2018 ECOSOC Integration Segment, 1-3 May 2018

Innovative communities: leveraging technology and innovation
to build sustainable and resilient societies

Commission on the Status of Women

The universal 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development confirmed the centrality of gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls to sustainable development and poverty eradication, and for progress across all the Sustainable Development Goals and targets. It envisaged a world in which every woman and girl enjoys full gender equality and all legal, social and economic barriers to their empowerment have been removed.

The Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) as the leading global norm-setting body for gender equality and the empowerment of women builds synergies with and contributes effectively to the thematic work of the Economic and Social Council. At its sixtieth session in March 2016, the Commission adopted a comprehensive roadmap with recommendations on how Governments and other stakeholders should proceed with the gender-responsive implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development so as to reach the goal of gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls by 2030, and with significant and measurable progress already by 2020, and so as to ensure that no woman and no girl is left behind. In addressing its priority and review themes since 2015, the Commission acknowledged the important contribution of women and girls to sustainable development and reiterated that gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls and women's full and equal participation and leadership in the economy are vital for achieving sustainable development, promoting peaceful, just and inclusive societies, enhancing sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth and productivity, ending poverty in all its forms everywhere and ensuring the well-being of all.

CSW work pertaining to the use of technology and innovation to build sustainable and resilient societies

At its sixty-second session, from 12 to 23 March 2018, the Commission considered "Challenges and opportunities in achieving gender equality and the empowerment of rural women and girls" as its priority theme. It evaluated progress in the implementation of agreed conclusions from its forty-seventh session on "Participation in and access of women to the media, and information and communications technologies (ICT) and their impact on and use as an instrument for the advancement and empowerment of women" as its review theme. Both themes provided opportunity to assess, and make recommendations, on the use of technology as a tool for accelerated realization of gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls.

Priority theme

The important role and contribution of rural women and girls to rural development, poverty eradication, sustainable development and the building of resilient societies is well documented. In the agreed conclusions of its sixty-second session, the Commission highlighted policies and actions to be undertaken by governments and other actors in the following three key areas: strengthening normative, legal and policy frameworks; implementing economic and social policies for the empowerment of all rural women and girls; and strengthening collective voice, leadership and decision-making.

The Commission addressed the role of technology, including ICT, throughout its discussions and agreed conclusions. For example, the Commission recognized the important role and contribution of rural women as critical agents in poverty eradication, in enhancing sustainable agricultural and rural development as well as fisheries. It underlined that meaningful progress in these areas necessitates, inter alia, closing the gender gap, introducing appropriate gender-responsive policies, interventions and innovations, including in agriculture and fisheries, and women's equal access to agricultural and fisheries technologies, technical assistance, productive resources, land tenure security and access to, ownership of and control over land, forests, water and marine resources, and to participation in local, regional and international markets.

The Commission also emphasized the need to ensure equal rights of women and men, and girls and boys where applicable, to access economic and productive resources including appropriate new and existing technology. Rural women's and girls' limited or lack of access to, inter alia, sustainable and time- and labour-saving infrastructure and technology, remains a concern. In this context, the Commission stressed the importance of investing in gender-responsive and quality, reliable, sustainable and resilient infrastructure, including in rural areas, inter alia, safe drinking water and sanitation, energy, transport, water for irrigation, and technology, including information and communications technology, and other physical infrastructure for accessible public services.

In the context of education, the Commission recognized that new technologies are, inter alia, changing the structure of labour markets and provide new and different employment opportunities that require skills ranging from basic digital fluency to advanced technical skills in science, technology, engineering and mathematics and in information and communications technology. All rural women and girls therefore should have the opportunity to acquire them.

The Commission further considered that a conducive external environment in support of national efforts towards the economic empowerment of women should include the mobilization of adequate financial resources, capacity-building and the transfer of technology on mutually agreed terms, which in turn would enhance the use of enabling technologies to promote women's entrepreneurship and economic empowerment.

