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**FOOD SECURITY: THE CHALLENGES FACED BY RURAL WOMEN AND THE
IMPACT OF FOOD INSECURITY ON WOMEN'S PERSONAL SECURITY**

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I. Introduction

This report addresses the challenges facing rural women in achieving food security, focusing specifically on women's access to natural and productive resources, the association between household food security and poverty, and the impact of food insecurity on women's personal security. In 1979, the General Assembly highlighted the importance of these issues in their adoption of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). In particular, Article 14 of CEDAW acknowledges the role that rural women play in the economic survival of their households, and sets forth the appropriate measures State Parties must take to eliminate discrimination against women in rural areas, and strengthen women's role in rural development. However, failure to realize the objectives of Article 14 has not only allowed for the persistence of sizeable gender gaps in agricultural production, household poverty, and income-generating opportunities, but has also impinged on other basic human rights to which rural women are entitled. The most notable of these include: the right to an adequate standard of living and adequate food, as set forth in Article 11 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), and the right to liberty and security of person, per Article 9 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR).

II. National Food Security: Access to Natural and Productive Resources

National food security is largely dependent on the work of rural women in the agricultural sector. According to the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), rural women produce roughly 50 per cent of the world's food.¹ However, unequal access to natural and productive resources such as land, credit, technology, and education, stymies women's agricultural productivity² in direct contravention of Article 14, paragraph 2 (g), which

¹ United Nations, Food and Agriculture Organization, FAO Women and Population Division, Sustainable Development Department, *The Right to Food in Theory and Practice: Rural Women and the Right to Food*, Rome 1998.

obligates State Parties to ensure the right of rural women to access agricultural credit and loans, marketing facilities, appropriate technology, and equal treatment in land and agrarian reform.³

The FAO estimates that absent these obstacles, rural women have the potential to raise the total agricultural output by 2.5 to 4 per cent, thereby reducing world hunger 12 to 17 per cent.⁴

A. Land Holdings

Access to land is not only a basic requirement for farming, but also the single most important asset for rural households that depend on agriculture to sustain their livelihoods.⁵ However, rural women across all developing regions are consistently less likely to own or operate the land they cultivate.⁶ For example, in Mexico, women account for only 22.4 per cent of registered landholders in communal farming lands, while that figure falls to 5 per cent in Kenya,⁷ and less than 3 per cent in Pakistan.⁸ Moreover, the land that women do have access to is often in considerably smaller plots, of poorer quality,⁹ and frequently negotiated through a man relative.¹⁰ In fact, information collected from the FAO Gender and Land Rights Database shows that, on average, male-headed households operate larger agricultural landholdings than female-headed households in *all* countries.¹¹ This is especially visible in countries like Bangladesh, Pakistan, and Ecuador, where the agricultural landholdings of female-headed households were less than half of those owned by male-headed households.¹²

Land tenure laws and social norms constitute the greatest impediment to women's access

² United Nations, Food and Agriculture Organization, *The State of Food and Agriculture 2010-2011, Women in Agriculture: Closing the Gender Gap for Development*, Rome 2011, 23.

³ Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (New York, 18 Dec. 1979) 1249 U.N.T.S. 13, 19 I.L.M. 33 (1980), *entered into force* 3 Sept. 1981.

⁴ *The State of Food and Agriculture 2010-2011*, *supra* note 2, at 5.

⁵ *Id.* at 23.

⁶ *Id.* at 25, 23.

⁷ The World Bank/The International Bank for Reconstruction and Development, FAO, IFAD, Agriculture and Development, *Gender in Agriculture Sourcebook*, Washington D.C., 2009, 15.

⁸ FAO, IFAD, ILO, *Gender Dimensions of Agriculture and Rural Employment: Differentiated Pathways out of Poverty*, Rome 2010, 48.

⁹ *The State of Food and Agriculture 2010-2011*, *supra* note 2, at 23.

¹⁰ Agriculture and Development, *supra* note 7, at 15.

¹¹ *The State of Food and Agriculture 2010-2011*, *supra* note 2, at 23.

¹² *Id.* at 23.

to land, particularly those regarding inheritance rights, and ownership rights upon divorce.¹³ One example of this is found along the coastal eastern region of Africa, where Islamic law dictates that a daughter may only inherit half the amount of land that a son is entitled to inherit, leaving the daughter without much opportunity to acquire land from her family.¹⁴ Furthermore, a daughter's land ownership in these communities is often brief, given that most women are typically forced to either sell or surrender their inheritance to a male relative.¹⁵ These types of discriminatory norms have also prevented women's access to land in countries where men and women have equal property rights. For example, in China, men and women have equal rights to land, but in practice, it is much more difficult for a rural woman to exercise these rights.¹⁶ This is largely because rural women often lose access to their family's land by moving to their husband's village, where social norms prohibit any claim to their husband's land upon his death, or upon divorce.¹⁷

B. Agricultural Credit and Loans

Similar to land, credit and other financial services, such as savings and insurance, provide opportunities for increasing agricultural output and food security at both the national and household levels.¹⁸ However, legal barriers and gender biases have prevented rural women, who often lack the collateral that is generally necessary to secure formal loans, from accessing these services.¹⁹ In fact, institutional discrimination by both public and private lenders often pushes women out of the market, or grants them considerably smaller loans than men.²⁰ For example, a study in Uganda indicates that while nearly all female-headed households expressed a desire to expand agricultural production and activity, women receive just 1 per cent of the available credit

¹³ *Gender Dimensions of Agriculture and Rural Employment: Differentiated Pathways out of Poverty*, *supra* note 8, at 49.

¹⁴ *Id.*

¹⁵ *Id.*

¹⁶ *Id.*

¹⁷ *Id.*

¹⁸ The State of Food and Agriculture 2010-2011, *supra* note 2, at 33.

¹⁹ *Id.*

²⁰ *Id.*

in rural areas.²¹ Moreover, a joint study conducted in Vietnam by the FAO and the United Nations Development Programme, reports that female-headed households not only have less access to formal credit, but also pay higher interest rates on loans than dual-headed households.²²

In developing regions, like Latin America and South Asia, rural women generally receive loans from credit and farming cooperatives as opposed to wholesalers or state banks.²³ However, even with the success of women-only cooperatives, women's membership in credit cooperatives is markedly low compared to men's.²⁴ For example, in countries like India, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Pakistan, and Nepal, women's total membership is only 7.5 per cent as compared to 92.5 per cent for men.²⁵ Thus, while women in some rural areas may now have access to credit, they continue to borrow less, and therefore, benefit less than their male counterparts.²⁶ This is notably true in Japan, where although there are no provisions preventing women's participation in agricultural cooperatives, women's membership remains low due to membership policies that allow only one member per household.²⁷ In deeply rooted patriarchy societies like Japan, prevailing custom and tradition dictate that membership should typically be afforded to a man.²⁸

C. Appropriate Technologies

In the agricultural sector, access to new technology is vital to productivity, and thus, central to national food security.²⁹ However, gender gaps are prevalent among a host of farming technologies, including improved plant varieties, fertilizers, and machinery.³⁰ For example, a study in Ghana indicates that only 39 per cent of female farmers, as opposed to 59 per cent of

²¹ *Id.* at 34.

²² *Id.*

²³ *Id.*

²⁴ Prakash, Daman, Rural Development Management Centre, *Rural Women, Food Security and Agricultural Cooperatives*, New Delhi, February, 2003.

²⁵ *Id.*

²⁶ *Gender Dimensions of Agriculture and Rural Employment: Differentiated Pathways out of Poverty*, *supra* note 8, at 51.

²⁷ *Rural Women, Food Security and Agricultural Cooperatives*, *supra* note 24.

²⁸ *Id.*

²⁹ The State of Food and Agriculture 2010-2011, *supra* note 2, at 34.

³⁰ *Id.*

male farmers, have adopted improved crop varieties because they have less access to natural and productive resources.³¹ Moreover, a study on mechanical equipment use by female and male-headed households reveals that male-headed households across Latin America, South Asia, and Africa, are more than 50 per cent more likely to use these types of technologies.³² This is further confirmed by a recent study in Central Benin, which shows that although equipment used for plowing is managed by groups, women's groups could not begin plowing their fields until the equipment drivers had finished their work on the fields owned by men.³³

Studies across most major developing regions have shown that rural women have dramatically benefitted from training courses designed to introduce women to new developments in technology.³⁴ One such example is in Morocco, where the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) taught over 300 women to produce better and safer olive oil by introducing a mechanical olive oil production unit, using locally available technology.³⁵ As a result, women's productivity increased by 40 per cent.³⁶

Despite these strides in agricultural processing, however, rural women continue to face unequal access to other forms of technology, particularly, transportation.³⁷ In fact, many women are restricted to culturally appropriate forms of transportation, such as traveling by foot with transport head loads, which prevents them from reaching markets that require long-distance travel.³⁸ For example, a study of coffee growers in Uganda found that only 7 per cent of transactions made by female-headed households took place in a nearby market, as compared to 15 per cent of the transactions made by male-headed households.³⁹ The study revealed that the

³¹ *Id.* at 35.

³² *Id.* at 36.

³³ *Id.*

³⁴ Agriculture and Development, *supra* note 7, at 207-208.

³⁵ *Id.* at 207.

³⁶ *Id.*

³⁷ *Gender Dimensions of Agriculture and Rural Employment: Differentiated Pathways out of Poverty*, *supra* note 8, at 55.

³⁸ *Id.*

³⁹ The State of Food and Agriculture 2010-2011, *supra* note 2, at 37.

disparity in these results were largely because men were more likely to own a bicycle, and thus reach the market more easily.⁴⁰

D. Education

Although studies have shown that education is positively correlated with agricultural productivity and household welfare, there continues to be widespread bias against women in education.⁴¹ In fact, data suggest that women heads of household in rural areas are significantly disadvantaged in terms of human capital accumulation—specifically education—in most developing countries.⁴² This is blatantly visible in countries like Ghana, where women have an average of approximately 2.5 years of education, while that figure climbs to approximately 5 years for men.⁴³ These disparities largely reflect the cultural norms in rural communities, many of which value boys over girls, and the needs of poor rural families who rely on their daughters for domestic and economic labor.⁴⁴ Indeed, a UNESCO report on Pakistan from 2007 reveals that in the Balochistan province alone, 53 per cent of rural boys, and 68 per cent of rural girls are not enrolled in primary school.⁴⁵

III. Household Food Security: Women’s Dual Roles, Nutrition, and Poverty

Rural women are vital in the translation of agricultural products into both food and nutritional security for their households, given that women are generally responsible for food selection, preparation, and the feeding of small children.⁴⁶ However, in most rural areas, a major challenge to household food security stems from women’s dual role of providing for their families through employment (both paid and unpaid agricultural work), and shouldering the burden of domestic responsibilities, which typically include cooking, cleaning, fetching fuel and

⁴⁰ *Id.*

⁴¹ *Id.* at 28.

⁴² *Id.*

⁴³ *Id.*

⁴⁴ *Gender Dimensions of Agriculture and Rural Employment: Differentiated Pathways out of Poverty*, *supra* note 8, at 91-92.

⁴⁵ *Id.* at 91.

⁴⁶ Agriculture and Development, *supra* note 7, at 12.

water, and child-rearing.⁴⁷ While much of this work is generally under-recognized and unpaid, it continues to consume an enormous amount of time and energy.⁴⁸ In fact, when all household and non-household activities are considered, studies have found that women generally work longer hours than men.⁴⁹ For example, a study in India found that on a one-hectare farm, women worked 3,485 hours per year, as compared to 1,212 hours for men.⁵⁰ Furthermore, a time-use survey in the Republic of Korea found that women spend 21 hours more per week than men doing unpaid work, and that their total working week exceeds men's by almost 1 hour per day.⁵¹

Transport is one unpaid activity in particular that absorbs an inordinate amount of women's time and energy on a regular basis.⁵² Limited access to transport technologies and poor infrastructure of roads creates a great burden for rural women,⁵³ who often travel by foot to collect firewood and water, or journey to the local market.⁵⁴ In fact, the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs estimates that women account for two thirds of rural transport in Africa, and that head loading contributes an additional 20 per cent to women's travel time.⁵⁵ Data reported by the FAO indicates that women and girls in Ghana, Zambia, and the United Republic of Tanzania are responsible for 65 per cent of all transport activities in rural households, in addition to completing domestic tasks at home.⁵⁶ As a result these trade-offs in women's allocation of time, rural women are not only left severely time-constrained, but also

⁴⁷ United Nations Development Programme, Asia-Pacific Human Development Report, *Power, Voice and Rights: A Turning Point for Gender Equality in Asia and the Pacific*, New Delhi, 2010, 63.

⁴⁸ *Id.*

⁴⁹ The State of Food and Agriculture 2010-2011, *supra* note 2, at 49.

⁵⁰ Coonrod, Carol S., The Hunger Project: Empowering Women and Men to End Their Own Hunger, *Chronic Hunger and the Status of Women in India*, June 1998.

⁵¹ Asia-Pacific Human Development Report, *supra* note 47, at 63.

⁵² United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Division for the Advancement of Women, 2009 World Survey on the Role of Women in Development, *Women's Control over Economic Resources and Access to Financial Resources Infrastructure, services and improved technologies, including Microfinance*, New York, 2009, 48.

⁵³ *Id.* at 48.

⁵⁴ Agriculture and Development, *supra* note 7, at 12.

⁵⁵ 2009 World Survey on the Role of Women in Development, *supra* note 52, at 48.

⁵⁶ The State of Food and Agriculture 2010-2011, *supra* note 2, at 14.

with few, if any, options for labor market participation even when opportunities are available.⁵⁷

Given that income is indicative of a household's ability to secure food, poverty is also a major threat to the food security of rural women in developing countries.⁵⁸ Due to a variety of factors, including the migration of men out of rural areas, natural disasters, conflict, and divorce, the percentage of female-headed households in developing countries has increased dramatically, and evidence has shown that these households are greatly overrepresented among the poor.⁵⁹ The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action has recognized that this overrepresentation is largely due to wage discrimination, occupational segregation, and other gender-related barriers.⁶⁰ For example, in Venezuela, 55 per cent of households are headed by women, a majority of whom are more likely to work in the informal labor market, and make less than half the salary of a man employed in similar activities.⁶¹ Similarly, female-headed households in the hillsides of Honduras bring in approximately 30 per cent less income than those headed by men.⁶²

The economic status of female-headed households presents stark consequences for household food security, as studies have shown that women's income is positively associated with greater food, health, education, and nutritional outcomes.⁶³ This is confirmed by data gathered from the Philippines, which indicates that increasing the amount of household income earned by mothers significantly contributes to an improvement in household food consumption.⁶⁴ According to the World Bank, these types of outcomes are largely due to the fact that when women have outside income, they are more likely than their male counterparts to buy food and

⁵⁷ *Id.* at 49.

⁵⁸ Food Policy Report, The International Food Policy Research Institute, *Women: The Key to Food Security*, Washington D.C., 1995, 11.

⁵⁹ Buvinic, Mayra, Foreign Policy, *Women in Poverty: A New Underclass*, Washington D.C., July 1998.

⁶⁰ United Nations, *Beijing Declaration and Platform of Action, adopted at the Fourth World Conference on Women*, 27 October 1995, available at: <http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/3dde04324.html> [accessed 29 January 2012].

⁶¹ International Fund for Agricultural Development, Rural Poverty Portal, *Rural Poverty in the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela*, available at: <http://www.ruralpovertyportal.org/web/guest/country/home/tags/venezuela>.

⁶² International Fund for Agricultural Development, Rural Poverty Portal, *Rural Poverty in Honduras*, available at: <http://www.ruralpovertyportal.org/web/guest/country/home/tags/honduras>.

⁶³ The State of Food and Agriculture 2010-2011, *supra* note 2, at 43.

⁶⁴ *Id.*

other household necessities.⁶⁵ For example, in Côte d'Ivoire, household welfare and nutritional improvement are not predicated on household income generally, but instead, on who accrues the income.⁶⁶ Indeed, studies in Côte d'Ivoire have shown that when household income is accrued to women, significantly more is spent on food and less on alcohol and cigarettes.⁶⁷

With the heavy workload placed on rural women, and the rise of poverty in rural communities, and particularly in female-headed households, women and girls are often short-changed in receiving adequate nutrition.⁶⁸ Although the Right to Food Guidelines clearly state that “States should adopt measures to eradicate any kind of discriminatory practices, especially with respect to gender, in order to achieve adequate levels of nutrition in the household,”⁶⁹ in many rural societies, tradition dictates that men eat before women in order to consume the best food.⁷⁰ This also means that when food is scarce, women and children often go hungry, leaving them more likely to be undernourished than men.⁷¹ Furthermore, women’s high work burden often forces them to reduce the nutritional intake of their households by making shortcuts in food preparation.⁷² In regions like the Asia-Pacific, this may explain why women and girls are more underweight, and more likely to suffer from chronic energy deficiency, than boys and men.⁷³

Scarcity of food, along with inequitable distribution of adequate food for rural women, has far-reaching implications for women’s health, market participation, and consequently, household food security. In fact, studies reveal that women in poor health and lacking adequate nutrition, particularly iron, are less likely to be productive in the agricultural workforce, and thus

⁶⁵ Agriculture and Development, *supra* note 7, at 12.

⁶⁶ *Id.* at 18.

⁶⁷ *Id.*

⁶⁸ *The Right to Food in Theory and Practice: Rural Women and the Right to Food*, *supra* note 1.

⁶⁹ Rae, Isabella, Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, *Women and the Right to Food: International Law and State Practice*, Rome, 2008.

⁷⁰ *The Right to Food in Theory and Practice: Rural Women and the Right to Food*, *supra* note 1.

⁷¹ *Id.*

⁷² *Id.*

⁷³ The State of Food and Agriculture 2010-2011, *supra* note 2, at 27.

less likely to provide for the economic well-being of their households.⁷⁴ Moreover, malnourished mothers are more likely to give birth to underweight babies, whose low health and nutritional status may perpetuate the cycle of poverty for future generations.⁷⁵ This is of particular concern in India and Bangladesh, which currently have the highest rates of low-birth-weight babies.⁷⁶

IV. The Impact of Food Insecurity: Women's Personal Security

Unequal access to natural and productive resources that restrict women's productivity and lessens their capacity to provide food security for their households, is also increasingly linked to higher incidences of violence against rural women.⁷⁷ Article 1 of the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women defines 'violence against women' as:

[A]ny act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual, or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or private life.⁷⁸

Indeed, this definition has been understood to encompass acts constituting some of the most egregious violations of women's rights, including domestic violence, human trafficking, sexual assault, and exploitation—crimes to which rural women are the most susceptible.

A. Domestic Violence

Domestic violence occurs across all socio-economic classes, but poor women with lower levels of education are more likely to experience it.⁷⁹ When men with low socio-economic status are unable to provide for their families, they may resort to violence, particularly against their wives or partners, "out of frustration and a sense of hopelessness."⁸⁰ For example, in India,

⁷⁴ *Id.* at 26-27.

⁷⁵ *Women and the Right to Food: International Law and State Practice*, supra note 69, at 19.

⁷⁶ *Agriculture and Development*, supra note 7, at 17.

⁷⁷ 2009 World Survey on the Role of Women in Development, supra note 52, vii.

⁷⁸ UN General Assembly, *Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women*, 20 December 1993, A/RES/48/104, available at: <http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/3b00f25d2c.html> [accessed 30 January 2012].

⁷⁹ Blanco, Blanca & Lorna Hayes, Trocaire Development Review, *The Hidden Challenge to Development: Gender Based Violence in Guatemala*, Dublin 2007, 51.

⁸⁰ *Id.*

where poverty affects nearly 30 per cent of the rural population,⁸¹ a survey of violence against women found that in 94 per cent of cases, the victim and her attacker were related, and in 90 per cent of those cases, the woman was victimized by her husband.⁸² Even more alarming, the same survey revealed that 9 out of every 10 murders of women were the result of husbands killing their wives.⁸³ Studies have revealed similar statistics for other countries in South Asia, including Pakistan, in which a study of 1,000 women in rural Punjab found that 35 per cent of women had been beaten by their husbands, and Nepal, in which 58 per cent of women in domestic violence cases admitted to suffering physical violence at the hands of their husbands.⁸⁴

