

Aide Mémoire

Expert Group Meeting

The Situation of rural women within the context of globalization

**Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia
4 to 8 June 2001**

I. Introduction

The Division for the Advancement of Women (DAW) in collaboration with the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) will convene an expert group meeting on the "Situation of rural women within the context of globalization". The meeting will address social and economic challenges and opportunities faced by women in rural areas. The expert group meeting is being hosted by the Government of Mongolia in Ulaanbaatar, and will take place from 4 to 8 June 2001.

The findings of the meeting will be incorporated into the Secretary-General's Report on the "Improvement of the situation of women in rural areas" which will be submitted to the General Assembly at its fifty-sixth session in 2001.

The recommendations of this expert group meeting will also be made available to the Commission on the Status of Women at its forty-sixth session in March 2002. The report will also be provided to the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), which is mandated to monitor the implementation of the Convention, including article 14 on rural women.

II. Background

The issue of rural women has been addressed at various United Nations conferences and summits, and the respective final documents provide comprehensive sets of policy recommendations and plans of action. In addition, the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) obliges State parties to "take into account the particular problems faced by rural women and the significant roles which rural women play in economic survival of their families, including their work in the non-monetized sectors of the economy, and to ensure the application of CEDAW to women in rural areas".

The issues relating to the situation of rural women were considered in the Nairobi Forward-Looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women (1985), throughout the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (1995), and in the Report of the Ad Hoc Committee of the Whole of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly (2000). The emphasis was put on their equal access to productive resources, such as land, capital, credit and technology as well as on gainful employment, decision-making, education and health services.

The Beijing Platform for Action called for the formulation and implementation of “policies and programmes that enhance the access of women agricultural and fisheries producers (including subsistence farmers and producers, especially in rural areas) to financial, technical, extension and marketing services; provide access to and control of land, appropriate infrastructure and technology in order to increase women’s incomes and promote household food security, especially in rural areas and, where appropriate, encourage the development of producer-owned, market-based cooperatives” (See para 58 n).

The outcome document adopted by the twenty-third special session of General Assembly emphasized that there were still too many rural women working in the informal economy with low levels of income and little job and social security and often with no rights to own land including through the right to inheritance. (See paras 71 (b), 81 (b), 92 (c) and 92 (e)). It further outlined microcredit and other financial instruments as “successful strategies” for economic empowerment for women living in poverty in particular in rural areas (See paras 7 and 21).

The situation of rural women has been extensively addressed in the Secretary General's reports to the General Assembly (see A/40/239 and Add.1, 1985; A/44/516, 1989; A/48/187,1993; A/50/257/rev.1, 1995; A/52/326,1997 and A/54/123, 1999) and during the Commission on the Status of Women.

The 1999 Secretary-General’s Report on the “Improvement of the situation of women in rural areas” (A/54/123 – E/1999/66) specifically addressed the situation of rural women within the context of emerging global trends that characterized the current status of rural development, in particular the liberalization of trade and markets for food and other agricultural products; the commercialization and modernization of agriculture and the increasing privatization of resources and services.

The General Assembly resolution 54/135 of 7 February 2000 took note of the report and called on Governments in collaboration with United Nations organizations and civil society to attach greater importance to the improvement of the situation of rural women, in particular within the context of globalization. It further requested "the Secretary-General, in cooperation with the relevant international organizations, specialized agencies, funds and programmes, and in consultations with Member States, to prepare a comprehensive report on the situation of rural women and challenges faced by them, based, *inter alia*, on the outcome of an expert group meeting, which will draw from the contributions and case studies provided by experts from various regions".

III. Objectives

Globalization poses both major challenges and unprecedented opportunities for rural women, and identifying policies that maximize the beneficial effects while curtailing those that are negative remains a major challenge. The objective of the expert group meeting is:

- to examine the impact of major global trends, such as the growth in rural non-farm economic activities, the liberalization of trade and markets for agricultural products, the commercialization of agriculture, and the rapid diffusion of products, technologies, information, consumption patterns and the flexibilization of the labour market on the situation of rural women; and
- to propose a policy agenda to maximize the beneficial effects for women within the context of ongoing rural, social and economic changes.

