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Parliaments deliver for rural women and girls

A parliamentary event organized by the Inter-Parliamentary Union and UN Women on the occasion of the 62nd Session of the Commission on the Status of Women

13 March 2018, ECOSOC Chamber, UN Headquarters, New York

The event was opened by Ms. Margaret Mensah-Williams, President of the IPU's Bureau of Women Parliamentarians and Chairperson of the National Council of Namibia, who noted that its outcomes would serve as the IPU's input to the 62nd session of the Commission on the Status of Women. She added that the IPU's yearly joint event with UN Women was a manifestation of its deep commitment to realizing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Member States had recognized that targets should be met for all nations and for all segments of society, and they were endeavouring to reach first those who were furthest behind. Nowhere was that challenge more salient than in rural areas. About 78% of the world's population in extreme poverty lived in rural settings. On nearly every global gender and development indicator for which data were available, rural women fared worse than rural men and urban men and women. These challenges amounted to intersecting forms of discrimination, injustice and violence to which women were specifically vulnerable owing to remaining prejudicial cultural practices.

It was one of the great outcomes of the SDGs to recognize and promote the links between rural women's rights and achieving sustained and inclusive social development. Across the world, rural women and girls faced systematic barriers to realizing their rights. Laws, national and local policies, budgets and development strategies ignored or insufficiently addressed their rights and needs, leading to their lack of voice in leadership and decision-making. Rural women's political empowerment was a precondition to achieving sustainable development of rural communities, which was central to the world's economic, social and environmental viability.

Ms. Purna Sen, Executive Coordinator and Spokesperson on Sexual Harassment, UN Women, described the parliamentary event as an important day and an important tradition. It was the responsibility of the parliamentarians present to ensure that any agreements reached within the walls of the United Nations building had relevance to women in the countries around the world.

Ms. Gabriela Cuevas Barron, President of the IPU, said that the relationship between the IPU and UN Women was a very important partnership, with a shared objective of advancing women's empowerment and gender equality. Her role as President of the IPU represented a great responsibility in terms of addressing the challenges facing the world. And one of those important challenges had to do with rural woman and girls, who in almost all cases had fewer opportunities than males. As girls, they did not have proper access to education, to health, or to basic services. As women, they also suffered huge discrimination. In many cases they had no income, access to credit, property rights, and more. This should not be accepted in 2018.

Session 1: Amplifying the voices of rural women and girls

Professor Anne Marie Goetz, Professor of Global Affairs, New York University, acted as the moderator for all the day's sessions. The first session examined the various barriers to rural women's participation in politics and decision-making. The invited panel for the session comprised Ms. Maryam Monsef, Minister of the Status of Women of Canada and Mr. Joel Lightbound, Member of the Parliament of Canada; Ms. Margaret Mensah-Williams, Chairperson of the National Council of Namibia and President of the IPU's Bureau of Women Parliamentarians; Ms. Delia Canaviri, Member of the Bolivian Chamber of Deputies; Ms. Marième Baba Sy, Member of the National Assembly of Mauritania; Ms. Annick Billon, French Senator and Chairperson of the Senate delegation on Women's Rights and Equality between Men and Women; and Ms. Zoe Carletide, U-Report Manager, World Association of Girl Guides and Girl Scouts.

Present-day women stand on the shoulders of those who have gone before them.

*Maryam Monsef,
Minister of the Status of Women of Canada*

The panelists discussed measures taken in their various countries to assist in the advancement of rural women. It was the feminist movement that had sustained that effort for decades. Despite inevitable differences, feminists shared a common cause, and a common understanding that investing in women raised the economy for all. In Canada, for example, all ministers had been asked to ensure that an intersectional gendered lens be applied to all proposals they brought to Cabinet, taking account of the potential impact of decisions on all the varied sectors of the population. The result had been, two weeks earlier, the first gendered budget in the 151 years of Canada's federation, together with accountability mechanisms including a Gender Results Framework.

The panel said, too, that the IPU, through its Gender Partnership Group, by encouraging member parliaments to include both men and women in their delegations, had modelled the practice that all should emulate. Canada had put that principle into practice in its federal government, having as many women as men in the Cabinet, with the diversity of perspectives around the table making for better government.

The economy of numerous developed countries largely owed their recent growth to women. But there were still plenty of obstacles to be overcome. The gender wage gap was a problem everywhere, with women earning only a portion of equivalent men's incomes. In the developed countries, the percentage of women's participation in the labour market was still significantly less than that of men. Countries could do better, must do better, for example by increasing parental leave so as to bring about a greater equality in the roles of the sexes within families, by providing greater assistance to women-headed companies, and by working to reach the goal of equal pay for equal work.

The 2018 budget also proposed to support Canada's new feminist international assistance policy and advance its international leadership in key areas, by providing an additional \$2 billion in resources over five years. Those new resources would be dedicated in particular to assistance to women and girls. The international assistance policy also specifically committed that by 2022 95% of bilateral international development assistance would target gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls, with no less than 50% directed to sub-Saharan countries.

It was hoped that the Canadian Government's approach of Gender-Based Analysis Plus would be adopted not only everywhere in the country but also by governments all around the world.

