



Sabine Pallas

CSW 56: 27 February – 9 March 2012

The empowerment of rural women and their role in poverty and hunger eradication, development and current challenges

What is the Commission on the Status of Women and why does it matter?¹

The Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) is an intergovernmental body and functional commission of the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) mandated to promote gender equality and the advancement of women. Member states convene annually for two weeks in late February/early March at the United Nations Headquarters in New York, around a priority theme, to assess progress made and formulate policies. The fifty-sixth session of the CSW, which takes place at the UN Headquarters in New York from

Equality between women and men is a matter of human rights and a condition for social justice and is also a necessary and fundamental prerequisite for equality, development and peace. (Beijing Platform for Action, 1995)

27 February to 9 March 2012, will focus on the theme “The empowerment of rural women and their role in poverty and hunger eradication, development and current challenges”.

Member states evaluate progress made on the implementation of the agreed conclusions on a priority theme from a previous session. The “review theme” in 2012, will be “Financing for gender equality and the empowerment of women (agreed conclusions from the 52nd session).”

Established in 1946 by ECOSOC, the CSW has been responsible for organising the world conferences on women, including Beijing in 1995. The CSW drafted the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), the CEDAW Optional Protocol, and reviews progress in the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action, which includes also provisions on women’s land rights, along with women’s human rights, economic empowerment, and participation in decision-making processes.

Women’s poverty is directly related to the absence of economic opportunities and autonomy, lack of access to economic resources, including credit, land ownership and inheritance, lack of access to education and support services and their minimal participation in the decision-making process. (Beijing Platform for Action, 1995)

Finally, the commission promotes gender mainstreaming of UN activities.

¹ This infonote draws from information contained on the official CSW website (<http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/csw/index.html>) and the NGO Committee on the Status of Women website (<http://www.ngocsw.org/>).

CSW working methods

The CSW is composed of:

- **Members:** forty-five member states are elected by ECOSOC for a period of four years: thirteen from Africa; eleven from Asia; nine from Latin America and Caribbean; eight from Western Europe and other states, and four from Eastern Europe. You can find the current list of members of the commission [here](#).
- **Bureau:** The bureau facilitates the preparation of the annual sessions of the commission and it is composed of five CSW members. Bureau members serve for two years. You can find the current list of members of the bureau [here](#).
- **Secretariat:** CSW is supported by UN-Women, which also facilitates the participation of civil society and the coordination of side-events.

In accordance with its multi-year programme of work, the CSW discusses a different priority theme in each session. A round-table is convened to share best practices and lessons learned, whilst two panels address policy initiatives to advance implementation and capacity building on gender mainstreaming related to the priority theme. The main CSW outputs are the 'agreed conclusions' on the priority theme, which are negotiated between member states. These conclusions are global and assess achievements and challenges encountered by member states, but also include recommendations for action by governments, intergovernmental bodies, civil society actors, and other relevant stakeholders.



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Why is CSW 56 important?

The 56th session is a critical opportunity for member states to advance women's status in rural areas, as well as accelerate the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action. The world needs strong policy interventions and concrete commitments to promote rural women's empowerment.

The time is right to push for more action to secure women's land rights. In the last years, a number of key steps have created the conditions to work better in this regard. Two important reports provided hard evidence on rural women's situation and potential.

In 2011, FAO devoted its flagship report, the State of Food and Agriculture, to women in agriculture, and advocated for closing the gender gap in development

Across diverse regions and contexts, women engaged in agriculture face gender-specific constraints that limit their access to productive inputs, assets and services. (FAO, SOFA 2011:36)

as a key strategy to eradicate hunger, promote sustainable development and spur growth. A few months later, the World Bank published its World Development Report on gender equality and development, which confirmed and complemented evidence gathered by FAO.

More recently, the CEDAW Committee has increasingly commented on the implementation of Art.14 of the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), which is devoted to rural women, shedding further light on rural women's rights as human rights. Leaders,

women's organisations and movements, as well as the civil society at large have brought a renewed attention to rural women's issues. Many among the organisations who participated in the 1995 Beijing Conference have worked to promote women's rights in the governance of natural resources and women's role in ensuring food security, making women's empowerment

the key issue in development. Finally, over the last decade many countries throughout the world have made significant progress in advancing de jure equality between women and men, amending national constitutions and laws. These efforts are coupled by the work done by UN entities, donors and CSOs, which have progressively recognised women's rights and gender issues through their strategies and projects.

We women pastoralists want our children, and our children's children, to have the tools and opportunities they need to adapt to realities and changing conditions of the modern world while retaining their traditional cultural legacies and lifestyles. This is our right and it is by remaining pastoralists that we can be of greatest service to the entire human community. (Mera Declaration of Women Pastoralists, 2010)

Nevertheless, gender inequalities remain deeply entrenched in rural societies, where women are extensively discriminated against in their access to assets, including land, and decision-making. CSW 56 comes at a critical time when it is possible and necessary to move from provisions to implementation. As an intergovernmental body, it offers states the opportunity to focus on de facto equality, identify good practices with an impact on the ground, hear what civil society can bring on the table, and draw on concrete policy options, mechanisms and recommendations.