Market integration and trends associated with globalization will have a pervasive impact on the lives and the livelihoods of rural households. Market orientation of agricultural production can favour large-scale commercial farming and export cash cropping, traditionally the domain of men, over household subsistence production, traditionally the domain of women, and have a negative impact on women's livelihood. For example, women may be responsible for the labour intensive tasks in cash crops production, or male labour mobility may leave women fully in charge of agricultural production, while women do not have the necessary access to information, resources and inputs. Emerging agro-processing industries in rural areas may provide new employment opportunities, with women as the preferred labour force. Such processes directly affect the household division of labour. Rural women's work patterns, employment opportunities, income, conditions of work and household food security may change dramatically. For example, new opportunities for wage labour may increase women's income and their status within the household, but at the same time impose a heavy burden of paid work, unpaid work and housework.

Rural women have an unrecognized economic potential that represents an efficiency loss for the household, society and economy as a whole. Women overall have lower levels of education and training than men, less time to spend on productive activities, and more limited command over productive resources such as land and capital (sometimes including the control over the income from their labour). Similarly their ability to take advantage of the emerging trends associated with globalization is less. The challenge is to assess the new demands placed on rural women and their response patterns and survival strategies in different settings across major regions of the world.

Different patterns of livelihood predominate in rural areas: nomadic pastoralism, subsistence agriculture, commercial farming and wage employment, including labour migration. While one pattern may be more prevalent in a given location, usually all elements coexist side by side. In order to understand the situation of rural women, the meeting will address how these livelihood patterns are affected by globalizing markets. At the same time, trends across socio-economic groups and different age groups will be addressed.

The emphasis of the expert group meeting will be placed on:

- The household division of labour
- The household resource base
- Access to land, property and other household or public resources
- Patterns and conditions of work
- Labour mobility and labour migration

The expert group meeting will aim to produce policy recommendations to promote a more even distribution of opportunities and benefits associated with globalization. The recommendations of the expert group meeting will be directed to Governments, the United Nations system, intergovernmental and regional bodies and civil society. They will aim to refine and expand an agenda for “actions to be taken” at both international and national levels outlined in the Beijing Platform for Action, as well as the further actions identified in the outcome document adopted by the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly (Beijing+5).

The findings and conclusions will provide a comprehensive contribution to the preparation of the Secretary-General’s Report on the "Improvement of the situation of women in rural areas" to be submitted to the fifty-sixth session of the General Assembly in 2001.

IV. Background documentation and profile of participants

The documentation for the meeting will consist of:

- Short papers prepared by each expert on a specific topic from her /his area of expertise;
- A substantive background paper prepared by a consultant;
- Substantive background papers prepared by the organizers.
- Papers prepared by observers.

Ten to twelve experts will be appointed by the Secretary-General of the United Nations to participate in the expert group meeting. They will be chosen on the basis of their knowledge of the issues under consideration from national, regional and international organizations and research institutions. Participants will also include practitioners from non-governmental organizations concerned with gender issues, rural development, and globalization. In selecting the experts, criteria of geographical and gender-balance will be respected. In addition, observers from interested Governments, United Nations entities, intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations, research organizations and private sector might attend and present their perspectives on the issues of the discussion.

V. Organization

The meeting will be organized by the Division for the Advancement of Women (DAW) of the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs and the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM).

The meeting will meet in plenary, and in working groups. In an opening plenary meeting, background presentations will create a conceptual framework for the discussion. The plenary will be followed by an in-depth discussion on specific issues in working groups where the participants will also make short presentations. On the last day of the meeting the participants will adopt a final report that would contain the main conclusions and recommendations of the meeting.

VI. Administrative arrangements

The meeting will be conducted in English. The costs of participation of experts invited by the Secretariat will be covered by the United Nations (travel cost in economy class and daily subsistence allowance). Observers are responsible for their own travel arrangements and expenses. The Government of Mongolia will provide logistical support.

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