The Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) 2018 - Update
Ministerial Level Roundtable #1

The Commission held its first Ministerial-Level Roundtable to discuss the theme of "Good Practices in the Empowerment of Rural Women and Girls, including Access to Education, Infrastructure, Technology and Nutrition".

**Background:** The rights of rural women and girls to quality, affordable education is at the core of SDG 4 and is a stepping stone to economic empowerment and political participation. However, data indicates that rural women and girls lag behind their urban counterparts. Information and Communications Technologies tend to reach rural areas last increasing the digital divide between urban and rural populations of women and girls. Rural women and girls still suffer from a higher rate of malnutrition and food security than all other populations.

Country representatives were asked to share and discuss the steps that their respective governments had taken to support rural women and girls with sustainable energy, transportation, water and sanitation, access to information and communications technologies and food and nutrition.

Here are some of the actions and best practices discussed by Roundtable participants:

**Australia:** National Broadband and mobile "black spots" networks are being rolled out with the purpose of closing the digital divide between rural and urban areas in the access to information and communications technologies. The government has committed $220 million to the "Black Spot" Program

**Cote d'Ivoire:** The government has made digital inclusion a priority and training in the use of digital tablets is available to women in general. Special funds have been created to encourage women's economic empowerment, especially in rural areas and funding for healthcare is increasing

**Paraguay:** Legislation aimed at empowering women in economic, social, political and cultural areas has been in place since 2015. The next step is the adoption and implementation of policies based on this legislation which cover among other rights, access to land.

**Switzerland:** Asked participants to suggest ways in which to engage men and boys in promoting rural gender equality. Norway suggested that "mixed-gender" teams working on gender equality are one option to help raise the awareness of men and boys.

**Saudi Arabia:** The government is taking steps and measures to support rural girls retention in schools. Financial incentives are in place to encourage teachers to work in remote rural areas

**Mali:** The country is living through violent terrorism and child mortality is on the rise. Terrorists are forcing girls into marriage and rape is being committed with impunity. The situation in Mali is precarious and the rural economy is paralyzed.
China: Status of women in China is inseparable from agricultural development which the Communist Party has designated as a priority at its National Congress in 2017. 99.0 percent of rural girls are enrolled in schools. Women's organizations are providing training to 3 million women. Healthcare includes free breast cancer screenings. Rural women are encouraged to participate in e-commerce and the wider digital economy and there is a system of micro-credit to support women who are rural entrepreneurs.

Also participating in this Roundtable were high-level representatives from a host of other countries.

**GWI Analytical Note:**

While the discussion on actions and best practices by various country governments was heartening, the biggest problem still remains in the area of implementation of gender-responsive policies, legislation and programs across countries, particularly in rural areas. Also, there seems to be a dearth of truly innovative ideas and practices expressed in the course of the discussion.

While governments can be labelled "slow to implement" for a number of reasons. GWI believes that the gaps between existing gender-responsive national plans and implementation is also the result of conflicts between a country's obligation to abide by global policies and the need to enact and implement national policies in favor of rural populations. (You will note that this was cited as the #1 Barrier in the Empowerment of Rural Women and Girls in the Expert Group Meeting that preceded CSW2018)

GWI believes that rural transformations that support women require three things: 1) "out of the box" thinking, 2) an understanding of the diversity within the world's population of rural women and girls - one solution does not fit all rural women and girls and 3) Reconciliation of global and national policies so that human rights can flourish alongside trade and development.

*If NFAs would like to build additional knowledge about the intersection of global and national policies as they impact human rights and development, please write to me and we will schedule a conversation that is specific to your country.*
Topic: Good Practices in the Empowerment of Rural Women and Girls, including through Prevention of Gender-based Violence and through Access to Justice, Social Services and Healthcare

This was a discussion of national plans and laws, fiscal policies, investments and services that are being implemented in countries that have seen progress in the empowerment of rural women and girls as well as actions that these countries aspire to.