In 2013, the Namibian delegation had brought two rural women to the United Nations. That was part of its support to the country's rural women's parliament and a part of capacity-building, a part of increasing gender equality, inspired by a quotation from Michelle Bachelet:

"By expanding rural women's rights in participation, opportunity and choices, we can bring about healthier economies and societies."

*Michelle Bachelet,
former Executive Director, UN Women*

Those rural women had come to Namibia's Parliament to discuss issues and raise the changes they would like to see in the country's governance. For example, the Government had complied with their request for more child care clinics, because women were having to travel long distances for care, journeys so arduous that they sometimes lost their babies or their own lives. Parliament was also training members of the rural women's parliament to stand in national elections, teaching them first to speak about their own experience, and then to go on to more universal subjects such as human trafficking.

Ms. Marième Baba Sy presented a short film on parliamentary outreach work in Mauritania, showing a parliamentary women's network convoy travelling to various villages and towns, carrying female parliamentarians to raise awareness among rural women of their rights and of the steps Mauritania was taking both at home and internationally to safeguard them. The visits gave the parliamentarians an opportunity to understand the daily living conditions of their constituents and the constituents a chance to discuss their problems, with a view to having them raised with the appropriate authorities. The problems included concerns on education, women's political participation, and access to and control of land, which women in Mauritania cannot inherit. Other issues included violence against women, notably early marriage, female genital mutilation, divorce, and the lack of school opportunities for girls.

The parliamentarians sought to educate women at local level on their rights, and at national level to examine what could be done to increase their participation. They also called on ministers to bring about rapid action, for example in introducing mechanization to agriculture, as a replacement for traditional manual methods. The Parliament had been trying for a year to push the Government to submit a draft law on violence against women, but the law had not passed the National Assembly, owing to a lack of agreement on core issues. The women parliamentarians' network did get a law passed on reproductive health, Mauritania having one of the highest maternal mortality rates in west Africa.

Senator Annick Billon gave a report on the situation of women in agriculture. It was based on more than 100 statements from female agricultural workers who had both attended Senate meetings and been met by politicians out in the field. The report dated from 2017, but the problems faced by female agricultural workers seemed to be unchanged from those in a 2015 report, written at the time of the Paris climate conference. Women played an important role in agriculture but owned a very low percentage of the land. Women had very limited access to credit and often had difficulty in obtaining recognition of the value of their work. They were insufficiently represented in professional bodies such as cooperatives, with consequences on the governance of the profession and on the recognition of their skills. The burden of stereotypes impeded the training of young female agricultural workers. Also, working in a sector directly affected by the economic crisis, women were more likely to get into precarious economic situations, and their incomes were often too low to permit them to retire under acceptable conditions. All of these difficulties were compounded for female agricultural workers in isolated regions, owing to obstacles in access to health or child care, and a lack of help for female victims of violence.

On the basis of those findings, some 40 recommendations had been drawn up to improve the situation of rural women. The first was to take better account of the feminization of agriculture, by facilitating women's access to ongoing training, with courses being organized in a manner consistent with the demands on their time and the provision of child care. Another objective was to better integrate the challenge of the health of women in agriculture: it was urgent to act against the negative outcomes on maternal and child health of handling fertilizers, pesticides, and similar products. There was a need to improve the supply of gynaecological services in rural areas, possibly by way of travelling clinics, and to improve care for women victims of violence, particularly in isolated regions without support networks.

The recommendations were also aimed at making agriculture attractive to girls and gaining recognition for the contribution of women to agriculture. It was also wished to encourage the development of networks of female agricultural workers, and to advance their access to association responsibilities, improving their visibility and enhancing the governance of the profession. All of the women who had contributed to the report shared a passion for the profession and, despite difficult work and low remuneration, a determination to feed their families and the planet.

As the world's leading movement for girls, the World Association of Girl Guides and Girl Scouts (WAGS) comprised ten million girls and young women in 150 countries. It worked through schools, community

groups, both urban and rural, and also prisons and refugee camps. Through its non-formal education programmes, it supported girls in developing leadership skills, raising their voices, and advocating for change to improve their own lives. Through its global programmes such as Stop the Violence and U-Report, WAGS worked with young people to realize their rights and participate in every aspect of their lives. Through its work on the ground in rural communities, it had consulted girls and young women in order to understand their challenges, who had responded that more value was placed in families and the wider community on boys than on girls, who were regarded as bringing a lower return on investment. Girls' needs and aspirations came last, if ever.

How could girls and young women realistically be expected to exercise leadership when they had to fight for those basic needs every day? WAGS had recommendations to parliamentarians on reaching out to rural girls and young women, responding to their needs and serving them better. A large percentage wanted parliamentarians to help establish youth parliaments, to engage with girls and young women prepare them for their own careers as decision-makers and leaders. Additionally, young people wanted to see their needs represented in a more sustainable way through the introduction of quotas to ensure a critical mass of young people in parliament. Her organization believed it essential to engage rural girls and young women both as the beneficiaries of parliamentary processes and government actions, and as knowledge- and rights-bearers, innovative and active development agents.

Girls and young women are the experts on their own needs based on their lived experiences, and must be involved in decisions that affect their lives.

*Zoe Carletide,
World Association of Girl Guides and Girl Scouts*

Girls and young women, especially rural ones, with the unique structural barriers limiting their social mobility and access to participation, could not be expected to act independently and thrive in what was currently a disabling environment. It was the primary responsibility of governments and key decision-makers to uphold the rights of all girls and young women, regardless of where they were from. As civil society, working with rural girls and young women, her organization had done its best to tell parliamentarians what rural girls said they needed from them. Now they wanted the parliamentarians to show them how they were going to respond to their needs. The next generation of voters was listening.

Mr. Delia Canaviri described the progress made by all categories of women in Bolivia up to 2017. In the past, there had been no opportunities for Bolivian women to enter parliament, but now, with new laws, there was a representation of 51%. Female participation had also increased in universities and social groups and in professional work categories, thanks to the new constitution which stipulated that all categories of activity should have 50-50 participation of men and women. This had been particularly beneficial to rural women, who prior to the reform had found it impossible to advance in any sphere. Women had also become active as mayors and in other municipal posts.

Along with the new constitution, there was a framework law on decentralization and autonomy, another on education and another on racism and discrimination. There was also the Mother Earth law, the law on political violence, and the comprehensive law to ensure that women could live free from violence. An important component was the law on agrarian reform and on land title. In the past, no women had had title to land; now the figure was 16%.

It was obviously important that the present generation's children should study. That was one of the keys to progress: the others were food security and justice. Those factors had to be achieved, so that future generations could, in the Bolivian phrase, "live the good life."

In the ensuing discussion, a delegate expressed appreciation for the panel's recognition of rural women and girls as facilitators of sustainable development and agriculture. In Iran's villages, women were the guardians of native identities and artistic knowledge of the environment Their existence was crucial to the

development of agriculture, food security and nutrition and eradication of poverty and the management of natural resources. Procedures must be put in place to accelerate the access of rural women to local and national facilities, including shortening the path to setting up a business, educational progress and rural development. That would create self-esteem and lead to greater participation. Assistance to female-headed households was included in Iran's economic and social development plans.

Female parliamentary caucuses could improve the situation particularly in terms of allocating funds to rural women. Even when women were making progress in increasing their numbers in Parliament, vigilance was still necessary, as that progress could easily be reversed.

On the issue of workplace harassment, mentioned by Ms. Sen, some countries had had to struggle with it, even within parliament. Workplace harassment was a fact in politics, and men must support women in making workplaces inclusive, with zero tolerance for harassment, including when the workplace is the parliament. Parliamentarians should have an open and frank discussion about how they dealt with each other on a gendered basis within the workplace.

The view was expressed that rural girls did not necessarily just want to work in agriculture. Educational opportunities must be open to all, dreams must be realized. Opportunities must be found for rural women to work not just in producing food but also in food processing, and all the accompanying entrepreneurial processes. In South Africa, less than 15% of women owned land, and the country intended to increase this, and to open up credit access for women to be or do whatever they wanted. In line with the stipulations in the Constitution, the South African parliament held sittings amongst the people wherever they were to be found. That was the way to get them to understand how parliaments work, and to express their views on the issues in their lives and on the legislation on which parliament was working.

In Greece since the 1980s, women have been able to become members in agricultural cooperatives with their own property which remains theirs after marriage. However the number of women members in the boards of directors of such cooperatives was still low. There were also women-only cooperatives that operated under favourable legislation, mostly in the secondary economic sector. Also there were local women's cultural associations that organized festivals and other cultural events. These organizations and associations gave an opportunity for rural women to participate in decision-making processes. They had an effect on decision-making centres and influenced the election of representatives in parliament and local authorities. They also gave an opportunity for grassroots women to emerge as leaders.

For amplifying the voices of rural women and girls, nothing was more effective than having more women legislators in parliament. Kenya had the quota that not more than two thirds of any institution may be of one gender. The goal had not been reached yet, but it was being pursued with intensity.

Various members of the panel responded. Some African countries had made very good efforts in terms of financial inclusion, for example using cellphones to access the financial system, rather than using banks. In terms of political inclusion, the highest numbers were in Latin America and the Caribbean. The highest percentages of women in politics, particularly in parliaments, were in Latin America. Europe showed good expertise about financial equality and access to same salaries, but that area was not so advanced in developing countries. The situation of rural women depended on progress being made against all forms of violence. But laws alone would not be enough: a culture of example was also needed. Also, motivation was needed to encourage women's participation without recourse to quotas. That could be achieved through supportive networks of women.

While quotas might be less necessary in developed countries, they were important in some countries of Africa, where more support was given to the participation of men than of women. Even when women were present only in low numbers, that was an important starting point for the creation of networks.

In terms of how to engage young people on line, there was a need to work towards creating safe spaces and a culture of trust without harassment, muckraking or other discouraging features. Society needed to address these cultural norms which perpetuated harassment and discrimination. Parliamentarians needed to ensure that those voices were going to be heard, and go to meet young people in their online world, as well as creating a safe enabling environment in the physical world.

All governments should understand that violence against women, and inequality of all kinds had a cost for society and countries. All governments should commit to the fight against violence against women and for equality in justice, health, and better productivity of work.

A representative of the IPU gave a presentation on its Gender Partnership Programme.

The IPU monitors very closely the percentage of women in parliaments, and every year produces a report on it. In 2017, the progress of women's representation was extremely low, demonstrating a worrying stagnation. In 2017, the world average of women in parliament reached 23.4%, up from 17.7% in 2007. This corresponds to: a 5.7% increase since 2007 and a 0.1% increase since 2016. The minimal progress made this year can be explained, partly, by the fact that there were fewer elections in 2017 than in previous years. Over a longer time frame, women's share of all parliamentary seats has increased on average by nearly 0.6% per year. In 2017, women won 27.1% of the seats up for reelection as compared with 22.3% in 2016.

In encouraging news, the number of chambers with fewer than 10% women MPs has decreased to 31 lower or single houses today, compared to 34 in 2016 and 38 in 2015. A quarter of parliamentary chambers in the world have at least 30% women members. However, only 11 lower or single houses have more than 40% women MPs (as opposed to 12 in 2016 and 13 in 2015), and four parliamentary chambers have no women members at all (compared to 5 in 2016 and 8 in 2015). Three bicameral parliaments have 50% or more women MPs in one of their chambers: Rwanda, Bolivia and Belgium. This has remained unchanged for the past two years. As of January 2018, 17.3% of Speakers of Parliament are women. The proportion was 8.3% in 2005 and 19.1% in 2017.

Quotas remain the main method of ensuring women's participation. In 2017, electoral quotas were used in 21 countries. Women won more than 30% of seats in these countries, compared with only 15.4% in the 16 countries where such quotas were not applied. The countries with the highest percentage of women elected in 2017 are Senegal (41.8%) and Norway (41.4%). Women took 27.2% of seats filled through proportional representation compared with 26.7% through majority systems.

Regional influence also matters. Good practices developed by some countries have an effect on neighbouring countries. This is the case in Latin America where eight countries now have laws that target parity in elective functions. It is also the case in France and its overseas territories.

In terms of regional trends the Americas, with 28.4% female representation in parliaments, has the highest regional average, while Asia, with 18.6%, has the lowest.

Session 2: Addressing discrimination against rural women and girls

In the 20th century, more women and girls died from traditional practices, from discriminatory laws and practices that enable or do not punish honour killings, and from all kinds of abuses, than all the men who died in all the wars of the century.

*Professor Anne Marie Goetz,
Professor of Global Affairs, New York University,
Moderator*

This session examined ways to combat discrimination against rural women and girls. The invited panel for the session comprised Ms. Rana Bandana, Member of the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW); Ms. Rea Abada Chiongson, Gender Advisor, International Development Law Organization (IDLO); Ms. Violet Shivutse, Huairou Commission Board of Directors, Founder and Coordinator, Shibuye Community Health Workers, Kenya; Ms. Maria Lucero Saldaña, President of the Foreign Affairs Committee of NGOs of the Mexican Senate; Mr. Charles Chauvel, United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and Ms. Paddy Torsney, IPU Permanent Observer to the UN.

Ms. Bandana , describing how the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) could help rural women, referred to its Article 14 that addressed specific problems faced by rural women and the significant roles which they played in the economic survival of the family, including their work in the non-monetary sectors of the economy, and general recommendation 34 that called upon States Parties to take all appropriate measures to ensure the application of the Convention to women in rural areas. In particular it focused on women's rights to healthcare facilities and information, education and training and especially functional literacy, economic advantages especially within agrarian reform, modern marketing facilities and technology, and adequate and healthy living conditions.

The CEDAW Committee addressed key issues with the States Parties both in the general recommendations and in the concluding observations as specific recommendations for them. In many parts of the world, socioeconomic and political constraints limited girls' and women's access to education. These included restrictions in mobility, and a preference for schooling boys rather than girls. Worldwide, rural women and girls had lower levels of literacy and were disadvantaged when it came to access to education and training. Rural girls could be victims of child or forced marriage, and experienced sexual harassment and violence which may force them to drop out of school. Their educational opportunities were also curtailed by the demands of domestic chores, farm work, wood and water collection, long journeys to school and sanitary facilities which failed to meet the needs of menstruating girls.

Under the umbrella of CEDAW, parliamentarians could take steps to prevent and prohibit child and forced marriage, and to discourage and prohibit polygamy. States Parties should protect the rights of rural women and girls to education and ensure that high-quality education was accessible and affordable for all, and provided in local languages. All of such measures were urged in constructive dialogues. There was also a need to train teachers at all levels on the rights of rural girls and women and on the need to combat discriminatory, sex-based, and other stereotypes that limited their educational opportunities. Awareness-raising was needed, to change attitudes to girls' education in rural areas, and incentives should be provided to support rural girls and their parents. Programmes were needed both inside and outside the school system to reduce the engagement of rural girls in unpaid care work; women and girls should be encouraged to pursue nontraditional studies and careers, pregnant girls in rural schools must not be expelled following childbirth, and child care facilities and counseling should be provided in schools. The CEDAW Committee had raised concerns with several Parties during the constructive dialogue about the prevalence of family and customary laws, which in some cases even superseded customary laws.

Ms. Chiongson referred to the importance of the rule of law. Some welcome progress had been made with the adoption of SDG 16, that placed the rule of law firmly in the heart of the developing world, and its intersection with SDG 5 on gender equality, and other development goals.

Also, in 2015 UN Women had recorded that 125 sexual harassment and 52 marital rape laws were already in place, although the quality of this legislation and of its enforcement were sometimes questionable. Unfortunately, the progress made had to be seen against a backdrop of laws that were structural barriers to women's advancement. The World Bank's Women, Business and Law report indicated that 155 out of 173 economies still had legal provisions that treated women differently from men. For example, even now there were countries that had legal provisions automatically making men the head of household, requiring wives to obey their husbands, or prohibiting women from getting a passport without their husband's consent, while 100 countries still had legal restrictions on what types of jobs women could do.

Unfortunately there were also poorly-conceived laws, even including some whose aim was to address discrimination against women. For example, one of the ways in which land rights were implemented was through titling and registration programmes, governed by legislation requiring national identity cards or marriage or birth certificates. But these processes were often inaccessible to women, particularly rural and poor women, who had limited capacity to engage with central administrative bodies, fewer funds to pay registration fees and less access to support networks. Thus the law, although well-intentioned, operated to disenfranchise women.

A further challenge was the existence of legal gaps. When women's human rights were not given explicit recognition in national law, or in implementing laws or mandates, it became very difficult for women to

claim those rights. In some countries this was still the case for domestic violence or for sexual harassment. Another problem was that of piecemeal legislation. For example, while a new law on domestic violence may be enacted to protect women, other factors such as restrictions surrounding jobs and mobility were usually governed by another law, leaving women still disadvantaged. There may also be implementation gaps between the letter of the law and the reality. Although primary legislation may be present, there was an absence of secondary laws and processes to compel implementation of it.

One of the largest challenges was the existence of an implementation gap arising out of the interaction between formal and informal legal systems. In very many countries, a number of legal systems: statutory, religious, customary or regional law coexisted within the same jurisdiction, resulting in overlapping rights, contradictory laws and competing authorities. And in many rural areas, customary law was sometimes the only source of regulation and justice. The failure to address the gender impact of that situation resulted in unequal outcomes for women, going as far as disenfranchisement.

Ms. Shivutse spoke of the role women parliamentarians could play in the area of basic health services delivery. Shibuye Community Health Workers had been founded with rural women to respond to the risks and death that were happening in 1999 during pregnancy and childbirth. With the onset of HIV, rural women were affected with HIV/AIDS largely because of lack of knowledge and it became necessary for community HIV/AIDS workers to take on the role of caregivers, because there was no alternative. This was at a time when Kenya's health systems were in a state of near-collapse as people struggled to become accustomed to new forms of healthcare provision. Thus the caregivers really played a major role, and, based on those experiences, realized that it was important for them, as key players in healthcare provision, to become involved in the discussions of healthcare. Thus they came together as the Huairou Commission and discussed what role women should be playing, particularly in Africa, and how the synergies could be maximized. On the basis of that discussion, the Home-Based Care Alliance was founded in nine countries of Africa.

One thing that women parliamentarians could do was to build coalitions with rural women in the community for effective feedback, to give a true picture of the situation in their constituency. Women parliamentarians could also have the role of developing programmes that raised awareness on issues of health in the community. Recently, her organization had conducted a gender tracking survey, seeking to find out how women were accessing health facilities and what kind of service they were getting. However, it had been difficult to communicate the resultant report to the national government; if the women parliamentarians would join the effort, such information dissemination would be much easier, and would help the government's planning in the area of health service delivery.

Women parliamentarians could also play a part in ensuring that rural women were participating in activities like budget discussions. Rural women had traditionally been excluded from budget discussions, and consequently the budget did not serve their needs. Especially in health service delivery, the budget might provide services that rural women did not need, and omit what was really needed. Rural women must be allowed to give voice to their genuine needs, which might not be what central planners thought they were.

Senator Saldaña explained that the Federal congress of Mexico had promoted laws on agrarian reform to strengthen the rights of women over the entire productive chain, Mexico's Constitution referring to mainstreaming gender equality and setting aside resources specifically for women. The Constitution also talked of principles in various subjects: in the agrarian sector the Constitution specifically granted equal rights over land to men and women, and guaranteed women places in the various governing bodies of the sector. The National Institute for Women had set up an inter-institutional board for rural, indigenous and farming women, with the aim of fostering cooperation among those three categories, rather than assigning all women's issues to a single institution.

The first national development plan referred to mainstreaming the gender perspective. This idea was not in a specific chapter or an annex, but was spread over the chapters on the economy, health and education. Additionally, those instruments had also made it possible to stipulate that budgets had to be balanced as between men and women. The social rights of rural women were taken care of through a range of budgetary programmes. Mexico's revenue budget tripled the resources for programmes and

support grants intended for rural women. Of particular importance was a programme for funding and microfinancing programs for rural women and a thrust towards producer projects. The sector of small female producers would have 10% more resources in the current year. In the area of public policy, the government had announced that the ministry of agriculture would be able to provide programmes to support women's productive projects, at a rate of interest lower than that paid by men. Among the programmes to support small producers the resources set aside for gender equality had also increased in the current year. Resources to support access to health had also increased, because Mexico had a high maternal mortality rate. These various resources were initiated on the basis of the laws on equality and on a life free of violence, as well as of the development plan. The Congress was charged with reviewing every year how the various budgets affected women, not only in the case of funds earmarked for women, but also how any budget impacted women positively or negatively.

Mr, Chauvel and Ms. Torsney asked the parliamentarians present how many of them had an oversight function. They gave a presentation on the Global Parliamentary Report, which related to issues of oversight, and which could be downloaded. As former parliamentarians, every week a minister would address them to explain the changes they were making in their departments, for greater awareness among the speakers' networks of women, both parliamentarians and outsiders.

The Global Parliamentary Report had been created basically on the basis of feedback from IPU members and from the 70 countries where UNDP was partnering with parliaments to strengthen them. The first Report, published some five years earlier, had been on the changing nature of representation, and sought to collate good practice and lessons learned from around the world in an easily recognizable and digestible document. The second Report, which had been published at the IPU Assembly in St. Petersburg in October 2017, dealt with oversight, and had been written in response to feedback from members of parliament around the world, seeking to be able to do oversight better and to understand ways in which it was being done well in other parliaments. It was hoped that the Report, distilling and condensing these lessons learned and good practices, would be studied so that parliamentarians could gain an insight into the ways in which their various parliaments and committee systems operated in oversight functions, and perhaps learn from the examples reproduced in it.

The purposes of oversight were many: assessing the presence or absence of corruption, assessing the degree to which the government followed the law, and assessing the fairness of government distribution of costs and benefits. Other reasons were to assess the ratio of cost to benefits, whether a programme worked, whether it made sense for a parliament to be involved. The Report included a Self-assessment of parliamentary capacity, which parliamentarians could use to look at their own parliament and see if it was gender-sensitive. They could also use the Gender Mainstreaming Checklist to examine what had been done, what else could be done. Parliamentarians could ask questions in committees and in plenary debates. The benefit came from publicizing successes, where parliamentarians' questions had revealed instances where there could have been gender discrimination in the absence of those questions.

Gender-responsive budgeting required examining policies and considering how they would have a different impact for girls versus boys, women versus men. And agreeing to accept the outcome of the present policy or determining if it would need to be adjusted to achieve the desired goals.

In the following discussion it was emphasized that the situation of rural women was closely linked to their level of education, and to the quality of their local infrastructure, It was suggested that if the situation of agriculture in North Africa were to improve, that would halt the out-migration of young people, who would then have a reason to stay rather than undertaking the risky sea-crossing to reach Europe. But to those who did make the journey, Europe should open its doors rather than trying to keep them out.

The opposing view was also expressed, namely that in some countries agriculture is highly mechanized, and uses less and less human manpower. That emphasized the need for education, to offer young people alternative options. It was suggested that education should be compulsory up to the age of 18. There was also a need for empowerment of women, to increase their future prospects. In some countries that was achieved by means of parliamentary or government quotas. But there was still much to be done to ensure that women were equitably represented at all levels of government and administration.

In mountainous countries, even where there was a government commitment to ensure access to health for all, particularly women and children and adolescents, there was also a need to make modern roads to reach clinics, especially in rural areas, where currently rural women still walked unreasonable distances to access healthcare services.

One important aspect was to ensure that rural women and girls received enough food and nutrition. The question was raised of whether there was a group of parliamentarians working on the implementation of SDG 2, on eliminating hunger.

Panelists said that intensive work was already in hand to encourage partner parliaments to either set up an SDG oversight committee, or to mainstream the SDGs into existing subject committee work. The IPU had prepared toolkits to help in that work, and there were also toolkits to help parliaments understand whether any given piece of legislation would move any of the SDGs forward or backward. Both UNDP and IPU would be happy to work with partner parliaments in advancing those efforts.

It was stressed that the whole issue of partnership needed to be rethought, to determine how rural women could be meaningful partners, and not just targets of the programmes being applied to their communities. That would enhance monitoring and support collective action planning.

Given the linkages between rural women's rights and many different issues, a whole range of laws really required a gender lens approach: those on commerce, trade, insolvency, taxation and more. There was a real need to invest in resources to actually monitor and analyze changes, and here it was critical to examine the SDGs and see where exactly the numerical measurements stood, but also to focus on the qualitative indicators as well as stories and case studies of good practice.

Session 3: Mitigating the impact of climate change on rural women and girls

The invited panel for the session comprised Ms. Rana Bandana, Member of the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), Ms. Janet Macharia, Head, Gender and Safeguards Unit, UN Environment Programme (UNEP), Ms. Anne Kuriakose, Senior Gender Specialist, Climate Investment Funds / World Bank (CIF/WB), Ms. Mereseini Vuniwaqa, Minister for Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation and Member of the Parliament of the Republic of Fiji.

Ms. Bandana noted that the latest CEDAW general recommendation, No. 37, on the gender-related dimensions of disaster risk reduction, was the first interpretive guidance on disaster risk reduction and climate change to be issued by a United Nations human rights treaty body. The objective of the general recommendation was to underscore the urgency of mitigating climate change and to highlight the steps that needed to be taken to achieve gender equality as a factor reinforcing the resilience of individuals and communities worldwide. The need for concerted efforts could not be over-emphasized, as the adverse effects of climate change and disasters were transboundary. Climate change and disasters affected women and men, girls and boys, differently, with many women facing disproportionate risks to their health, safety and livelihoods. Situations of crisis exacerbated pre-existing gender inequities and also compounded intersecting forms of discrimination that affected disadvantaged groups of women, particularly rural women, to a different degree or in different ways than men or other women. The general recommendation underscored that States had obligations both within and outside their territories to ensure the full implementation of the Convention at all stages of climate change and disaster prevention and mitigation. Any steps taken by States in this context within their own jurisdiction and extraterritorially must be firmly grounded in human rights principles of substantive equality and non-discrimination.

