

# Pre-CSW62 Africa Regional Strategy



## Meeting Report

*19-20 February 2018  
Addis Ababa, Ethiopia*

**#CSW62Africa**



“ We are not smallholder farmers,  
**we are FARMERS.**

We don't want microfinance,  
**we want FINANCING.**

We need to move away from being  
relegated to "micro" " issues. ”

*Participant at the FEMNET Pre-CSW62 Regional Strategy Meeting in  
Addis Ababa, Ethiopia (19-20 February 2018)*

**A woman living in the rural areas today is an agricultural worker, a fisherwoman, a farmer, an entrepreneur, community leader, care giver... she fetches water, maintains family, and stands for political office. What we have seen all of these years is her resilience and her innovation. What we have not seen is the infrastructure that supports her... That needs to change.**

– Lopa Banerjee, UN Women

## **1.0 Overview and Objectives**

From February 19<sup>th</sup> to 20<sup>th</sup> 2018, over 70 representatives from women’s rights organizations, activists, and advocates from across 20 African countries came together in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia to co-create the African common position, including policy recommendations and key messages, for the Commission on the Status of Women convening (CSW62) to be held on 12–23 March 2018 in New York. The priority theme of the CSW62 is *“Challenges and Opportunities in Achieving Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Rural Women and Girls.”* The review theme is *“Participation in and Access of Women to the Media, and Information and Communications Technologies and their Impact on and Use as an Instrument for the Advancement and Empowerment of Women.”*

The objectives of the meeting included to:

- Develop a common advocacy position and policy recommendations with key messages that will be used to lobby governments prior to and during CSW62
- Sustain the advocacy momentum and African women’s exchange of ideas, information and strategies beyond CSW62 using online social media platforms

## **2.0 Clarifying Notes**

There are two reoccurring issues that came up throughout the two day meeting that require clarification:

- *Language:* The issue of language came up quite a bit when referring to “rural women and girls.” Many of the representatives present preferred using the term, “women and girls living in rural areas,” because it implies a focus on the conditions of the rural environment and not general stereotypes of a one-dimensional “rural African woman.” While there is no one rural African woman, there is a common rural condition, defined by what Lopa Banerjee called in her

talk, “**spatially underserved areas.**” In recognition of these discussions and the politics of language, this report will use the term, “women and girls living in rural areas.”

- *Representation:* There was a lot of talk about who was absent from the meeting and the implications of those absences. In particular, there were very few women who live in rural areas, no girls and only Cameroon present representing the Central African region. There was a general understanding that this was a problem and something that should be addressed. Mary Ishaya Afan, a small holder farmer and community leader from Platu, Nigeria, working on women’s rights supported by ActionAid, used a proverb to address the importance of having a variety of lived experiences in these types of meetings when she said, “**A stone that is inside water does not know that there is a sun, but the stone that is outside of the water can feel the sun hitting its head.**” She used this proverb to say that only someone who lives the life that she lives with the struggles that she has in a rural area like hers can understand what her lived reality is. It was explained by the meeting organizers that the omissions were due to a lack of resources. Some of the representatives made the point that not present does not necessarily have to mean not represented and that they would do their best to represent a variety of voices in the common position document and at the delegation. It was noted that this should be the practice moving forward as there will always be meetings where not everybody is present, but where everybody’s voice, concerns and perspectives should still be represented.

### **3.0 Welcome Remarks**

The meeting began with welcome remarks from Mrs. Emma Kaliya, Chair of the FEMNET Board; Adama Diop, United Nations Representative Officer, Femmes Africa Solidarité (FAS); and Diana Louise Ofwona, Regional Director, UN Women West and Central Africa; and moderated by Dinah Musindarwezo, Executive Director, FEMNET.

These short presentations set the stage for the meeting, outlined the objectives, and spoke to the challenges and opportunities facing the rights struggle for African women and girls living in rural areas. They underscored the importance of leaving this meeting and going to CSW62 with one voice. In the past, African representatives came to CSW meetings with separate agendas and advocacy positions, which led to contentious debates and division when it came to setting standards for the rights of women. CSW being the largest global space specifically dedicated to women’s rights is an important institution and one in which a unified African voice and a common African position is needed to push through policies for women’s empowerment on the continent.

