

Gender equality, Women farmers influence in decision-making processes and the empowerment of rural women and girls

In the opening ceremony of the CSW Secretary General Antonia Guterres said: Empower not only rural women and girls but listen to them!

When we look to the economic and social situation of women in rural areas what do we see?

How can we put the discussion today in the right context?

A lot of people have a stereotype in mind when they think about rural women.

We have to make clear that you have a lot of different women in rural areas. They are not the same. They work on the farms and they have jobs outside, they have a different culture and different needs, they have different religions and different family situations.

There is one thing women in rural areas in all countries have in common. They play a big role in food production.

But sometimes they work hard and even get not enough money to make herself a good living. Women have a big pension gap. 25% of rural women in EU will end up in poverty when they are old and in developing countries it will be more women ending up in poverty.

So, we have to work on fostering the position of women in rural areas.

I also worry about the growing gap between people in the city and people in rural areas.

People in cities want to have cheap food and sometimes they want a place to relax in the countryside. They want to pay the lowest price possible for food. They don't want to pay the real cost price for food. But a woman in rural area need a cost-effective price to make herself a living and to produce sustainable food.

We have to build a bridge between women in cities and women in rural areas. They need each other. Especially for the food production. Digitalization and good communication can build that bridge.

At this moment 7,6 Billion people in the world need food and water and it will go up to 9 billion.

Water To drink, to use in household and for agricultural food production. Besides that, we have to deal with climate change. A big challenge! Yesterday a new report was handed over to Antonia Guterres " Making every drop Count, With an Agenda for Water Action. In 2030 there will be 40% less water available than at this moment. Sound policies, transparent governance and innovative approaches at the international, national and local level are needed.

We need smart farming, new technologies in order to increase agriculture productivity and to contribute to a more efficient use of resources, a more efficient way of using water. Women have a big role to play in this field. Women need a solution and women are part of the solution!

What is the position of women:

- Women comprise an average of 43% of the agricultural labor force in developing countries
- Women own less than 20% of land worldwide
- Rural women account for the production of half of the world's food
- For many, the livelihoods come from small-scale farming, almost always informal and often unpaid and a lot of women work like assisting spouse
- Women have limited access to seeds, credits, to climate-smart technologies, advice, fertilizers, livestock, mechanical equipment, school, training, innovation, health care, services
- On average 47% of women worldwide report having an account at a formal financial institution (against 55% of men), in rural area less women have an account
- Women are lacking behind in decision-making bodies
- 7 out of 10 of the world's hungry are women.
- A lot of Women and girls have no access to good water facilities. They have to carry everyday a lot of water for household and food production. Figures show that women and girls spend 200 million hours a day on carrying water! Every single day.

Key messages for the empowerment of rural women and girls.

1. Access to basic needs to produce and sell: Access to land, clean water, ownership of farms, knowledge, financial advice, credit, subsidies, water, market.
2. Same positions in decision making bodies as men, that means more women in boards of cooperatives, farmers organizations, politics - and same position in decision making on family farm
3. Education, lifelong learning, validation of skills
4. Good social, infrastructural and medical services
5. Support female-entrepreneurship and the founding of cooperatives and farmers organizations by women.
6. Access to digital services, mobile phone and bank account and access to innovative new technology to use the resources like water more efficient

Conclusion;

Most important recommendation:

Support Women in establishing "Cooperatives specialized in technology and innovation".

Women in rural area can do a step forwards if they can use new technology and innovations. They cannot do it on their own. They have to do it together. They can start with simple technology, they can share, they can have training together and they can help each other to work with the new technology. They need advice and they need money to start but if they do it together in a cooperative it is possible and I have seen that it will help them to do big steps forward. I saw good examples in Tanzania. Women start to milk a cow, cooling the milk together, sell it to a dairy factory and they came out of poverty!

You can think about little machines to work on the land, Little machines for processing products to make products with added value like tomato sauce or paste out of tomatoes., You can think about solar panels to have energy for mobile phones but also for the cooling installation for milk. There are a lot of innovations which can help women in rural areas to produce food in a good and sustainable way, to use resources, like water and land more effectively, to use fertilizers more effectively, to make products with added value and to come out of poverty.

And after that innovation will help them every day a step further.

Women representative of the Netherlands to the UNGA Willemien Koning