

62nd Session of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women
National Women's Alliances Submission re Australia's Position on the Priority Theme
Challenges and opportunities in achieving gender equality and the empowerment of rural women and girls

General

1. We welcome the increasing focus on the SDGs as a site for action on gender equality. However, we note that the Agreed Conclusions of the Commission on the Status of Women constitutes a vital site for addressing those facets of gender equality, women's and girls' human rights and women's and girls' empowerment which are not captured by the SDGs, particularly those areas that are not explicitly mentioned but which fall broadly under the commitment to leave no one behind, which risk slipping off the agenda through a focus on the SDGs. This includes the rights, needs and contribution of Indigenous women (including the importance of the knowledge and culture of Indigenous women in addressing climate change), women living with disability, LGBTIQ women, young women and girls, older women, the Women Peace and Security Agenda, women in prison, migrant and refugee women and girls and women in the sex industry. We ask that the Australian delegation promote these issues at CSW62.
2. We note that the language concerning gender equality in the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action is stronger and more detailed than the gender equality language in the SDGs and the BPfA remains the primary global policy document on gender equality. While there are benefits in using the 2030 Agenda to accelerate gender equality, the SDGs should not replace the Beijing Platform for Action (BPfA) at CSW, but rather strengthen it by providing a new site for the use of the BPfA language. We ask that Australia advocate for the preferential adoption of language used in the BPfA.
3. Women's organisations, human rights organisations, feminist organisations (collectively 'CSOs') and academic institutions play a critical role in driving change and ensuring accountability for gender equality. In recent years, the space for meaningful CSO engagement in UN environments has shrunk significantly. Australia has advocated for the role of CSOs in the CSW in the past and we urge Australia to continue to advocate for an active, meaningful and clearly defined role for CSOs at CSW. We also call on Australia to advocate for States to take measures to protect women human rights defenders and support and fund specialist women's services and women-led and feminist CSOs and networks.
4. We congratulate the Australian Government on its successful advocacy for the recognition of the role of National Human Rights Institutions in the CSW process in the Agreed Conclusions of CSW61. We call on Australia to ensure the same commitment is reflected in the Agreed Conclusions for CSW62.
5. We applaud the Australian Government for its role in promoting strong language on Indigenous women in the CSW61 Agreed Conclusions. We urge Australia to advocate for the retention of this language in the CSW62 Agreed Conclusions and to strengthen that language to recognise Indigenous stewardship of land and the importance of traditional knowledge and cultural practices in sustainable approaches to climate change.

Challenges and opportunities in achieving gender equality and the empowerment of rural women and girls

6. Rural women play a vital leadership role in shaping laws, strategies, policies and programmes on all issues that affect their lives, including sustainable development, improved food and nutrition security and better rural livelihoods. The CSW62 priority theme: *challenges and opportunities in achieving*

gender equality and the empowerment of rural women and girls, raises a wide range of issues, particularly the need for all States to:

- 6.1. ratify the *Convention to Eliminate Discrimination Against Women* without exemptions and fully implement article 14 of CEDAW;
- 6.2. focus on the conditions which enable women's participation in communities and economies, including supporting and promoting rural women's voices, agency and public participation;
- 6.3. support rural women's substantive participation and leadership at all levels of decision-making in public life, commercial and economic activity (including family businesses), peace agreements and post-conflict recovery processes and within the community and household;
- 6.4. support rural women to overcome and challenge male-dominated leadership spaces, including the family, and recognise the leadership work already performed by rural women and girls, which is often undervalued and unrecognised;
- 6.5. ensure women have access to justice and full legal standing before the law, that the human rights of women and girls are protected within customary legal systems, and that rule of law and human rights are enforced regardless of geographic location and gender;
- 6.6. encourage full participation of rural women in all decision-making processes on peace and security, from local communities to global policy processes, prioritising women's active agency in peacebuilding and conflict resolution by all relevant stakeholders, and implementing gender-sensitive security measures developed together with rural women;
- 6.7. recognize the important role played by rural women in ensuring food security, poverty eradication, environmental sustainability and sustainable development and commit to supporting their empowerment, and ensure rural women's full, equal and effective participation in society (including the family), the economy and political decision-making;
- 6.8. ensure that the negative and inequitable impacts of climate change on rural women are mitigated and that the benefits of sustainable development flow to women by developing inclusive social policies which put gender equality considerations and the voice and agency of women at the centre of climate management initiatives and investments;
- 6.9. note that women are physically and economically vulnerable to natural disasters and essential to subsequent recovery initiatives and ensure that the voice and agency of rural women are central to all disaster mitigation and recovery plans;
- 6.10. eradicate the digital divide through equal access to affordable telecommunications, digital communications and technology and reliable internet access for rural women and girls, along with the necessary supporting infrastructure;
- 6.11. significantly increase investment to close resource gaps for building rural infrastructure (including transport, education, health and market infrastructure) in order to achieve gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls. This will necessitate mobilising a range of financial resources including public, private, domestic and international resources, fully implementing official development assistance commitments and combatting illicit financial flows;
- 6.12. ensure rural women have access to reliable and universal health services across the life span, in particular mental health services, allied health services, maternity and maternal health

services and sexual and reproductive health services (including abortion and contraception) in a timely, respectful, culturally appropriate and needs driven manner;