## 4.0 Overview of CSW and the Political Context of CSW62

The first session included presentations from Lopa Banerjee, Director Civil Society Division, UN Women and Dinah Musindarwezo, Executive Director, FEMNET and was moderated by Bibyshe Takubusonga Mundjo, Actions Pour La Reinsertion Sociale de la Femme (ARSF).

Lopa Banerjee began her presentation by underscoring the role of activism and activists in the founding of UN Women. She stated that the importance of the CSW is its role in setting global standards on women's rights policy. She contextualized the meeting in the greater global movement seen all over the world where women are mobilizing around issues of accountability. She said that **women and CSO's are calling governments out on promises made and not kept**. Therefore, this meeting and the work of CSW will continue the momentum and join the voices of women all over the world insisting that their rights are respected and that national and global systems work for them. CSW has been instrumental in expanding women's rights, documenting the lives of women, and ensuring that UN, in all areas, incorporates a gender lens. She said that it is time to set new standards for gender equality and to make sure that accountability is at the center of these discussions. The importance of these types of meetings being to ensure, **"nothing about us without us."** She made several points regarding CSW62 including:

- **Delegation composition:** Representation is important for CSW62. UN Women asked all delegations to report on the composition of their delegation. The UN Women Executive Director will applaud member states who included civil society leaders and women leaders from rural areas in their delegation to encourage best practices
- **Membership:** Membership of the CSW committee includes 45 member states, which serve for four-year terms. Thirteen of the member states are from Africa (DRC, Egypt, Equatorial Guinea, Eritrea, Ghana, Kenya, Liberia, Malawi, Namibia, Tunisia, Niger, Nigeria, and Tanzania)
- **Consensus:** Since Africa constitutes almost 1/3 of UN member states, it is important that Africa speaks as one voice and takes a leadership position on standard setting for CSW62. Africa must have consensus positions and African missions should ensure that their delegations are informed and ready to engage
- **Beijing and 2030:** Emphasis should be made on the linkage between the Beijing Platform and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development
- **Data:** We need more data to support our goals
- **Accountability:** Along with setting standards and policy recommendations, accountability discussions must be strong at CSW62

The presentation emphasized the aspirations of the SDG's – **Leave No One Behind**. A fundamentally human rights approach, CSW must look beyond averages to see who is left behind and why. She spoke about the volatility of the global economy and the evidence that shows that orthodox economic policies are not serving women. With the current shift towards exclusionary and fear based politics, the work of women's rights movements becomes all the more vital.

UN Women released a [report](#) on SDG's last week informed by civil society representatives, which provides new data that shows the feminization of poverty. There are 122 women living in poverty for every 100 men, with women in the age group 25-35 (the productive and reproductive age) dropping into poverty at a high rate, showing that the link between productivity and reproductivity is clear and proving that **poverty is not random**. Clustering is happening around discrimination, disadvantage and inequality and the continuation and deepening of poverty is happening around this clustering. Policy recommendations need to address this in its complete comprehensiveness.

**“Civic space is shrinking because governments are taking concrete action to shrink the space. It is designed to keep us out and to keep us from influencing policy. We have to fight against this.”**

– Lopa Banerjee, UN Women

Dinah Musindarwezo followed Lopa's talk with specific information on the key processes and opportunities for policy influencing from a CSO perspective. She explained the structure of CSW meetings, the breakout sessions and the expert group meetings. She spoke about the challenges facing policy changes including the politics of language and the fear of governments to commit to issues that may be seen as controversial. In particular, she mentioned words that were controversial for governments in the past CSW's including, women's human rights, sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR), gender equality (governments preferred gender equity), rights of women of all ages (implication being that girls have SRHR), etc.

She noted that ECOSOC accredited civil society organizations are invited to submit expert papers and urged those who feel inclined to add their voice (the accreditation process is run by the NGO selection committee, comprising 19 member states. No civil society representatives are present in these discussions, but there is a push to at least capture the discussions on camera). She emphasized the need for **a united African**

**voice** and urged representatives to study the reports and draft conclusion and to push for agreed upon messages and policy recommendations.

*Discussion Section:*

**“We are fighting an ideological war when fighting for women’s rights and empowerment.”**

– Stephanie Muchai, Hivos

- **Feminist discourse:** Women’s rights discourse should not be compromised. It is important to take a clear feminist self-actualization position. People make decisions on behalf of women and girls living in rural areas. They need to be a part of the conversation
- **Land rights:** Land access and rights must be at the center of all policy issues – the reason why Rwanda is a success is because they did just that
- **Socio-cultural practices:** Addressing the religious and cultural practices that suppress the rights of women and girls living in rural areas is necessary
- **Intergeneration dialogue:** Should work towards creating spaces for intergenerational dialogue so that women of various ages can learn from each other
- **Economic empowerment:** Women and girls in rural areas need to be economically empowered, which means that they should have access to financial literacy education, resources, and land
- **Communications:** Communications must be revolutionized and people should be able to use all means of communications possible to get their messages across
- **Education:** The right to affordable and accessible education throughout the lifecycle should be a priority
- **GBV:** Elimination of gender based violence in all of it’s forms

## 5.0 Feedback on Emerging Themes and Policy Priorities from the Rural Women Assemblies

*This panel session included short presentations from representatives of the convening of national rural women assemblies in Malawi, Kenya and Cameroon, as well as representatives from other CSO's and communities. Specifically, the presenters included Zoneziwoh Mbongdulo, Women for A Change, Cameroon; Fridah Githuku, Executive Director, GROOTS Kenya; Emma Kaliya, Malawi Human Rights Resource Centre; Mercy Kanhume, community leader, Malawi; Mary Ishaya Afan, small holder farmer and community leader, Platu, Nigeria; Julie Cisse, Oxfam, Senegal; Rosemary Natome, Turkana county, Kenya; Safaa ElAgib Adam, Community Development Association, Sudan; and moderated by Nyaradzayi Gumbonzavada, Chief Executive, Rozaria Memorial Trust*

**“Who was born in a village? Who did their first five years of school in a rural area? Who grew up in a village? Who lives back and forth between rural and urban spaces? Who will be buried in a village? Who lives in a town that is like a village (electricity, water, fuel challenges)?”**

These are the questions posed to the group by the moderator in opening up this panel session. The answers to these questions revealed that the majority of participants, even those who work on the rights of women and girls living in rural areas, but do not necessarily live in rural areas, still have connections to and life experience of the rural.

This session was led by discussions from eight representatives of CSO's and community leaders and while the speakers presented a diversity of experiences, they spoke to many of the same cross cutting issues. Zoneziwoh Mbongdulo, Fridah Girthuku, and Emma Kaliya spoke specifically about the rural women assemblies that took place in their countries and the other presenters spoke about their lived and work experiences.

Below is a short summary of some of the topics discussed:

**“Early child marriage is not marriage, it is sexual exploitation.”**

– Nyaradzayi Gumbonzavada, Rozaria Memorial Trust

Julie Cisse concentrated her talk on the legal instruments and initiatives in place that articulate standards on the rights of women including the Maputo Protocol, the Malabo Declaration on Agriculture, and the Kilimanjaro Initiative. She stressed the importance of

creating solidarity amongst people working on women's rights issues and addressing the **socio-cultural norms** hindering women's freedoms. Rosemary Natome spoke about the need for advocacy on behalf of women and girls living in rural areas, the effect of polygamy on the rights of women and girls, and the lack of land ownership and rights to inheritance in Turkana. Safaa ElAgib Adam focused on the specific condition of Sudanese women and girls living in rural areas, which most often means, living in **conflict zones**. Their situation means an increase in the prevalence of GBV, lack of financial and physical security, decreased access to resources, concentration of work in the informal sectors, and a lack of **land rights** and access to investment with most of the land in Sudan belonging to and controlled by traditional leaders and political elites. She mentioned that Sudan has drafted a national plan that is favorable to women's rights and that it is important to help push it along. Discussions around the link between **food security and physical security** came up when Mary Ishaya Afan explained that when food is near harvest, clashes break out between pastoralists and farmers. "**Women experience violence through food production,**" she said. She mentioned the violence that young girls and women experience in the internally displaced persons camps (IDP's) and the need to separate the camps by gender. Zoneziwoh Mbondgulo spoke specifically about the rural assembly in Cameroon which touched on issues of access to resources, SRHR, ICT for rural women and the exploration and valuing of **indigenous knowledge systems**. Women from over 25 rural communities and members of parliament were present for the meeting and her organization has continued engaging ministries to tackle the challenges outlined at the meeting. Fridah Githuku spoke to the rural assembly in Kenya where 300 rural women from different counties were present. Resolutions included the need for gender disaggregated data, access to timely and quality information, basic services and infrastructure for women and girls, SRHR, investment in the water sector, land security and mainstreaming the introduction of gender equality in school curriculum.

### *Discussion Section:*

- **Early child marriage:** Early child marriage certainly leads young girls down a path of exploitation, dependency, GBV, and disenfranchisement
- **Solidarity:** The need to create solidarity and knowledge sharing platforms amongst people working on women's rights issues throughout Africa
- **Land rights/land ownership/land inheritance:** The access to land rights, ownership and inheritance are essential to the economic empowerment and therefore the overall well being of women living in rural areas
- **Land grab:** The phenomenon of land grabbing in Africa by national and international corporations has disenfranchised and displaced communities, which has had a disproportionate affect on women



- **Credit:** Women must have access to fair and affordable credit and understand credit options in order to lease/buy land or increase productivity
- **Financial literacy education:** Women need access to education around financial literacy in order to take control of their household and business finances
- **Political leadership:** The women's rights movement in Africa needs women political leaders in order to articulate and implement women's rights agendas
- **ICT for rural women:** Access to ICT for women and girls in rural areas can help with financial, food and physical security, solidarity between movements, increased communication and an increase in the quality of livelihoods
- **Civic registration/birth certificates:** Many women and girls living in rural areas do not have formal registration or birth certificates and therefore are not counted in data and do not have access to state resources
- **Advocacy:** Concerted, organized, and unified advocacy campaigns need to take place throughout Africa in an effort at movement building and the implementation of policies and social change

**“I said to the people of ActionAid, ‘I want to learn how to look like you and talk like you. I want to learn what you know so that I can be in the meetings where decisions are made about us. I want to make those decisions.’”**

– Mary Ishaya Afan, smallholder farmer and community leader

## **6.0 SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats)**

*This session was led by presentations from Kafui Kuwonu, Women in Law and Development in Africa (WiDAF) and Juliet Kimemia, Head, AAWORD Kenya Chapter and moderated by Christine Nankubuge, Eastern Africa Sub Regional Support Initiative for the Advancement of Women (EASSI)*

Kafui Kuwonu's presentation focused on the legal and systemic frameworks in place that protect the rights of women and girls living in rural areas. She spoke specifically about the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and its importance as a legal political framework for the rights of women and girls. She mentioned article 14<sup>th</sup> and its recognition that **“women's rights are human rights.”** The language of the Beijing Platform includes the rights of women and girls to economic independence, education,

health care, sexual and reproductive health, fundamental freedoms, and a life free of discrimination and violence. It also recognizes the rights of women and girls to **“equal access to economic resources, including land, credit, science and technology, vocational training, information, communication and markets.”** Along with the Beijing Platform, Kafui mentioned the Kilimanjaro Initiative and the Paris Agreement on Climate Change as an initiative/framework that speak directly to the rights of women and girls living in rural areas.

She underscored that while these frameworks are in place, there is a lot to be done when it comes to accountability and investment and putting these frameworks to practice. She urged the need to take next steps in assuring action for the rights of women and girls. She spoke about the need to invest in putting women in positions of power and building strong networks that link the local to the national to the regional to the global.

Juliet Kimemia focused her presentation on the importance of data in the empowerment of women and girls living in rural areas. She said, *“leaving no one behind”* is the spirit behind the SDG’s and **“it has the power to destroy narratives that have been normalized in communities who feel like they don’t belong.”** She spoke to the role of data, in particular gender-disaggregated data, in making this a reality. While there is global data and sometimes nation wide data that is helpful in getting a better picture of the challenges facing women and girls, there is still a dearth of local and household level data which have the power to tell stories of the lives of women and girls. She went through some of the SDG’s and highlighted the questions that can be answered through **gender-disaggregated data**. For example, she referenced SDG number 6, clean water and sanitation, and spoke to the need for local data that demonstrates the time women spend fetching water. Juliet echoed what another participant said later on in the meeting, *“In order to get anything done, we must first generate the evidence.”* She urged participants to think about how to create solidarity around access to services and redistribution of resources.

### *Discussion Section:*

- **Production of data:** It is important when thinking about data collection, to think about the role of women and girls in rural areas in the production of data. They should generate their own evidence
- **Disability:** Issues of marginalization exist even within these discussions. Disabled women and girls living in rural areas have their own set of circumstances and intersecting challenges and they should have a space in these conversations

- **Translation:** In the spirit of inclusivity and bringing our talks to a local level, the seventeen SDG's should be translated in local languages
- **Quote system for funding:** Creating a quota system when it comes to funding so that domestic funding can go to women led orgs doing good work
- **Action:** Legal frameworks without implementation are useless. The focus should be on how to make sure that governments follow through on promises and implement policies for women's empowerment and equal rights
- **Political Leadership:** Again, women need to be able to take on leadership positions in order to implement the language in the legal frameworks that protect the rights of women and girls in rural areas

#### Glimpse into a side conversation:

A. When I decided to get educated on my rights as a woman farmer and try to advocate for women's empowerment in the rural areas, my husband threatened to leave me. But, I did it anyway.

B. What happened?

A. Nothing happened

B. He didn't leave you?

A. No, he left and married another woman. He left me with four children, but nothing happened. My vision was farther than his. I was thinking about the future. I was thinking about how to change things for myself and my family and for the women in our community.

B. Where is he now?

A. He came back. When I started advocating and learning and increasing my own productivity, I became successful, and he came back. Now, he tells other men in our community that they must empower their women.

## 7.0 The SADC Sponsored Resolution on Women, the Girl Child and HIV/AIDS

*This panel was led by presentations from Joseph Pitso, Southern African Development Community; Florence Anam, Advocacy and Communication Manger, International Community of Women living with HIV (ICW); Uwase Nadege, AfriYAN Eastern and Southern Africa and ICW; Tendayi Westerhorf, Pan African Positive Women's Coalition; and moderated by Jackie Makokha, Senior Community Support Adviser, UNAIDS Regional Support Team, Eastern and Southern Africa.*

**“HIV positive women are mothers, teachers, sisters, community leaders, sex workers... they are a part of your community and their voices need to be apart of these discussions.”**

– Tendayi Westerhorf, Pan African Positive Women's Coalition

This panel discussion focused on the Southern African Development Community (SADC) sponsored resolution on women, the girl child and HIV/AIDS. It began with a presentation by Joseph Pitso of SADC who spoke to the importance of resolution 60/2 which was passed by consensus in 2016 in New York. The resolution recognizes the need to take a human rights approach to dealing with the epidemic and calls upon governments, NGO's and civil society to accelerate efforts to prevent HIV/AIDS and to ensure the rights of those living with HIV/AIDS (including the right to a life without stigma and GBV, the right to sex education, and the right to antiretroviral drugs). He underscored the significance of this resolution in Africa, but especially for the Southern Africa region, which is disproportionality affected by HIV/AIDS (Southern Africa holds 1% of the worlds population, but nearly 40% of the worlds HIV infections - the majority of those affected being young women).

He emphasized that CSW is not opening up discussions on the resolution; the request this year is that governments accelerate the implementation of resolution 60/2. Only Tanzania, Malawi and Zimbabwe are reporting on the resolution. SADC has created GROM, an instrument to help countries implement the resolution.

Florence Anam began her talk underscoring the importance of including the issue of HIV/AIDS in discussions around the rights of women and girls living in rural areas in Africa. She, like her fellow presenter, Uwase Munyaburanga, revealed staggering statistics that speak to the impact of HIV/AIDS in Africa and on women in particular such

as the UNAIDS data statistic that shows that 67% of people living with HIV in sub Saharan African are women. She spoke about mother to child infections and the fact that while opportunities within science to prevent HIV infection rates have increased, people in sub Saharan Africa still continue to get infected and loose their lives. She said, **“you cannot talk about women’s health without thinking about SRHR as a path towards gender equality.”** She mentioned that the challenges towards prevention are structural, including societal stigma, access to information, sex education, and the like. Uwase Munyaburanga spoke to some of the same issues of women’s particular risk to the virus and disproportionate infection rates. She highlighted the particular vulnerability of young women and the link between GBV and high infection rates.

