On the Occasion of the 62\textsuperscript{nd} CSW session

Date: 16 March 2018

Time: 1:15-2:30 pm

ECOSOC Chamber

“Rural Women in the Arab Region: Cases of Challenges and Resilience”

\textbf{CONCEPT NOTE}

\textbf{BACKGROUND}

The Arab Women Organization (AWO) believes that investing in women is the key to developing the world, thus investing in every aspect from women’s health and education to women’s labour will no doubt have substantial returns. Thus AWO holds a series of events that advocates for investing and empowering women. On the occasion of the 61\textsuperscript{st} CSW, AWO held a side event titled “Investing in Refugee Women: Turning Challenges into Opportunities”, and in continuation of AWO’s efforts and in light of the 62\textsuperscript{nd} CSW theme of empowering rural women, AWO will hold the side event “Rural Women in the Arab Region: Cases of Challenges and Resilience”. This is to reflect hardships that Arab rural women face and how they manage to continue their chores despite facing many obstacles. Indeed, empowering rural women and reducing the gender gap in agriculture is essential to eliminating hunger and developing more sustainable food systems.

By empowering rural women we are not only achieving gender equality and a simple human right, we are achieving many of the sustainable development goals among which; SDG 1 (No Poverty), SDG 2 (Zero Hunger), SDG 5 (Gender Equality), SDG 8 (Decent work and Economic Growth), SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities), and SDG 13 (Climate Change). Rural women are often marginalized when in fact they endure a lot of hardships with almost no recognition. Rural women all over the world spend around 16 million hours per day to collect safe water, and 90% of collected water and wood is done by women’s efforts alone. They spend thousands of hours collecting wood and working on the land, without having any ownership rights. Moreover, as conflict over natural resources increases globally, and climate change related disasters
continue, rural women face increased pressures – both as a result of the loss of income from conflict and disaster and an increase in domestic responsibilities resulting from weakened social infrastructure such as health and education.

Women make up an average of 43% of agricultural workforce in developing countries and 50% or more in part of Asia and Africa. While women do the better share of work on land, they rarely own it, as less than 20% of landholders are women. In the Arab region, women represent the majority of agricultural workers and producers in many countries of the region, yet they remain concentrated in the less lucrative nodes of value chains. Moreover, in some countries of the Arab region, women, especially those living in rural areas, have no control over land and productive assets, even when they have the right through inheritance. Not to mention that rural women have less access to input, seeds, credit and services, which is a universal phenomenon.

There are many ways to invest in rural women and empowering them through introducing new technologies in farming practices, providing small loans and microfinancing, ensuring land and tenure security, and securing land ownerships. Furthermore, women’s land ownership is a key factor in ending hunger as narrowing the gender gap in the agricultural sector would save 100-150 million people from hunger. Indeed, families were women own the land allocates a higher percentage of the income to the children’s nutrition, health, and education, which will indeed accelerate the development process.

**Objectives of the Side Event and Talking Points**

The side event will represent a forum to present the Arab views on the importance of investing in rural women in the Arab region and the impact of such investment on development in their respective societies. Thus, it will highlight the major challenges faced by rural women in the Arab region – including those that relate to conflict and disaster - and the importance of providing them with access to not just land, but also the tools that can support their agricultural endeavour, save time, and ensure maximum harvest in a sustainable and innovative manner.

In this regard, the event will shed the light on the best practices in the empowerment of women and girls, in Asia and Africa, especially with regards to access to education, infrastructure and technology, food security and nutrition. Not to mention introducing
them to new technologies that will help them adapt to the changes in climate that affects the production of agricultural products and provide them with access to local markets.

The ideas exchanged during the event will encourage strengthening the political commitment toward the realization of gender equality and the empowerment of rural women and girls.

In essence, AWO aims to illustrate how investing in rural women will not only end world hunger, but it also will expedite the entire developmental agenda. This will be done by highlighting:

1. The interlinkages between empowering rural women and the majority of the SDGs.
2. The impact of conflict, climate change and disasters on rural women – in particular as it relates to migration, trafficking and loss of income.
3. Rural women’s daily life, including challenges, and work life balance.
4. Exploring ways to invest in rural women by providing microfinance loans, introducing new technologies in farming, and training them to adapt to climate changes.
5. Economic perspective of empowering rural women and providing them with the same access as men to land, and ensuring land ownership.
6. Immediate measures needed to start creating partnerships for microfinancing rural women to expand their production.
7. Importance of providing same access to rural women as men to land, technology, financial services, education, and markets.
8. Success stories of countries that invested in rural women by using technology to facilitate adapting to climate change, and selling their produce on a larger scale.
Speakers and panellists:

Moderator:

Minister Mervattallawy, Director General, AWO

High level Panellists

- H.E. Ms. Atifetejahjaga (recorded video)
  President of the Republic of Kosovo (2011-2016)

- H.E. Ms. Nezihalabidi
  Minister of Women, Family and Children in Tunisia

- H.E. Ms. Bassima Hakkaoui
  Minister of Solidarity, Women, Family and Social Development in Morocco

- H.E. Mr. Maged Abdel Fattah
  Head of the Arab League Delegation to the UN

- H.E. Ms. Sima bahous
  Jordan’s Permanent Representative to the UN

- H.E. Mr. Mourad Wahba
  Director of the Regional Bureau for Arab States, UNDP

- H.E. Mr. Mohamed Naciri
  Director of Arab States Regional Office, UN Women