- 6.13. promote the clear articulation and implementation of the sexual and reproductive rights of women in an environment of severe backlash against women's and girls' right to control their own bodies, including recognising that human rights include women's right to have control over and decide freely and responsibly on matters related to their sexuality, including their sexual and reproductive health, free from coercion, discrimination and violence;
- 6.14. provide access in rural communities to specialist and culturally responsive women's services, including health, housing, gender-based violence and legal services as well as access to community controlled organisations;
- 6.15. promote the participation of women and girls in sport and leisure activities as a tool to address rigid gender stereotypes, achieve women's empowerment and improve their health and wellbeing;
- 6.16. recognise that poverty is experienced with additional complexities in rural settings, particularly due to increased cost of living associated with transport of goods and provision of services over large distances or difficult terrain;
- 6.17. ensure rural women have equal rights to economic resources including ownership and control over land and other forms of property, inheritance, new technologies, financial services (including microfinance) and natural resources;
- 6.18. take steps to address the practice of patrilineal farm succession and inheritance in farming families;
- 6.19. ensure women have access and equal rights to direct receipt of income security and other social protection entitlements and reform existing income and social protection systems to better address gendered poverty, better reflect women's economic participation over the life cycle and ensure a functional living income;
- 6.20. address the barriers to market engagement faced by rural women due to factors such as lack of mobility, capacity, and technical skills and address discriminatory practices, stereotypical attitudes and safety issues which prevent or discourage rural women from accessing opportunities to expand their businesses;
- 6.21. note that when women have control over production and resources, poverty and hunger decrease at the household level and ensure that all food security policies and programs are developed with a central focus on gender equality;
- 6.22. ensure women's access to clean, affordable and reliable energy sources in order to improve women's health, minimise unpaid work in obtaining fuel and performing household tasks and to support women's home based businesses and other economic activity;
- 6.23. provide universal and equitable access to safe and affordable drinking water and adequate sanitation and hygiene, paying special attention to the specific needs of all women and girls, and to improve water management and wastewater treatment with the active participation of women;
- 6.24. acknowledge that addressing the issue of unpaid work is of critical importance for the empowerment of women across the life cycle and advocate for measures which promote the

measuring, recognition and valuing of women's unpaid care work and an equal division of unpaid work across the genders;

- 6.25. recognise the diversity of women's work in rural communities, including work at sea and on water, and as traders, service providers, managers and leaders;
- 6.26. promote visible role models for women in agriculture and acknowledge that rigid gender norms, stereotypes and roles perpetuate and entrench discrimination against rural women, making women agricultural workers invisible, sidelining women farmers from training and career support and excluding women from property ownership and inheritance;
- 6.27. implement macroeconomic, labour and social policies that promote full and productive employment and decent work, including the development of social policies which address the fact that employment opportunities tend to be more limited in rural, remote and regional settings;
- 6.28. address other, more general measures to ensure women's sustainable participation in the workplace including:
 - 6.28.1. ensuring women have access to quality, affordable child care and paid maternity leave;
 - 6.28.2. addressing the tendency for rural women to be employed in insecure, casualised and short term / contract work more often than men;
 - 6.28.3. taking steps to prevent workplace gender discrimination and discrimination on the basis of pregnancy and parenting responsibilities, along with preventing bullying and sexual harassment in the workplace including through the misuse of technology;
 - 6.28.4. encouraging the adoption of workplace policies and practices which support women experiencing violence to maintain their employment;
 - 6.28.5. addressing gendered pay gaps, gendered discrimination through taxation, discriminatory or inequitable practices which result in diminished opportunities for women business owners and other structural disincentives to work;
 - 6.28.6. working towards the implementation of progressive national taxation systems;
 - 6.28.7. addressing the gender gap in retirement incomes and savings and discrimination against older women when seeking and maintaining employment; and
 - 6.28.8. supporting women's organising and women's rights to collective action and social movements;
- 6.29. recognise that refugee and migrant women, who are more likely to have lower levels of education and local language proficiency, experience the isolation of rural communities more acutely and are therefore highly vulnerable to economic insecurity and domestic violence;
- 6.30. develop and implement legislation addressing economic challenges for refugee and migrant women in rural areas, the protection of their labour rights and their economic empowerment by States, institutions and civil society and prevent the exploitation of women migrant and other women by labour hire companies and other entities, particularly women on short term or precarious visas or women with no permanent residency;