The vulnerability of women and girls was constructed socially, economically and culturally through the distribution of power, wealth and resources. For example gender-based violence against women and girls was common in humanitarian crises and might become acute in the wake of disasters where there was heightened physical and food insecurity, as well as impunity for perpetrators. In this regard the Committee recommended that States Parties develop policies and programmes to address existing and new risk factors for violence against women within the context of disaster risk reduction and climate change.

Furthermore the Committee recognized that climate change and disasters including pandemics influenced the prevalence, distribution and severity of new and re-emerging diseases. The susceptibility of women and girls to disease was heightened as a result of inequalities in access to food, nutrition and healthcare, as well as social expectations that women would act as primary caregivers for those in need. The general recommendation emphasized that the disproportionate impact that climate change and disasters were having on women and girls could be addressed through women's empowerment and by achieving substantive gender equality. It was essential that the substantial contribution that women were already making to disaster risk reduction and climate resilience, including in their role as food producers and through their knowledge and skills in climate adaptive agriculture, be acknowledged and incorporated within gender-responsive strategies and policies. As a result of discriminatory laws and social norms, women had limited access to secure land tenure, and their farmlands tended to be of inferior quality and more prone to flooding or erosion. Increasingly, due to male out-migration, women were being left with responsibility for farming in climate change-affected areas. The general recommendation could be a great guidance to States Parties and the parliamentarians in the following areas: creating conducive environments for gender-responsive investment in disaster prevention, mitigation and adaptation; adopting regulatory measures to protect women; investing in gender-responsive social protection systems; ensuring that the disaster risk resilience of the workforce and critical infrastructures facilitated equal access for women to markets and financial services; protection and promotion of women's right to access training in non-traditional areas of work; and promotion and protection of women's equal right to food, housing, sanitation, land and natural resources.

It was considered important to look at the impacts of climate change within the overall context of management of natural resources. Men and women had different needs and priorities and would use environmental resources and services very differently. Therefore natural resources degradation was likely to disadvantage the weaker groups, who in most societies were women and children. Owing to women's domestic and productive roles they were at a greater risk of impoverishment than men. Women were also more vulnerable, worldwide, to environmental degradation, owing to their dependency on natural resources. They had few opportunities to improve their situation, and their inadequate knowledge and insufficient control over natural resources also increased their vulnerability.

There was a need to ask how resilience could be built. Firstly, the division of labour between men and women must be considered. This often determined how women and men would adapt to environmental challenges posed by climate change. This then raised the question of the resources that would enable women and men effectively to adapt to climate change.

The way forward had to involve a multi-pronged approach, and a review of existing climate change policies to identify entry points so as to promote female participation in adaptation. But there was also a need for a more detailed gender analysis to demonstrate that women could be agents of change, contributing their considerable knowledge and experience to the actual development of climate change policies and strategies. This in turn called for collection and analysis of sex-disaggregated data on vulnerabilities and capacities.

Ms. Kuriakose explained that the Climate Investment Funds involved around \$8.3 billion of investment, working in partnership with 72 countries on a portfolio of over 300 projects with a focus on renewable energy, forestry, climate adaptation, transport, agriculture, disaster risk reduction and social protection.

One of the strengths of the model of the Funds was that they are implemented through the World Bank and all the regional development banks and in close partnership with countries through long-term investments and a focus on institutional development. The Climate Investment Funds had gathered a number of lessons in terms of implementation: the first was the importance of embedding all climate action in national goals and strategies. Having standalone siloed projects was not really enough but when countries were advancing towards targets they had set themselves, there was much more potential for real change and sustained and embedded efforts.

The second lesson had to do with the importance of thinking about the embedding of institutional structures and using them for the benefit of these programmes. In the context of climate there were some very specific mechanisms, such as those under the UNFCCC (United Nations Framework Convention on

Climate Change) which provided for gender focal points in countries. Being able to link up institutionally with those groups was important. Another aspect was the importance of local-level planning and participation of rural women themselves in those efforts. The Climate Investment Funds had some very large-scale adaptive social protection projects in the programme which both helped to buffer households in terms of income shocks but also simultaneously helped make areas more resilient through their investments in soil and water management infrastructure.

It was notable that the national goals and sustainable action over time had dramatically influenced the multilateral development banks' own goals on gender and climate. Through the lessons of implementing these projects, the World Bank, for example, now had a multi-year gender and climate programme consisting of a variety of policy analytical and data efforts, informing all of its policy dialogue and investments in-country. Such processes often helped steer dialogue in-country in line with countries' own poverty strategies. It was a lesson for all stakeholders that the complex challenge of climate change required mainstreaming to a degree that went much beyond short-term, single-sector, and siloed approaches.

