Empowering Rural Women to Develop Resilient, Sustainable Livelihoods and Communities
Co-organized by: International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), Huairou Commission
Friday, 17 March 2017, from 1:15 pm to 2:30 pm
United Nations HQ – Conference Room B, New York

Background:

Rural women make up about 45% of the agricultural labor force in developing countries and actively contribute to food and cash crop production. Smallholder women farmers and indigenous women thus play a critical role in ensuring food security and in reducing rural poverty, often through unique and ingenious ways of employing traditional knowledge practices and sustainable farming techniques. Yet rural women face a number of barriers to economic empowerment. They are constrained by limited access to and control over land and other productive assets and also limited access to markets. The effects of climate change are putting additional pressures on women farmers, requiring them to adopt and experiment with adaptive measures to sustain production and income generation.

Despite the many obstacles that grassroots women face, they have emerged as active agents of rural transformation and resilience in many communities. For instance, Garifuna indigenous women farmers in Honduras were instrumental in establishing a range of food related enterprises by using collective tools and seed banking to cultivate diverse crops and strengthen value chains. Kenyan women farmers effectively employed climate smart cultivation methods to increase food and livelihood security and alongside this effort, they worked as community based caregivers to extend support to their neighbors affected by HIV/AIDS. Tribal women in Madhya Pradesh, India, organized in self-help groups and engaged in rain-fed agriculture, vegetable cultivation and horticulture, including new forms of kitchen gardens and strived for organic certification. In the face of a record-breaking drought in Maharashtra, India, women farmers led efforts to insure a stable supply of nutritious food and created an association of 900+ women entrepreneurs that are marketing energy efficient cooking technology across their villages and towns, demonstrating strong leadership in rural transformation.

Recognizing the need for greater participation of rural women in policy dialogues and partnership building, Huairou Commission launched the Rural Women’s Empowerment Initiative in 19 countries across Africa, Asia, Latin America, and the Caribbean to highlight rural women’s roles, contributions, and priorities in the context of the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Supported by IFAD in 2015, the findings of the 4 multi-stakeholder dialogues and 14 local consultations in 13 countries throw light on the ways and means to increase rural women’s participation. The insights that emerged stressed the need to formalize rural women’s role in decision making, improve their access to productive assets and develop adaptive mechanisms to respond to vulnerabilities posed by climate change.

Informed by the power of these stories and the lessons learnt from the participatory policy dialogues, the side event will seek to take the debate and discussions further. It will showcase new ways of thinking about the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and targets from the standpoint of rural women and their concerns. The event will also discuss innovative strategies that, if scaled up, would improve rural and indigenous women’s economic status as well as produce socially and environmentally responsible rural development outcomes that advance multiple SDGs.
**Format:**
The event will include a panel discussion with four grassroots women (farmers, community network builders and entrepreneurs) from India, Nicaragua, Peru, and Zimbabwe who will describe how they acted as agents of rural transformation in their respective communities. A brief intervention from Huairou Commission will report on the findings of the IFAD supported study. Representatives from Member States will then share successful policy interventions and best practices at the national level in addressing the needs and priorities of rural women. The panel will be moderated by IFAD.

**Participants:**
The speakers include:

- Haydee Rodriguez, President of the Union de Cooperatives Las Brumas, Nicaragua
- Relinda Sosa, President of Conomavidi, Peru
- Shorai Chitongo, Ray of Hope, Zimbabwe
- Rekha Pandram, Tejaswini Rural Women’s Empowerment Programme (Madhya Pradesh), India
- Nicole Bohrer, Huairou Commission
- Representative from Member States
- Maria Hartl, IFAD (Moderator & Closing remarks)