- 6.31. note the increased risk of men's violence against women and girls in rural areas due to the interplay of geographic and social isolation, entrenched traditional gender values and roles that reinforce male privilege and a greater tolerance of violence against women and girls;
- 6.32. stress the importance of eliminating violence against women and girls in all its forms, including domestic and family violence and sexual assault (including marital rape), financial abuse, elder abuse, harmful cultural practices (including female genital mutilation and early and forced marriage), forced sterilisation, trafficking, slavery and slavery-like practices;
- 6.33. recognise the economic impacts on women of domestic violence, including as a barrier to participation in education, the paid workforce and leadership roles;
- 6.34. adopt, review and ensure the implementation of laws that criminalize violence against women and girls, as well as comprehensive, multidisciplinary and gender-sensitive preventive, protective and prosecutorial measures and services to eliminate, prevent and respond to all forms of violence and harmful practices against women and girls;
- 6.35. recognise that women living with disability experience higher levels of violence and abusive behaviours and greater barriers to reporting and leaving violence than other women in rural areas and ensure that social policies and programs directed to ending violence against women incorporate the voice and agency of women with disability at the most fundamental levels;
- 6.36. work to stop violence before it starts through prevention initiatives to transform violence supportive culture, attitudes and beliefs and social and community structures characteristic of smaller communities, particularly in rural settings;
- 6.37. ensure that legal systems and processes which deal with marriage, divorce and child custody operate to protect women and their children from violence and other forms of abuse, do not re-traumatise women who have experienced violence and, when deciding where a child will live and with whom the child will spend time, incorporate the principle that the best interests of the child are not served by being (re)exposed to any form of violence against women or children, regardless of customary or cultural considerations;
- 6.38. ensure all rural women and girls have access to quality education, and provide educational opportunities starting in early childhood and continuing throughout the life cycle, including lifelong learning and retraining, adult education and distance education and e-learning, as well as to opportunities for informal learning, recreation and self-development;
- 6.39. note that education includes vocational (including technical) education and training to enhance opportunities for women and girls to pursue careers in a wider range of occupations and beyond traditional gender roles, including education in science and technology, literacy, numeracy, financial literacy, human rights and sexual and reproductive rights;
- 6.40. mainstream a gender perspective into education and training programmes and curricula, including in science and technology and in training in agricultural skills and rural industries; and
- 6.41. ensure that data collection and research programs are sufficiently flexible and informed to be able to accurately capture the lived experiences of rural women and girls, and ensure that such data collection and research is undertaken regularly and routinely, producing disaggregated statistics so that progress can be tracked.

7. When considering all of the measures in paragraph 6 above, it is important to:

- 7.1. promote the conscious inclusion of the needs and rights of Indigenous women and girls, with a strong focus on the intersectional disadvantage experienced by these women and girls, particularly through gender, ethnicity, disability, age and the ongoing effects of colonialism;
 - 7.2. draw on traditional practices, Indigenous knowledge, local knowledge, traditions and community based approaches when developing social policies to support rural women;
 - 7.3. ensure that funding for gender equality measures is clearly identified and constant;
 - 7.4. promote the conscious consideration of the needs and rights of women and girls living with disability, including through additional resourcing for access measures and take all appropriate legislative, administrative, social, educational, employment and other measures to protect and promote the rights of all women and girls with disabilities and to ensure their full and effective participation and inclusion in society, and to address the multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination they face;
 - 7.5. work with men and boys in rural areas to achieve gender equality and ensure that they understand that the benefits of gender equality and women's empowerment and leadership are also favourable to them;
 - 7.6. emphasise the duty of states to implement human rights-based legislation and policies that promote gender equality and women's rights;
 - 7.7. recognise families in all their diverse forms and the promotion of rights relating to sexual orientation and gender identity and expression (including the rights of lesbian, gay, intersex, transgender and bisexual people); and
 - 7.8. advocate for specific language referring to women and girls' human rights and resist all attempts at redefinition of women's and girls' human rights that subsume these within the framework of the family.
8. Australia has a strong history of articulating the need to address the intersections of disadvantage and oppression: poverty, racism and xenophobia, heterosexism and homophobia, sexism and limitations on sexual and reproductive rights, as well as the historical and ongoing impacts of colonialism on Indigenous peoples. We strongly recommend that Australia continue to advocate for an analysis of the priority and review themes which addresses and explores intersectionality and promotes the voices of women experiencing intersectional discrimination and disadvantage, particularly for:
- Indigenous women,
 - women living with disability,
 - women from marginalised socio-economic, racial and ethnic groups,
 - young women and girls,
 - older women,
 - displaced, migrant and refugee women,
 - lesbian, gay, intersex, transgender and bisexual people
 - women in the sex industry; and
 - women in prison.

The National Women's Alliances thank the Australian Government for this opportunity to provide our views and look forward to working with the Australian Delegation to continue its advocacy in these areas.

The following SDG targets are mapped against sections of the submission:

