

**UNITED NATIONS DECLARATION
ON THE RIGHTS OF PEASANTS
AND OTHER PEOPLE WORKING IN RURAL AREAS**

**Non-discrimination
against rural women
(art. 4)**

Training sheet No. 6



*"There is not one developed world and one underdeveloped world
just one maldeveloped world"*

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NON-DISCRIMINATION AGAINST RURAL WOMEN

Article 4 of the Declaration deals with the right of women to non-discrimination or, in other words, their right to equality with men. This article comes straight after the article prohibiting discrimination in general (art. 3). It was felt necessary to have one article devoted specifically to discrimination on grounds of gender.

Throughout the world, women are still the social group that suffers most discrimination. They have less access to political representation, economically powerful positions or education, and in particular are the main victims of poverty.

Rural areas are no exception: women account for 60% of people suffering from hunger and malnutrition, yet they make up the majority of producers. Moreover, when families need to ration food for lack of resources, women often come second to men and children.

Another indicator of the existence of discrimination against women in the countryside is that, according to a study by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO),^[1] depending on continent, they account on average for only 3-18% of landowners, not counting land seized by transnational corporations, State-owned land and land collectively managed by rural communities. Moreover, again according to the FAO, the plots that rural women do control are generally smaller than those owned by men. This disproportion can be explained only by structural discrimination against women.



¹ See *The State of Food and Agriculture (2010-11), Women in Agriculture: Closing the Gender Gap for Development*, FAO, Rome, 2011, p. 25 fig. 8, www.fao.org/3/i2050e/i2050e.pdf

ENJOYING HUMAN RIGHTS ON AN EQUAL FOOTING WITH MEN

In principle, women have the same human rights as men, it's basically as simple as that. They are even supposed to have extra rights, since once they become mothers they have the right to special protection. Ironically, however, in practice they actually enjoy fewer rights than men. So the purpose of the principle of non-discrimination is to ensure that women are not prevented from exercising their freedoms and can assert their rights.

Applying the principle of non-discrimination, we can scrutinize a country's legislation to check that it does not prevent women from asserting their rights vis-à-vis men. But, most importantly, it opens up the possibility of speaking out about discriminatory practices that are not codified in any law and that need to be done away with by the State.

Women's right to non-discrimination is already established in all international human rights instruments, and there is even a special international convention on the subject.^[2] But these rules are clearly not enough. The reaffirmation of this right in the Declaration further strengthens that framework, in a way that is particularly effective as it applies to women peasants and rural workers specifically and raises issues that affect them specifically.

However, once again, this right will not be realized unless those concerned, i.e., women, take firm ownership of the Declaration and forge alliances in their struggle across all sectors of society, including with male peasants and rural workers.



² Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, in force since 1981. To date, the Convention has been ratified by 189 States.

Elimination of all forms of discrimination against peasant women

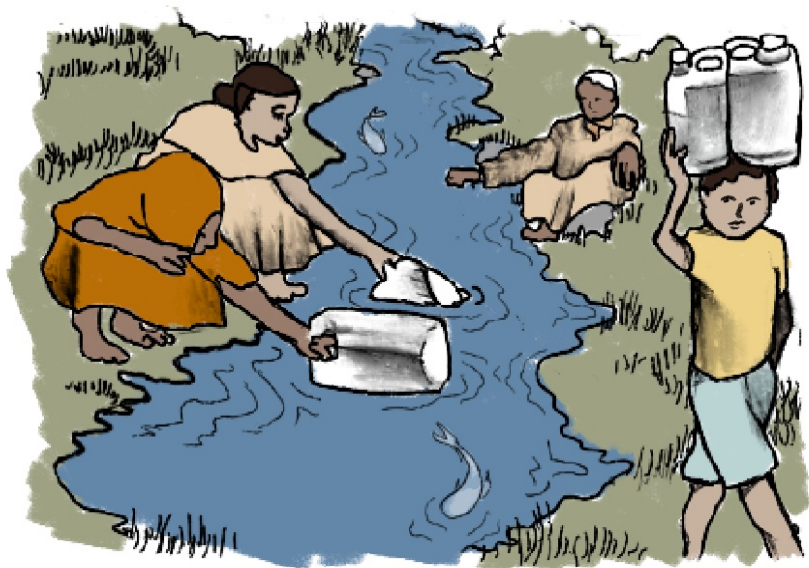
Non-discrimination is the cornerstone of States' obligations in terms of human rights. As a first step, States must take all appropriate measures to eliminate all formal and de facto discrimination against rural women.

In all their laws, policies and programmes, States must take into account the particular problems faced by rural women, as well as their particular contribution to food security and nutrition. They also need to tackle legislation that, while not ostensibly designed to discriminate against women, nonetheless in practice has effects that are discriminatory, such as laws on parenting that discriminate against women in the labour market.

Note that discrimination is not only a legal problem; it can also be an outcome of government policies. That is why all forms of discrimination must be eliminated.

In addition, even though discrimination is sometimes a matter for the State, it is just as much a matter for society as a whole. States have an obligation to put a stop to discrimination, which they may do by means of new laws or policies or by implementing special programmes to safeguard women's rights. But it can also be done through equality education and by adopting forms of public discourse that repudiate discrimination against women and promote gender equality.

Lastly, States must take all necessary and appropriate steps to implement the provisions of the Declaration for the benefit of all women and girls.



EMPOWERMENT OF PEASANT WOMEN (ART. 4.1)

Article 4 centres around States' obligations. It also contains specific rights for women in rural areas and provides for promotion of women's empowerment. Under this article, States must take "all appropriate measures" to combat discrimination against women in order to ensure, "on the basis of equality between men and women, that they fully and equally enjoy all human rights and fundamental freedoms".



Empowerment means the right to make decisions and act freely without being dependent on a man. Women should no longer need a man in order to make and carry out decisions. All laws and practices that prevent women from taking initiatives must be abolished and replaced by incentives and assistance to enable them to assert their rights and act autonomously.

It is thus quite right that the Declaration should cover the concept of empowerment; indeed, it needs to be highlighted so that women are finally free to act.

Participating in and working for development

Article 4, paragraph 1, also refers to equality between men and women in the matter of participation in development. Women must be able to "freely pursue, participate in and benefit from rural economic, social, political and cultural development." As we can see, it covers all areas of society, and women can thus take part in, and even initiate, social change aiming at respect for human rights and greater equality.

This right of participation cannot be reduced to token inclusion of women in a development project. The idea is that there should no longer be any obstacles – or, better still, that there should be support – for a woman or women who act to bring about social change.

It is important, if this section of the Declaration is not to amount to empty words, not to simply set up development programmes that include a "Women" component. Rather, States must give women the opportunity to work out their own development plan, and the means to implement it. The principle is never to make decisions on women's behalf, and to get away from stereotyping in designing projects.

To guarantee women-led development, we need to understand and combat the unequal relationships between the sexes that exist in our societies.



ORGANIZATION, AND ACCESS TO CREDIT AND MARKETING FACILITIES (ART. 4.2.e, f, g)



Article 4 states that peasant women have the right to “organize self-help groups, associations and cooperatives in order to obtain equal access to economic opportunities through employment or self-employment” (4.2.e). They also have the right to participate in all community activities (art. 4.2.f).

This article also recalls women’s right to organize in order to obtain the same economic

opportunities as men. In the same vein, it refers to the right to “financial services, agricultural credit and loans, marketing facilities and appropriate technology” (art. 4.2.g), for it is often through a combination of women’s self-organization and access to financial resources that poverty among women in rural areas is reduced.

DECENT WORK AND EQUAL PAY (ART. 4.2.i)

Women’s invisibility on farms usually deprives them of the right to be paid for the work they do. This invisibility is not a fact of life, but a social construct that must be resisted in order to ensure respect for women’s human rights.

Women who want or need a job in agriculture or in rural areas are still all too often discriminated against because of their gender. Article 4 therefore recalls that rural women have the right to “decent employment, equal remuneration and social protection benefits, and to have access to income-generating activities”.



RIGHT TO SOCIAL SECURITY (ART. 4.2.c)

The first thing to note is the precise wording of this right: women have the right to benefit “directly” from social security. In rural areas, women are usually part of a family farm owned and run by a male family member.



Very few women own the facilities where they work. Their access to social security is either limited or blocked by the fact that they are most often invisible on family farms; their work does not count and is not valued. They should be able to benefit from social security without having to depend on a male family member.

VIOLENCE AGAINST RURAL WOMEN (ART. 4.2.j)



Violence against women exists in all countries and at all levels of society, and rural areas are no exception. Not only that, but in many cases it is compounded, since women often suffer reprisals for reporting violence, or simply because the violence comes to light.

Protecting women victims of violence is an obligation on States. They must take steps to ensure that women are not subjected to violence and, if they are, that the violence ceases. Most prevention and protection initiatives are set up

in cities. It is absolutely essential to develop them in rural areas too (shelters, financial help, special law enforcement units, etc.). When they have a problem, women must be able to get on with their lives in rural areas and not have to flee their communities, which exposes them to even more violence.

However, the right to “be free from all forms of violence” is fully realized only when there is no violence. States must conduct education and prevention campaigns on violence against women, aimed at all men and all women, of all ages and in all settings.

In short, this article requires the protection of women from violence of all kinds: physical, sexual, verbal and economic. In our societies, structurally unequal as they are, such violence is to be found everywhere and must be resisted, whether in its most obvious forms (such as physical assault) or in its more insidious manifestations (such as offhand misogynistic comments in the media).



SUMMARY

Key points on article 4

This article recognizes a number of important rights specifically to rural women, such as:

- empowerment;
- access to land and natural resources;
- access to credit and marketing facilities;
- participation in development planning and implementation at all levels;
- decent work and equal pay;
- access to adequate health care and family planning services;
- social security;
- education and training;
- participation in all community activities;
- freedom from all forms of violence.



For more information, go to
www.cetim.ch/factsheets-on-peasants-rights

See also the text of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and Other People Working in Rural Areas on the UN website,
<https://undocs.org/en/A/RES/73/165>



United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and Other People Working in Rural Areas: 12 training sheets

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