GWI Note: Since many countries were represented in this discussion and because there are so many good ideas that are being implemented and shared, GWI is summarizing this discussion in four parts, so that its NFAs can build the necessary knowledge to support the good work of their respective country governments and/or to advocate for best practices highlighted in this roundtable

**Colombia**: Study on the Institutional Tolerance of Violence against Women - 45% of public servants deal with violence. Additional trainings are needed so that gender stereotypes do not normalize Gender-Based Violence (GBV)

**Albania**: 42% of population lives in rural areas where traditional gender roles are deeply entrenched. So, change is challenging but the country’s legislation is being brought to conform with international standards. Awareness of rights and direct outreach to women is helping GBV victims come forward

**Turkey**: Law enforcement with special units for women and children with female personnel. Provision of shelters and family centers with social, economic, cultural, occupational, health and psychological supports. Empowerment of rural women is included in National Strategy Plan.

**Burkina Faso**: Adoption of legal instruments to prevent violence and provide reparation to GBV victims. Land Laws enacted – these need to be publicized to build capacity into the implementation of these laws. Integrated assistance centers provide legal assistance. 80% of tariffs on healthcare have been reduced for women and girls to support access to healthcare including pregnancy and cancer services. Support of rural women entrepreneurs is helping women emerge from a shadow economy

**Denmark**: Men and boys must be part of the solution to GBV. Social norms and masculine negativity are discussed as well as practicing prevention, protection and prosecution. Young people are targeted for education to break the cycle of violence

**Finland**: Inclusive and coordinated policies at the national level and global level are needed. 1 in 5 Finnish women experience intimate violence. In response to recommendations from international bodies. Finland has created mechanisms to coordinate all actors: risk assessment, law
enforcement, child services, health services and addiction. Result: Reduced 80% of recurring cases. Increased numbers of shelters available

Morocco: 33% of women work in rural areas in agriculture and cattle – rearing and are not paid for their work. Law protecting women’s personal income has been passed and social services including maternity care and student centers are provided

Lichtenstein: To ratify Istanbul Convention soon. Laws are not enough – much work at the society level needs to be done to sensitize society. “No Way” Initiative launched to create awareness of GBV - bread sold in bag with slogan and emergency contact numbers. National Human Rights Institution created to advise women and girls and for legal remedies.

Ireland: Overlap in favor of rural women between National Strategy and Department of Community and Rural affairs. Six National objectives - for women economic/ social, health, visibility, elimination of violence leadership and participation in decision- making. Rural entrepreneurs are being provided with mentorship and there is a national plan for jobs for women and an intention to ratify the Istanbul Convention
Topic: Good practices in the empowerment of rural women and girls through prevention of GBV and access to justice, social services and healthcare

Sri Lanka: RS 763 million has been allocated to rural women. The government has formed collaborations with the private sector and banks to help rural women. Every police station has Women and Child bureaus to protect GBV victims and trafficking victims.

Brazil: Government takes integrated action for women and girls with consideration of the diversity in this population. The Brazil Women’s Program combines the work of all sectors. Feminist law supports women’s caucuses in Congress. A hotline informs women of appropriate social services. In 2016, the hotline grew by 137% in terms with calls from rural areas. Mobile medical units are deployed in rural areas.

Palestine: Occupation has derailed pro-women strategies which has led to the deterioration of status of women and girls – particularly rural populations. Government tries to measure women’s participation in workforce in rural areas which is a good indicator of women’s economic progress and a basis for investment strategies. National observatory established to monitor violence against women in order to change laws and policies.

Germany: Access to relief from violence is more difficult for rural women. Government now examining gaps in support even in Germany’s very good social services system. Legislation has been improved and the Istanbul Convention has been ratified. A national help line had 150,000 contacts. Building a database is challenging as numbers of GBV incidents go unreported. Germany has set up a women’s center in Pakistan and is providing international help to many countries. More awareness is needed and men and boys need to be included more.

Uganda: Extensive legislation in place against violence. Law enforcement trainings and shelters across the country are established. Observes 16 days of activism every year. Police stations have family desk managed by women officers. Strong partnership with civil society is in place. The Women’s Empowerment Fund supports women who have undergone FGM and pays for girls to remain at boarding schools during holidays and during the circumcision season.