Domestic violence is also a common occurrence in places with large, marginalized, rural populations like Nicaragua, the second poorest country in Latin America after Haiti.⁸⁵ Nearly half of the population (about 43 per cent) lives in rural areas, and two out of every three people struggle to survive on less than a dollar per day—households headed by women being among the poorest.⁸⁶ Recent reports on violence against women indicate that 30 per cent of Nicaraguan women between the ages of 15 to 49 years old have been abused by their husband or partner, and a subsequent study revealed that 37 per cent of Nicaraguan women had never spoken to anyone about the abuse before.⁸⁷ This culture of silence is also pervasive throughout other parts of Latin America, such as Colombia, where although domestic violence is widespread, it is severely underreported largely due to cultural views that continue to view domestic violence as a “private

⁸¹ The International Fund for Agricultural Development, Rural Poverty Portal, *Rural Poverty in India*, available at: <http://www.ruralpovertyportal.org/web/guest/country/home/tags/india>.

⁸² Naved, Ruchira Tabassum, Asian Forum of Parliamentarians on Population and Development, *Violence Against Women in South Asia – A Regional Analysis, A situational Analysis of Violence Against Women in South Asia*, Bangkok, 3.

⁸³ *Id.*

⁸⁴ *Id.* at 4.

⁸⁵ The International Fund for Agricultural Development, Rural Poverty Portal, *Rural Poverty in Nicaragua*, available at: <http://www.ruralpovertyportal.org/web/guest/country/home/tags/nicaragua>.

⁸⁶ *Id.*

⁸⁷ Prieto-Carron, Marina, *Gender-Based Violence in the Lives of Nicaraguan Women Maquila Workers*, 21 CAWN Newsletter: Central America Women’s Network, 5 (2006).

matter.”⁸⁸ However, information provided by the National Institute of Legal Medicine and Forensic Science confirms that Colombia has 178 reports of family violence per day, 70 per cent of which occurs between spouses, and 78 per cent of which is directed against women.⁸⁹

B. Human Trafficking

Rural women living in hunger and extreme poverty are also more vulnerable to human trafficking. The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) notes that traffickers are able to operate in this context, where they can exploit the uncertain economic situations of impoverished women.⁹⁰ For example, in Nigeria, an increasing number of women and children are trafficked, both internally and cross-border, from rural communities into exploitative domestic work, farm labor, and prostitution.⁹¹ With diminished resources, a heavy workload, and a general lack of employment prospects, Nigerian women often seek to diversify their income, which makes them more vulnerable to being trafficked.⁹² This common scenario is also found across South Asia, from which an estimated 150,000 women are trafficked every year under the guise of increased economic opportunity. In fact, 35 per cent of women and girls trafficked from Nepal to India were brought under the pretext of better paying jobs and relief from poverty.⁹³

Vulnerability to human trafficking has also increased as a result of changing patterns in migration. In countries like Ecuador, where nearly 42 per cent of the population lives in poverty, desperate socio-economic conditions have historically driven men to migrate out of the country in search of employment.⁹⁴ Without a steady stream of household income, the women left behind become even more impoverished, increasing the likelihood that they—and their children—will

⁸⁸ Violence against Women in Colombia, A Report to the Committee against Torture, Thirty-First Session, Consideration of Reports Submitted by States Parties Under Article 19 of the Convention, 10 – 21 November 2003, 172-173.

⁸⁹ *Id.* at 173.

⁹⁰ Asian Forum of Parliamentarians on Population and Development, *supra* note 82, at 56.

⁹¹ The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, Intersectoral Programme Poverty Eradication, Policy Paper No. 14.2, *Human Trafficking in Nigeria: Root Causes and Recommendations*, Paris 2006, 22.

⁹² *Id.* at 25.

⁹³ Asian Forum of Parliamentarians on Population and Development, *supra* note 82, at 56.

