

<sup>10</sup> Including ILO Convention on Maternity Protection No. 183 (2000)

<sup>11</sup> [http://www.fian.org/library/publication/a\\_life\\_without\\_dignity\\_the\\_price\\_of\\_your\\_cup\\_of\\_tea/](http://www.fian.org/library/publication/a_life_without_dignity_the_price_of_your_cup_of_tea/)

<sup>12</sup> It is estimated that women spend "85–90% of their time each day on household food preparation, child care and other household chores." <http://www.fao.org/3/a-at890e.pdf>

<sup>13</sup> <http://www.unwomen.org/en/news/in-focus/commission-on-the-status-of-women-2012/facts-and-figures>

<sup>14</sup> [http://arrow.org.my/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/Food-Security-and-SRHR\\_Key-Resources\\_2014.pdf](http://arrow.org.my/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/Food-Security-and-SRHR_Key-Resources_2014.pdf)

prenatal, birthing, post-natal and breastfeeding supports are often not available, or not culturally adapted, let alone in local languages, requiring women to travel to urban centers, isolating pregnant women and new mothers from their families and communities at very vulnerable times in their lives.

**VI. Women's rights have been historically isolated from the human RTFN within legally-binding language of key international human rights treaties.**

This structural isolation within human rights treaties has further aggravated the realities of rural women. Women are invisible in the International Covenant of Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (CESCR), the women's RTFN – beyond its limited link to the right to health – was omitted in the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), and both CEDAW and the Convention of the Rights of the Child (CRC) only gave mention to pregnant and lactating women's nutritional status. This poor reflection of women's RTFN in international treaties has contributed to the marginalization and exclusion of women from decision-making processes that affect their local food systems, with a particular impact on the social groups most affected by hunger and malnutrition, especially rural women and girls. This neglect and exclusion combined with a wide-spread lack of knowledge of international human rights frameworks that could support rural women's claims result in women and girls being unaware of and unable to access the powerful tool that is human rights to hold those in power to account. As a result, governments fail to implement effective measures to protect and advance the RTFN of rural women and instead implement country-level economic and development plans that directly respond to the demands and orientation of the neoliberal global economy and governments and that violate the RTFN by enabling the grabbing of affected groups' natural resources, discriminating against women small-scale food producers and their food systems.

**VII. Demands for achieving rural women's RTFN.**

1. Guarantee rural women producers' access, control, management and ownership of all natural and productive resources on which they depend.
2. Recognize and support rural women's knowledge, culture, traditions and practices (in relation to agriculture, fisheries, forestry, livestock rearing and other food producing sectors) and their ecological understanding and sustainable practices should inform the management and conservation of resources.
3. Guarantee and implement decent work for rural women workers based on existing international instruments in a non-discriminatory manner.
4. Guarantee that systems are put in place to ensure that rural women who engage in domestic work are seen as significantly contributing to the economy and receive social security benefits.
5. Recognize the "intertwined subjectivities" of woman and child during pregnancy, childbirth, and breastfeeding framed through the lens of women's rights throughout their lifespan – especially women's and girls' rights to SRHR.
6. Introduce policies and laws that enable States to regulate and avoid any undue interference of for-profit or commercially-motivated non-state actors in rural women's RTFN.
7. Guarantee the full implementation of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.
8. Guarantee an adequate legal framework for the realization of rural women's fundamental rights and freedoms based on the principles of equality and non-discrimination.
9. Ensure the independence and transparency of monitoring mechanisms in the context of the 2030 Agenda: these must be based on human rights, be free of any commercial or corporate undue influence and conflicts of interest, and ensure the full participation of the most affected by hunger and malnutrition, especially rural women.
10. Ensure the full realization of the RTFN of rural women within the framework of food sovereignty.

*The following organizations endorse the contents of this submission:*

\* denotes ECOSOC Consultative Status

1. Asian-Pacific Resource and Research Centre for Women (ARROW)\*
2. Urgenci
3. Women's UN Report Network (WURN) – The Tandem Project\*
4. Society for International Development (SID)\*
5. World Council of Churches (WCC)
6. Commission of the Churches on International Affairs (CCIA)\*
7. Terra Nuova
8. YAC Nepal
9. POSCO Pratirodh Sangram Samiti (PPSS)
10. WhyHunger
11. Women Lanka Network in Sri Lanka
12. El Centro de Documentación en Derechos Humanos “Segundo Montes Mozo S.J.” (CSMM), member of Plataforma Interamericana de Derechos Humanos, Democracia y Desarrollo (PIDHDD)
13. Sindicato Andaluzo de Trabajadores/as (SAT) – member of La Via Campesina
14. ACTUAR - Association for Cooperation and Development
15. Biowatch South Africa
16. Intercontinental Network for the Promotion of Social Solidarity Economy (RIPESS)\*
17. CIDSE\*
18. Programme on Women's Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (PWESCR)\*
19. ACTUAR - Association for Cooperation and Development
20. REALIMENTAR - Portuguese Civil Society Network for Food Security and Food Sovereignty
21. REDSAN-CPLP - Regional Civil Society Network for Food Security and Nutrition in the Community of Portuguese Speaking Countries
22. ICCO Cooperation
23. International Women's Rights Action Watch – Asia Pacific (IWRAP-AP)
24. Geneva Infant Feeding Association (GIFA)
25. Comité de América Latina y el Caribe para la Defensa de los Derechos de las Mujeres (CLADEM)