The Commission's agreed conclusions contain the following actions pertaining to technology, innovation and resilience of women and girls living in rural areas:
- Enact legislation and undertake reforms to realize the equal rights of women and men, and where applicable girls and boys, to access among others, appropriate new technology
- Ensure equal access to agricultural technologies that are affordable, durable, sustainable and accessible to women farmers and fishers, through investment, the transfer of technology on mutually agreed terms, and support research and development and integrated and multisectoral policies to improve their productive capacity and incomes,

strengthen their resilience, and address the existing gaps in and barriers to trading their products in national, regional and international markets;

- Invest in provision of and access to quality, resilient and gender responsive infrastructure and time- and labour-saving technologies, information and communication technologies (ICTs), safe, affordable, accessible and sustainable transport systems, affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy, and safe drinking water and sanitation for all, including through technology transfer on mutually agreed terms, to improve the lives, livelihoods and wellbeing of all rural women and girls;

- Commit to encourage urban-rural interactions and connectivity and eliminate geographic and territorial disparities by strengthening gender-responsive sustainable and affordable transport and mobility, technology and communication networks and infrastructure,

- Encourage and facilitate rural women's entrepreneurship and expand opportunities for their enterprises, cooperatives and self-help groups, by for example, improving access to financing and investment, technology and infrastructure, training and diverse markets;

- Recognize, reduce and redistribute rural women and girls disproportionate share of unpaid care and domestic work, as well as contributions to on-farm and off-farm production, by, for example, the provision of infrastructure, technology and public services, such as water and sanitation, renewable energy, transport and information and communications technology;

- Address the digital divide, which disproportionately affects rural women and girls, by facilitating their access to ICT and science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) education to promote their empowerment and to develop skills, information and knowledge that are needed to support their labour market entry, livelihoods, well-being and resilience and expand the scope of ICT-enabled mobile learning and literacy training while promoting a safe and secure cyberspace for women and girls;

- Strengthen and build the resilience and adaptive capacity of all rural women and girls to respond to and recover from economic, social and environmental shocks and disasters, humanitarian emergencies and adverse impacts of climate change, natural disasters and extreme weather events by providing essential infrastructure, services, appropriate financing, technology, and social protection, humanitarian relief, forecast and early warning systems, and decent work for women;

- Develop and implement policies and strategies that promote rural women's and girls' participation in and access to the media and information and communications technologies (ICTs), including by increasing their digital literacy and access to information;

- Develop and adopt gender-responsive strategies on mitigation and adaptation to climate change to support the resilience and adaptive capacities of women and girls to respond to the adverse impacts of climate change;

- Ensure that the perspectives of all rural women and girls are taken into account, and that women, and girls as appropriate, fully and equally participate in the design, implementation, follow-up and evaluation of policies and activities that affect their livelihoods, well-being and resilience.

Review theme

In the context of its review theme, presenting countries acknowledged that the digital age had and continued to rapidly transform many aspects of economic, social and political life. This included creation of content, access to and dissemination of information, and ways of working and

interacting, with broad implications for education and learning, access to services such as health, forms of work and employment such as commerce and finance. In many of the presenting countries, the integration of gender perspectives in national ICT strategies and policies, including many e-government initiatives, provided a solid basis for action to enhance opportunities and actively respond to challenges that women and girls encountered in the digital age. Countries reported on their efforts to address online gender stereotypes and digital harm.

Several of the presenting countries highlighted the persistence or even widening of a gender digital divide, reflected in the lower rate of enrolment and retention of girls and women, compared to boys and men, in science, technology, engineering and mathematics fields and in computer science education in particular.

Many presentations demonstrated how ICT technologies have broadened economic opportunities and access to services, with particular achievements for women including those living in rural areas, and women with disabilities. Policies, strategies and specific programmes aimed at improving women's and girls' participation in ICT and their IT literacy. Comprehensive partnerships, between government, civil society organizations, the media and the private sector, including through public-private partnerships, were a key strategy for enhancing women's and girls' access to, and use of ICT.