⁹⁴ Chemonics International, Inc., United States Agency for International Development, *Anti-Trafficking Technical Assistance: Ecuador Anti-Trafficking Assessment*, August 2006.

become victims of trafficking.⁹⁵

Recent trends, however, have shown that an increasing number of women are migrating out of the countryside and into urban areas to escape poverty, hunger, and a shrinking agricultural sector.⁹⁶ For example, in countries like Thailand, the growth of tourism and manufacturing in urban, municipal areas has attracted more than 1.3 million women from rural communities.⁹⁷ While this type of mobility presents several opportunities for women's wage-earning capacity, isolation and unfamiliar conditions leave migrant women even more vulnerable to physical and verbal abuse by employers, sexual assault, HIV, and human trafficking.⁹⁸

D. Violence against Indigenous Women in Rural Areas

The effects of food insecurity, both at the national and household levels, are even more acute among Indigenous women, whose worsening economic situations have forced their displacement and migration to urban centers.⁹⁹ For example, in Mexico, Indigenous peoples have been growing corn and harvesting coffee for over 10,000 years; however, the passage of the North American Free Trade Agreement in 1994 has since flooded Mexico with U.S. agricultural products, undercutting the prices of domestic foodstuffs.¹⁰⁰ As a result, in the state of Chiapas alone, it is estimated that 70 per cent of the rural population (mostly Indigenous families) now lives in extreme poverty.¹⁰¹ Relocation to major cities or "free-trade zones" often presents greater risks for Indigenous women, including poor health, lack of housing, lack of employment, and wage disparities—discrimination that not only increases the likelihood of male violence against women, but also the social consequences that exacerbate this type of violence, such as poverty,

⁹⁵ *Id.*

⁹⁶ Asia-Pacific Human Development Report, *supra* note 82, at 62.

⁹⁷ *Id.* at 66.

⁹⁸ *Id.* at 149.

⁹⁹ International Indigenous Women's Forum, A Companion Report to the United Nations Secretary-General's Study on Violence Against Women, *Mairin Iwanka Raya: New Beginnings for Women*, Miskito 2006, 33.

¹⁰⁰ *Id.*

¹⁰¹ *Id.*

drug abuse, alcoholism, depression, gang-membership, and suicide.¹⁰²

Apart from the risks of violence associated with migration from rural to urban areas, Indigenous women continue to face increased risks of gender-based violence in their native lands. A visible example of this in the United States, where more than 60 per cent of native women in Alaska live in rural areas and experience the highest levels of sexual violence as compared to the rest of the state.¹⁰³ In fact, research carried out by Amnesty International USA reveals that of the 41 confirmed cases of rape and murder in Alaska since 1991, 32 involved Alaska Native women.¹⁰⁴ In the same report, statistics further show that 34.1 per cent of both Native American and Alaska Native women—more than one in three—will be raped during their lifetime, as compared to less than one in five for the United States as a whole.¹⁰⁵

V. Recommendations for Action

Given the concerns raised in this report, Human Rights Advocates (HRA) requests that the Commission on the Status of Women consider the following recommendations in its Agreed Conclusions for the Fifty-sixth session:

- A. States shall take all appropriate measures to increase food security for rural women by eliminating gender-based obstacles to successful agricultural productivity and household food security including:
- Increasing the number of rural women in local and national decision-making bodies to address gender inequalities in agricultural production, particularly women's access to natural and productive resources, and human capital.
 - Reducing poverty in women-headed households, by increasing women's employment, eliminating wage disparities between men and women, and addressing

¹⁰² *Id.*

¹⁰³ Amnesty International, *Maze of Injustice: The Failure to Protect Indigenous Women from Sexual Violence in the USA*, New York 2007, 36.

¹⁰⁴ *Id.*

¹⁰⁵ *Id.*

the complex trade-offs rural women make in their allocation of time that prevents their successful participation in the labor market.

- Eliminating violence against women by passing and enforcing national legislation criminalizing all forms of gender-based violence, including but not limited to, intimate partner violence, rape, sexual assault, and femicide, and ensuring that perpetrators are prosecuted to the fullest extent of the law.

B. States shall implement programs aimed at educating children on the principles of gender equality from their earliest stages of development with the goal of eliminating institutional and social forms of patriarchy, which have served as the leading justification for discrimination against women in the public and private spheres of society.

C. States shall take appropriate measures to collect disaggregated data on women that distinguishes between women living in rural areas, and women generally. This type of disaggregated data will better reflect disparities, and subsequently, inform better policy decisions at both the national and local levels of government.