For a successful outcome of the 56th CSW, the voices of civil society and rural women's organisations, in particular those who are traditionally excluded, need to be heard. These are usually women who experience the most insecure tenure and housing rights, such as grassroots, indigenous, pastoralist and fisher women. Hence, the CSW 'agreed conclusions' should address and capture challenges and needs of the huge variety of rural women, to unveil differences and unique potential of each group.

In particular, the 56th CSW should identify best practices in empowering women and making them able to participate in the governance of land and other natural resources on an equal footing. It is also important for the 'agreed conclusions' to provide firm policy guidance on closing the gender gap in access to and control over land and clear commitments in implementing policies.

NGO/CSO participation

Although not part of the governance structure, NGOs and CSOs are crucial to the CSW's work. They can participate in sessions, attend panels, and organise events through the NGO Committee on the Status of Women, New York Chapter. The NGO Committee represents around 80 organisations based in New York and organises the NGO consultation day, promotes participation of activists and groups from around the world, and facilitates joint submissions to influence the CSW agreed conclusions. Detailed information can be found on <http://www.ngocsw.org>

Get involved in CSW 56

Representatives of NGOs/CSOs accredited to and in good standing with ECOSOC may attend CSW sessions, even if informal consultations on decisions, resolutions and agreed conclusions are restricted to government delegates. Sometimes, the chairperson allows NGO/CSO representatives to observe. NGO/CSOs with or without consultative status with the ECOSOC may contact the NGO Committee on the Status of Women (www.ngocsw.org) to organise and attend parallel events outside UN premises.

For more information, visit the CSW official website: <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/csw/NGO.html>

Pre-registration and registration

In order to participate in the CSW events, pre-registration and registration are mandatory.

BY 17 JANUARY 2012

Online pre-registration can be done at: <http://esango.un.org/irene/?page=viewContent&nr=17482&type=8§ion=8>.

Q&A can be found on the 56th CSW official website. Any additional question should be sent to csw@unwomen.org, with subject line 'CSW pre-registration'.

BY 31 JANUARY 2012

All participants need to fill in and print out an application form to obtain a grounds pass, which will be available at the organisation's account on CSO net. Participants will be required to show this form at the on site registration in order to obtain a grounds pass.

UPON ARRIVAL AT THE UNITED NATIONS

Each pre-registered NGO/CSO representative must register on site in order to obtain a grounds pass.



Written statements

BY NOVEMBER 2011

NGOs/CSOs in consultative status with ECOSOC might submit written statements to the CSW on the thematic issue considered. These statements are submitted months prior to any session; can be in one of the six official UN languages; should not exceed more than 2000 words, and follow precise editing guidelines. Please visit the 56th CSW website to access samples.

Oral statements

BY 17 FEBRUARY 2012

NGOs/CSOs can request to make an oral statement during the general discussion. Oral statements should not exceed three minutes. A limited number of NGOs/CSOs with ECOSOC status will also be able to make an oral intervention during the interactive panels. Interventions must be focused on the theme of the panel. An online sign-up will be provided on the official 56th CSW website by December 2011.

Calendar of side events

A calendar of side events organised by Permanent Missions and United Nations entities is posted on the UN Women website prior to the CSW session, and updated regularly. A calendar of parallel events organised by NGOs is posted on the NGO Committee on the Status of Women website (<http://www.ngocsw.org/ngo-csw-forum/ngo-parallel-events>).

NGO parallel events

All questions on NGO sponsored events should be directed to the NGO Committee on the Status of Women (<http://www.ngocsw.org/ngo-csw-forum/ngo-parallel-events>).

For more information

- 56th Committee on the Status of Women (CSW)
- Committee on the Status of Women (CSW) home page
- UN-Women CSW page
- The NGO Committee on the Status of Women, NY
- Live webcasts of CSW sessions
- Expert group meeting, *Enabling rural women's economic empowerment: institutions, opportunities and participation*. Accra, Ghana, 20-23 September 2011
- Land Portal Gender page
- ILC webpage on Rural Women, Land and CEDAW

References

- Food and Agriculture Organisation. 2011. *The State of Food and Agriculture 2010-2011. Women in Agriculture. Closing the gender gap for development*. FAO: Rome, Italy
- Global Gathering of Women Pastoralists. 2010. *Mera Declaration*. MARAG: Mera. India
- The Fourth World Conference on Women. 1995. *Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action*.
- World Bank. 2011. *2012 World Development Report on Gender Equality and Development*. World Bank: Washington. United States



INTERNATIONAL
LAND
COALITION

The International Land Coalition (ILC) is a global alliance of civil society and intergovernmental organisations working together to promote secure and equitable access to and control over land for poor women and men through advocacy, dialogue, and capacity building.

International Land Coalition

Secretariat

Via Paolo di Dono, 44
00142 – Rome, Italy
tel: +39 06 5459 2445
fax: +39 06 5459 3628
info@landcoalition.org
www.landcoalition.org

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This infonote is part of a wider initiative on *Women's Land Rights (WLR)*. If you would like further information on the initiative and on the collaborating partners, please feel free to contact the International Land Coalition.

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The *Land Portal* – gender page will follow the 56th CSW. Visit us at www.landportal.info/topic/gender and join the gender group.

You can discuss, share and connect with a community of gender and land concerned activists, researchers, practitioners and organisations.

You can also find us on [Twitter](#) and [Facebook](#).