The topic of climate change was very important to Fiji as a nation, particularly as it currently held the Presidency of the Conference of Parties to the UNFCCC. But in addition, Cyclone Winston in 2016, one of the worst cyclones ever to hit the country, had been a natural disaster that had woken up the nation, causing it to re-strategize and rethink the way that it dealt with disaster risk management. And it had also brought to the fore the importance of international guidelines that would assist the nation to steer its national efforts. Under the Fijian Presidency a gender action plan had been adopted in Bonn in 2017. Fiji was proud of thus putting the gender aspect into the international climate change discussions. In the national context, Fiji had some 189,000 women and girls, living across 100 islands. That entailed a unique set of challenges that the nation had had to address. Providing for the peculiar needs of women post-disaster and also in disaster risk management plans required the use of the gender lens. One particular initiative that had come to fruition post-Winston in 2016 was the protection cluster under the national disaster risk management organization. Members of the cluster were stakeholders from different organizations, both national and international, who had come together to discuss the unique needs of the different vulnerable groups that were affected by Winston. One of those groups comprised women in evacuation centres post-disaster, and the protection cluster had given rise to a report, based on a survey of the evacuation centres and on interviews of women in them, which gave an insight into how women experienced disasters differently from men, how their needs post-disaster were different from men's.

In the ensuing discussion, several delegates described the effects of climate change on their country. Adaptation and mitigation plans were being prepared urgently, at national and at local level, but time was running short.

An African delegate raised two related questions: What was holding Africa back, preventing its participation, and secondly why had virtually no African country received anything from the Green Climate Fund? It was also asked how the United Nations was supporting rural people, in particular young girls, who do not know get help from the GEF or the GCF.

Delegates stressed that several of the effects of climate change were economic. The economy and livelihood of women in rural areas were typically dependent on land, agriculture and animal husbandry, sources of income on which climate change had a severely negative impact. In those circumstances women's livelihoods seriously suffered, they became more economically dependent on men, and might be forced to migrate. As migrants, they lacked adequate training to cover their income loss. Climate change also had social and psychological effects. Women owing to their emotional caring role and because of their maternal nature sacrificed their own food to share with their family members during a food shortage, negatively impacting their own quality of life and level of health.

It was essential to manage climate change and to mitigate its impact so as to contain the harm done to rural women and girls as guarantors of food security in many parts of the world. That could be achieved only through ensuring women's participation in decision-making processes.

Where indigenous peoples lose their traditional wild sources of nutrition as a result of climate change, they are forced to change to completely unfamiliar foods. This requires an effort of knowledge transmission.

On the issue of accessing funds, it was explained that the GCF had readiness funds that helped countries develop their accreditation process so that they could apply for funds directly. Making use of the readiness funds involved a considerable amount of institution-building and capacity-strengthening, both because it was a complex process and because the funds had their own very strict gender requirements as well. The investment plans through which the Climate Investment Funds worked with their member developing countries were really seen as umbrella-type frameworks, in which countries were mapping out their work for multiple years ahead, in terms of their priorities and sources of funding.

Under the UNFCCC process, there was a women and gender constituency which included local Climate Finance Options and member governments that were interested in advancing this agenda. That could be a powerful network for capacity-building and knowledge-sharing and thinking about how to move forward in individual countries.

Ms. Macharia pointed out that the levels and the types of factors that increased vulnerability would differ all over the world, varying with levels of literacy, opportunities for economic empowerment and also infrastructures. For example, the effects of climate change in the Himalayan region had led to an increase in trafficking of young girls. In Africa, an increase in child marriages because of climate change had been observed. It was essential to examine the context of individual regions, understand what were the factors that were really increasing the vulnerability of women and children and also consider what other interventions could be employed to decrease the levels of vulnerability.

Ms. Mensah-Williams summed up the day's discussions, noting that rural women face systematic barriers to the realization of their rights, and are disproportionately affected by poverty and exclusion. They experience many forms of discrimination in law and in practice, they are impacted by natural disasters and climate change, they are more likely to experience gender-based violence than urban women and girls, they have less access to education, healthcare, and social services, decision-making and justice.

Rural women and girls have diverse experiences but face common challenges in both developing and developed countries. Laws and policies must consider the diversity of rural women and the challenges faced by the most vulnerable including indigenous women or women with disabilities, HIV or other diseases. Parliamentarians must listen to and amplify the voices of rural women and girls, promoting mechanisms to guarantee the participation of rural women in decision-making at all levels.

Women's parliamentary caucuses, standing committees and other parliamentary mechanisms can be used to establish bridges between governments and rural women's grassroots movements. Real change will only come from parliamentarians who prioritize consultation with rural women and girls on sustainable development. Parliamentarians should meet rural women in their communities to hear their needs and ideas. Legislative frameworks should guarantee that rural women could claim all their rights, and the aim of parliamentarians must be to repeal discriminatory laws and address legislative gaps and plural legal systems, which deprive women of their rights.

Parliamentarians must also use their oversight role to ensure that all laws and policies adopted meet the effects intended and have adequate financial resources to be truly implemented including in rural areas. The use of tools like gender checklists and gender-responsive budgeting can be envisaged to strengthen service delivery and accountability to rural women. The link between gender and climate change is complex. Women and men do not experience climate change equally. Climate change policies must reflect that; it is critical that more women participate in political decision-making on climate change policy.

The outcomes of the day's discussions would be communicated to the Commission on the Status of Women.