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NAPP COO COMMUNIQUE ON INTERNATIONAL DAY OF RURAL WOMEN

BOXED VOICES OF RURAL WOMEN IN ASIA

Are we still waiting for a proper Gender-responsive investments in rural areas? Have we never been more critical? Or are we just spectators?

Indeed, the United Nations has dedicated October 15 as the International Day of Rural Women. From agriculture to food security, nutrition, land and natural resource management, domestic care and work, rural women are at the forefront taking charge every single day.

The role that women and girls play in safeguarding the sustainability of rural households and communities, improving rural livelihoods and overall wellbeing, has been progressively recognized. Women account for a widespread proportion of the agricultural labour force, including informal work, and perform the bulk of unpaid care and domestic work within families and households in rural areas. Though they make significant contributions to the Agri-sector, yet women and girls in rural areas suffer disproportionately from multi-dimensional poverty. Women farmers may be as productive and enterprising as their male counterparts but have less access to lands, credits, agricultural inputs, markets, and high-value Agri food chains and obtain lower prices for their crops, lower wages etc. There are structural barriers and discriminatory social norms that continue to constrain women's decision-making power and political participation in rural households and communities.

In most cases women and girls in rural areas lack equal access to productive resources and assets, public services, such as education and health care, and infrastructure, including water and sanitation, while much of their labour remains unrecognised and unpaid, even as their workloads become increasingly heavy due to the out-migration of men.

Similarly Gender based violence affect all groups of women, but rural and indigenous women are particularly vulnerable. Addressing gender-based violence is both a fundamental human rights issue and a serious impediment to food and nutrition security. Violence can reduce a rural woman's ability to work, care for her family and contribute to society.

In the current context, vulnerability of women and girls in rural areas with a crucial role in agriculture, food security and nutrition have increased due to the Pandemic. These are the women who already face struggles in their daily lives and are based in remote areas and are less likely to have access to quality health services, essential medicines, and vaccines. Restrictive social norms and gender stereotypes can also limit rural women's ability to access health services. Furthermore, a lot of rural women suffer from isolation, as well as the spread of misinformation, and a lack of access to critical technologies to improve their work and personal life.

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Lessons learned

Integrating gender-based violence mitigation into a program that was not originally set to directly combat this systemic issue may seem like an intimidating task, but Fairtrade Network of Asia and Pacific Producers has learned from the process.

Here are a few insights gained through various interactive process across Asia:


1. **Information to stabilize:** NAPP initiated **Gender Assessment activity** to understand the leadership role that women played in the set-up of Producer Organization across Asia. Sri Lankan producer organizations topped the list in ensuring women's leadership and participation were shared. During the mid-term NAPP conducted a Pilot batch test for **Gender Audit** at selective Producer organization to understand the balanced approach. It was known that continuum of women's decision –making hadn't changed even though their activity in the producer organization had increased. That was a sign that something more needs to be done to break the silence in the development of women and girls.
2. **Build the strategy into what we are already doing:** Constructing system to have day to day interaction with farmers, while it could support us to integrate gender equality learning and trainings as one off approach but Constant engagement on the thematic will have positive effect among the producer organization members as well within the community. **NAPP Gender Leadership School** was a flagship program that was initiated in 2018 to address the gender equality issues along the lines of leadership, Market engagements, Banking etc with both women and men taking their leads in their community.
3. **Keep measuring – quantitatively and qualitatively:** The changes brought about in the women's decision making power and empowerment along with mitigation of gender-based violence, is not easy to measure but NAPP has been witnessing an increase in the participation of women in leadership and business roles and these data needs to be recorded. To mark few women leaders in the system who are to be appreciated and encouraged come from Indonesia, Central Asia, and Vietnam. The growth of women leadership at the producer organization level needs to be supported. **Youth Inclusive Community Based Mitigation and remediation –YICBMR** is another process that NAPP is working to address the issues of Gender Based violence. With the support of Fairtrade International it has been initiated in India and Philippines and this needs to be strengthened as it involves the community to engage in the mitigation and remediation process. This will encourage the producer organization to lead and take responsibility of its issues.
4. **Increase resources at various levels:** We need to proactively organise interactive hubs for youth/young adults on various subject. This space will not only provide them a platform to learn and exchange view but also create internal specialist on Gender, Marketing, Business etc. Such space is the need of the hour to encourage self – learning among the youth and for them to develop a sense of community responsibility and become Champs or Advocates of Social change at the producer level.

To conclude, it is clear that insufficient investments have been made in addressing the challenges faced by rural women and girls, including but not limited to- obtaining quality secondary and higher education; access to agricultural training; adequate promotion and protection of their land rights; access to drinking water and sanitation; access to adequate public services and infrastructures; access to information and services related to health care and family planning; protection from all forms of GBV and discrimination such as early and forced marriage and FGM; access to digital technology and financial literacy opportunities; equal representation in decision making at the local, regional, national and international level; adequate protection and promotion of rural indigenous knowledge and skills; and placing value on unpaid care and domestic work.

Unless greater attention and support are provided for the world's rural women and girls, the imbalance will be noticed. Thus, NAPP calls on producer organization, governments, policy makers and communities to put rural women and girls on the front line of sustainable development efforts. Investing in rural women and girls' safety, economic and financial empowerment, education and rights - in time of both peace and crisis empowers them to reach their full potential, build better lives and futures for themselves, their families and communities and allow them to participate as leaders in the building of a climate resilient community.

It's good to sit up and take notice...but better to get up and take action!

Sincerely,



Sanjeet Singh Khurana

Chief Operations Officer

Reference:

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(3) FOOD AND AGRICULTURE ORGANIZATION OF THE UNITED NATIONS, *Tackling climate change through rural women's empowerment*, 2018, <http://www.fao.org/3/ca0178en/CA0178EN.pdf>