

WFWPI Statement to CSW62: Women as a resource in peace and development

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Women as a resource in surmounting the obstacles to peace and sustainable development in rural areas

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Women's Federation for World Peace, International, as a non-governmental organization in general consultative status with the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations, commends the priority theme of the 62nd session of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women: Challenges and opportunities in achieving gender equality and the empowerment of rural women and girls. As the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development Preamble states: "...We are determined to take the bold and transformative steps which are urgently needed to shift the world onto a sustainable and resilient path... we seek to realize the human rights of all and to achieve gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls."

Rural women and girls face unique challenges to empowerment and gender equality. Some of those challenges include: remote rural areas being out of reach of NGOs; governments and donors alike focus attention and resources on more visible areas which depend upon infrastructure such as roads, schools, and hospitals. Basic services such as running water, electricity and education are not easily accessed in many rural areas causing rural women and girls to spend most of the day collecting water and searching for fuel. In addition, in some remote areas, poverty drives many men to urban areas for work, leaving women and girls with the burden of fieldwork.

Opportunities for women and girls in leadership training, education, and job training in rural areas are scant. Access to health and hygiene knowledge and practices are limited. Rural, impoverished areas also experience disproportionate consequences of climate change. In the case of countries at war, rural areas are much more dangerous and prone to unpunished violence than urban centers where NGOs and UN peacekeepers are concentrated. Women and girls are the first victims of this unpunished violence. In spite of these difficult challenges, opportunities for empowerment do exist. It is apparent that voices of rural women need to be heard in the halls of local, national and international governing bodies. In order to achieve proper representation, advocates for rural women that support gender equality and empower all women and girls are essential.

Small NGOs working on the ground in remote, rural areas have been known to maintain surprisingly broad networks that can leverage the investment of donor resources. Those who leave rural areas for training, education and the promise of paid work in other lands also have been known to pool resources to invest in capacity building efforts back home. For over twenty five years, WFWP volunteers have followed a consistent plan to invest in rural areas. After an initial needs assessment in the targeted community is made, the program team pairs these needs with international support. Representatives then go directly to the local community to implement the project or program. The direct outcome of this method yielded sustainable projects in schools in Guinea Bissau, Equatorial Guinea, Cameroon, Myanmar, Nepal, Ethiopia, Liberia, Solomon Islands, Bangladesh, Mozambique, Kenya; vocational training institutes in Rwanda, Senegal, Nepal, Myanmar, Jordan, Afghanistan, Sao Tome and Principe; literacy education in Haiti, Afghanistan, Ethiopia, Bangladesh and AIDS prevention education in Ghana,

Mauritania, Cameroon, Kenya, Belarus, Russia, Haiti, USA, Argentina, Liberia, Belize, Peru, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, Trinidad and Tobago.

Although each these programs began with support from outside of the rural community, the expectation is for local leadership to grow capacity to co-direct and ultimately direct these projects. Projects initially receive financial support from outside sources with expectations that they become self-supporting. Through these grassroots programs and others, WFP provides programs in more than 50 countries that address Sustainable Development Goals 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, and 16.

Encouraging governments and those in civil society to invest funds and collaborate with NGOs on the ground to implement capacity-building efforts is an important opportunity which can be a lifeline. Strong commitment, communication, and collaboration between local governments, the rural population and NGOs have proven to be a vital best practice for efficient and effective development of empowerment for rural women and girls and gender equality.

Women's Federation for World Peace initiated the Global Women's Peace Network (GWPN) in March 2012. It was established to help build a network of women leaders dedicated to solving pressing social issues and secure an environment for human development through feminine peace leadership. It seeks to ensure mutual prosperity and lasting peace rooted in a culture of caring responsibility and universally shared values. Affiliated NGOs from around the world are coming together to build a network, share wisdom and information, and work together to put their best ideas into action.

Rev. Diane Winder, Interfaith minister and former Vice President of the UN Association of New Zealand, addressed the gathering at the launch of the Global Women's Peace Network in New Zealand. She said: "Women know better how war attacks the fabric of families and communities and what price their families pay...there can be no peacebuilding without an understanding of how women are affected by conflict and the approach women use to maintain peace." She added that "women tend to look at society as a family; they are more likely to dissolve psychological barriers, dismantle dehumanization of the enemy and to understand the position of others. Women are built to cross lines, to break barriers and build bridges." Women in rural areas who face difficult or dangerous situations worldwide are often unable to see beyond daily survival and the safety of their family and themselves. NGOs are in the position of a mother or older sister to offer support and provide resources. It is with that vision, that the Global Women's Peace Network was founded.

In addition, young women, have a vital role to play in capacity building in rural areas. As stated in the context of Security Council Resolution 1325, they need a place at the table in decision-making, in peacebuilding, and reconciliation. According to UN Women, when women are included in peace processes, there is a 35% increase in the probability of that resolve lasting at least 15 years. As these realizations come to light, young women need to be prepared to rise to future crucial responsibilities in conflict prevention, mediation, and governance. NGOs occupy a privileged position as mediators between government resources and local needs. They provide programs fostering confidence, leadership aspirations, and related skills which guide women and girls to take responsibility for transformation in their communities and eventually ownership for the goals of the United Nations.