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Statement submitted by Dominican Leadership Conference, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council*

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

* The present statement is issued without formal editing.



Statement

The Dominican Leadership Conference is a worldwide organization. Dominican women are in 42 countries serving in a variety of settings, e.g., Universities, secondary school's elementary schools' primary school and in informal settings assisting with literacy as well as health.

There are many challenges and opportunities in achieving gender equality and the empowerment of rural women and girls.

Women and Girls in rural areas have often been left behind in many countries.

They are more likely to be in the poorest areas of a country with the least number of resources to help them move out of poverty and take on their own sense of empowerment.

Women in rural areas have the least amount of attention by governments of most countries. They are like the forgotten of the government. They have little educational opportunities, skill development training, frequently they are victims of abuse both sexual and physical and at times sold for money as families have little money to feed the family. This is a terrible plight especially for girls and women. Widows are also left to fend for themselves as often families do not want to care for them. And the families may even take the children from the mother and leave her abandoned in the rural village.

In surveying the work of Dominicans in five countries, Brazil, Ecuador, Colombia, Pakistan and India we learned that girls are the victims of all kinds of discrimination, policies and laws. Tribal women are less likely to own their own land, property laws discriminate against women inheriting family property, and widows are discarded from inheritance from their deceased husbands. Customs and patriarchal systems often favor male relatives. These barriers threaten rural tribal women's food security, forcing them to migrate to urban areas searching for other livelihoods.

Women are, however, the lifelong agents of change in their families typically investing all their earnings into their families and communities compared to men.

Governments don't always live up to their international commitment to protect women from discrimination, as the gap between de jure and de facto discriminations persists. Rural women still find it more difficult to access basic education and vocational education provision, as girls are expected to assist with family routines, such as fetching fuel and water. Climate change has made a drastic difference to their income, so once the harvesting season is over most of the men go on migration to generate income for their families, women and children are the most affected group.

Covid-19 Pandemic has increased their vulnerability and work security, threatening their livelihood options.

Many things contribute to Gender Inequality among these women: uneven access to education, lack of employment, job segregation, lack of legal protection, poor medical care, lack of political representation, and societal mind sets.

The Dominicans are working to build the capacity of women for their own development and the development of their children and the society at large. Women in rural India play an essential role in ensuring food security and eradicating poverty. They do this amid a serious challenge due to gender-based stereotypes that deny the equitable access to opportunities, resources, assets and services. The main obstacle is gender inequality. This is a cross cutting challenge.

Bangalore is one area where Dominican women can uplift women in health, education, community-based organizations. They are working with the scheduled

tribes, castes and other backward castes who are totally deprived of all the primary needs.

In the following countries we heard the greatest drawback for women is education. As one woman put it “without education there is no empowerment. Our role is to empower girls by giving them an education.”

In the rural area of Buesaco, Colombia, 75% of the population lives in the countryside. They approach empowerment that will lead to economic and social protection. Skill development in tailoring and even in ancestral manual skills that generate entrepreneurship, participation, inclusion, individual and community economic development are given.

Due to the significant domestic and sexual violence against girls the sisters have set up a home in Hogar de Paso. This is one way the women and girls can be safe, due to it being a significant corridor for armed groups and international drug trafficking. Women need a safe place and someone to listen to them.

The program Construyedo Suenos (Building Dreams) is a guide for the women in Colombia. Within this safe environment they begin to create handicrafts, attend school reinforcement, leadership and entrepreneurship training as well as clothing and arts and crafts project.

In Ecuador, women are working in the Riobamba area, serving indigenous people of Imantag, Cotacachi, Pifo, and Pichincha Province. The work here is centered on strengthening women’s participation and inclusion in the communities where they learn leadership skills.

Campina Grande, Brazil is divided into 18 communities comprising three urban areas and fifteen rural areas. Most of the communities here are led by women. They have formed women’s groups that meet weekly in one of their homes. Here they learn what their rights are and build their own story.

They are practicing natural medicine, as well as planting medicinal herbs, distributing them and manufacturing a variety of medicines such as oils, essences. They have also set up a natural pharmacy. In addition, they are growing their own organic vegetables for sale.

The Dominicans in Bangalore, India have committed to work with the marginalized, underprivileged, unnoticed and vulnerable. They are working in (8) eight states of rural and urban India.

In this region of the world, rural women are playing an important critical role in agricultural food security. Because they are mostly Tribal Women, they do not own their own land. Property laws discriminate against women inheriting family property, widows are discarded in their rights to inherit from their deceased husbands, customs and patriarchal social norms often favour male relatives. These rules, force women to migrate to urban areas to search for their livelihood.

Rural women find it more difficult to access education and vocational education, as girls are expected to assist with the family routines of feting and carrying fuel and water.

However, there are still opportunities for women’s development by:

- Ensuring women and girls are in community-based organizations.
- Ensuring rural/slum women are aware of their land rights, strengthening food security and nutrition for rural women and girls.

- Empowering rural/slum women and girls through quality education and access to information and communications including vocational training and job opportunities.
- Ensuring awareness and access to healthcare and sexual and reproductive health and rights as well as infrastructures, water and sanitation.
- Strengthening women on laws, policies, human rights, women's rights leadership, entrepreneurship awareness program and prolife and programs to address violence and harmful job opportunities.

Other important aspects of women's transformation are seeing that:

- Women are decision-makers
- Women are leaders
- Women are a success of our community interventions
- Enrolment in schools
- Protection policy
- Medical assistance
- Platform for children

As women begin to have equal relationships with men and greater control over their resources and assets as well as joint decision-making women will flourish.

We recommend that member states:

1. Ensure women, as well as girls, are in community-based organizations such as self-help groups and adolescence groups.
2. Ensure rural/ slum women are aware of their land rights, strengthening food security and nutrition for rural women and girls.
3. Empower rural/slum women and girls through quality education and access to information and communications including vocational training and job opportunities.
4. Ensure awareness and access to healthcare and sexual and reproductive health and rights, as well as a developed infrastructure with water and sanitation.
5. Strengthen women on laws, policies, human rights, women's rights, leadership, entrepreneurship, awareness program, and prolife programs that address violence and job opportunities.
6. Encourage women's Leadership, decision-making, and voice to be heard.
7. Promote rural women's employment, decent work, social protection, and proper wage.
8. Prevent and eliminate all forms of violence against rural women and girls including harmful practices about cultural practices.
9. Develop alternative income generation opportunities to become self-dependent and thus become economically fit enough to compete with the reality of life.
10. Develop awareness and skills for women, to access financial services including savings, which allows them to benefit from economic opportunities.
11. Make protection policies for women on how they can proceed legally if anything unfair they would face.

12. Conduct medical camps, especially for pregnant women and new-born babies, and health check-ups for adolescent girls to ensure proper health care and ensure personal hygiene for them.

Endorsers of the Statement:

Company of the Daughters of Charity of St. Vincent de Paul,
International Presentation Association,
Sisters of Charity Federation,
The Grail,
VIVAT International