Argentina: Argentina has developed its first national institute to frame gender policies referencing CEDAW. Coordinates a rural women’s roundtable on Agriculture, Human Rights, Health. Intervention strategies take a multi-agency approach and an intercultural system for rural and indigenous women. Awareness of rights and services is raised through a partnership of state and Union of Rural Workers.

Zambia: Multisectoral programs for rural women. Tractors and tillers donated to women and partnerships with traditional leaders to provide land to women’s cooperatives. Social Cash Transfers are provided to rural women and victims of GBV to reduce exclusion and food security is also
supported with food packs. Mobile banking helps access to finance and village banking (microcredit) helps transfer small amounts of money. User-friendly courts fast-track GBV cases to be resolved in 30 days. Also available one – stop centers for GBV care and for victims of trafficking

**Mexico:** Emphasis on political participation of rural women – these women are highly vulnerable to political violence. Elections are complex and challenge parity of women. Law in place for gender parity in elections process because rural women produce 50% of the country’s food but are not allowed to stand for elections and have no part in political, social and economic decision-making

**Slovenia:** New equality body for victims of discrimination for all women including rural women. Numbers of shelters have been increased and funding is provided to NGOs particularly those working with the Roma population to prevent early marriage and for reproductive education. Mobile screening units help with early detection of HIV, cancer. cervical and breast cancer. Agricultural advisory bodies and public services exist in all rural areas.

**Spain:** Taking comprehensive measures in gender equality, GBV reduction and sustainable development of rural women. Hotline, primary care centers and partnership with pharmaceutical companies for medications round out medical treatment services. A webpage on GBV and a geo-locator to identify closest services and the UN Women’s safe cities programs are also in the mix.

**Jordan:** Lessons learnt include understanding that commitment has to be at the highest level of government. Influx of refugees have overwhelmed services. Services and work is done within the family protection framework in which twenty partners provide services. Social taboos and cultural contexts are important considerations with such a diverse population. National insurance helps and access to justice is supported by strengthening NGOs and government institutions. Important for Jordan to move from purely Humanitarian to Developmental

**Malta:** A small country with little difference between urban and rural. Investments are made in women’s freedom to enter labor market to move women to financial independence. Free childcare provided. Launched national strategy to fight GBV from police to social services and healthcare by mainstreaming international conventions into country law. Laws based on Istanbul Convention. Commission on Human Rights and Equality based on Paris Principles under the aegis of house speaker making human rights the responsibility of the government.
Topic: Good practices in the empowerment of rural women and girls through prevention of GBV and access to justice, social services and healthcare

Peru: 1 in 3 women experience violence. Civic authorities encouraged to implement prevention and care strategies in their own communities. Civic authorities are provided with road-map of their functions and obligations. Schools, community officers, grassroots organizations form a united front for rural women and girls. A roundtable for indigenous women produces input from women themselves.

Canada: There are laws against discrimination against women. Difficulties in implementation vary by region. Support for Work and Family Life and strategy of equality between women and men is being mobilized that will bring economic empowerment to rural women. Trying to get 100,000 people out of poverty.

France: 20% of French population lives in rural areas and 40% of the country’s violence takes place in rural areas. Women’s financial autonomy is important to escape violence. Therefore, support provided for women farmers including maternity leave, shelters and an array of services by law enforcement, local officials, service providers. Cyber violence and street harassment which also affect rural women and girls is condemned

Zimbabwe: Information on GBV and harmful practices is disseminated to community leaders, young people, schools, colleges, workplaces. The Domestic Violence Act criminalizes violence as well as the potential for violence. Women-friendly courts and police units prevent and prosecute. Registered nurses have become mandated reporters and can testify in court. Training manuals are provided to all frontline staff of all social services including education and healthcare.

Honduras: Legislation, policies and programs form the basis of the national plan against GBV which incorporate treatment and promotion of rights – healthcare and economic participation. Protocols in place for shelters. Special Committee against GBV in schools to prevent sexual harassment as well as community networks. Social rehabilitation of victims, strong families’ programs, workshops on empowerment and addiction for young people and parks and recreation for a better lives.

Seychelles: Small island and has no distinction between urban and rural and no harmful practices. Conducted baseline study of GBV and its national plan is in development. Plan has 2 prongs – prevention and education. Prevention includes sensitization and empowerment and education includes victim outreach coordination of partners and government and awareness of legislation and policies, hotlines and counseling services.

Sierra Leone: There is a lack of infrastructure for social services in rural areas. Country focuses on protection laws and inclusive governance – ward committee includes 50% of women. National id
card for protection and gender desk officers at all ministries. Ministries have gender-responsive budgets. Sitting magistrates to accelerate cases, Saturday court, free legal services, family units at all police stations, free healthcare for pregnant women and new mothers and children under 5 and creating awareness of hospitals as the sites for treatment and one stop centers for care.

**Somalia:** Conflict and fragile economy/country leading to increase in violence and 1st national development plan in 30 tears and dedicated legislation to address sexual violence and emphasis on gender equality in development – all stakeholders. Increasing availability of data on rural areas which is required by development partners. Large investments needed in the prevention of conflict and climate change and in acknowledgement of victims’ environments

**Algeria:** Promotion of women in cultural and economic environments. Legislation specifically family law is ratified. GBV is now a crime – anywhere – in the home, in public spaces, at work. Fund to study status of divorced women and alimony payments. Legislation supports children of divorce. Development of database in progress to promote gender parity

**Japan:** Empowers women farmers through coordinated activities between companies and farmers. Farmers social networks, online agribusiness school, technical assistance, new market development, improvement in productivity, horticulture and livestock with ICTs. Involvement of local governments and national campaign on GBV. One stop center for victims of GBV – 41 centers established. Spousal violence counselling available at 278 locations
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**Czech Republic:** relies on strong legal framework and appropriate sanctions. Has outlined rights and obligations of patients and providers to facilitate access to health services. Social services to individuals are provided by state and municipalities. Study on availability of shelters for GBV victims, showed sufficient shelters remain a challenge. Plan for prevention of GBV includes involvement of NGOs and academia and outlines specific measures – including legal assistance.

**Yemen:** Economic social conditions are difficult in rural areas. Wars and conflict have challenged rural areas – lack of drinking water, security and the spread of diseases, food insecurity. Country is appealing to international community to create programs for rural areas

**Sweden:** Governance emphasis on competence and outreach. Feminist government is responsible for all women and girls. The entire country has ownership of and obligations to fulfill national strategy. Strategy is prevention – including men and girls – training, education and competence among professionals, relevant education on GBV targeting all professional areas will be basis for competence to treat victims – outreach to boys and girls – website – Refugees need information in their own languages. In process of changing curricula on sexual health and reproductive rights and mainstreaming these topics into current education for boys and men

**Thailand:** Women’s Development Fund provides access to healthcare. Development of Action Plan on GBV with all relevant sectors – national legislation being considered.

**Trinidad and Tobago:** National action plan before cabinet. A central registry of domestic violence, national hotline and shelters, gender sensitizing workshops are provided. Women’s Institute for Alternative Development partners with law enforcement to fight crime. Need more shelters.

**Kazakhstan** – SDGs are embedded in family and gender policy with emphasis on rural populations. Focus on employment and entrepreneurship, soft loans to rural areas, empowerment strategies for rural women’s participation in decision-making and management. 20% of rural households headed by women so focus on women’s economic development, access to higher education through grants, micro-credit, lower tax burdens, access to social services, access to Internet in rural areas, healthcare with telecommunications health centers and aviation medical services, pro-bono legal services. Special standards identified in social services to support Trafficking victims.

**Malaysia:** Legal frameworks are amended for laws against domestic violence, for emergency protection orders, against sexual offenses against children. In place, advocacy to create awareness throughout government and civil society. Information sharing with other ASEAN countries. Provision
of free legal aid for victims, counselling services, one stop centers for services and care for GBV victims, quality health care through national system complemented by private healthcare.