Tendayi Westerhorf spoke forcefully about some of the unseen challenges facing women living with HIV including women ageing with HIV and the difficulties that menopause causes for HIV infected women. She spoke specifically about including in any resolution, the language of women’s empowerment, positive health and dignity. She raised the question of who manufactures the treatment and the power dynamics of intellectual property when it comes to HIV/AIDS medication. She urged the meaningful involvement of women living with HIV in any and all discussions around women’s rights in Africa. She applauded the HIV prevention revolution and stressed the importance of youth involvement in prevention and advocacy. Speaking about the links between poverty and increased HIV rates and the common development models used by governments, she said, **“We don’t want income generating programs. We want real investment in women’s economic empowerment. If a woman is economically empowered, she will not go into sex work, she will have access to information, she can negotiate safe sex and will have a lower chance of experiencing GBV.”**

### *Discussion Section:*

- **Stigma:** A major impediment in the struggle against HIV/AIDS is the stigma attached to the disease. Education campaigns to reduce stigma and acceptance in society should be an important part of prevention and treatment
- **Criminalization of HIV/AIDS:** An example of an HIV positive woman who was arrested for breastfeeding a child brought up the issue of the criminalization of HIV/AIDS which leads to increased stigma
- **LGBTI communities:** Access to condoms and lubricants are especially challenging for LGBTI populations and the stigma attached to these populations increases the chance of engaging in unsafe sex practices
- **Male engagement:** Men must be engaged in education campaigns and the overall struggle against HIV/AIDS in order for behavioral changes to be made (safe sex practices and the reduction of GBV)

- **Test and treat:** Testing and treatment services need to be provided to women at local levels. Women should not have to go outside of their communities to be tested or treated
- **Sexually active youth:** People are having sex earlier without knowing about safe sex practices
- **Sexual abuse:** Child sexual abuse is a factor in HIV infection and should be addressed
- **Monitoring action:** Resolutions are important, but action is more important. There needs to be a concerted effort at monitoring the impact of resolutions on the ground

## 8.0 Panel discussion: Redlines in the Context of CSW Negotiations

*This panel session was led by presentations from Vania Kibui, IPAS; Crystal Simeoni, Head of Advocacy, FEMNET; Bethel Terefe, Oxfam International; and moderated by Elisah Mbiza, Monitoring, Learning and Evaluation Officer Femmes Africa Solidarité. The session had moderated feedback from women living in rural areas including, Mary Ishaya Afan, a small holder farmer and community leader from Platu, Nigeria; Mercy Kanhume, community leader, Malawi; and Alice Kachere, community leader, Malawi*

### *Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR)*

**“From an ideological standpoint, it seems like issues that relate only to women are the issues that don’t have consensus.”**

– Vania Kibui, IPAS

Vania Kibui began the session with a discussion on the importance of SRHR, in that it is fundamentally linked to other rights. A violation of SRHR does not take place in a vacuum, it is linked to access to information and sex education, access to the highest standards of health, the rights to a life free from violence, agency in choosing safe sex and family planning, the protection against discrimination on the grounds of gender and a right to life. With the prohibition of rights to contraceptives and laws against abortion, SRHR becomes **a matter of life or death for women**. Every eight minutes a woman in a developing country dies of complications from an unsafe abortion.

She spoke about the opposition surrounding SRHR and the impact of religious fundamentalism and cultural norms on the policies and implementation of SRHR. Language and messaging is extremely important with regards to these issues as people and organizations who work on SRHR are accused of being anti-family. There is a need to refine the messaging, use social media in creative ways, communicate change, and engage youth populations. There are legal instruments in place that support these rights, including the Maputo Protocol. The question is how these instruments and the language within them can be used to implement policies that protect SRHR. Vania underscored the importance of unity with relation to the women's rights movement. **"We are all in the same fight, fighting for the same thing. All of these rights are interrelated and women need these rights at the same time, every day. We have to come together and agree that there are certain bare minimums that we need to fight for."**

In Mary Ishaya Afan's response to Vania's presentation, she spoke about the specific circumstances facing women and girls living in rural areas. She spoke from her personal experience of never having had a conversation with her own mother about menstruation. In her community, she said that young girls stop going to school when they menstruate. They don't have access to sex education, formally or informally, which means that they don't know what makes them pregnant and how to protect themselves. Many young girls get pregnant without knowing it and lose their lives trying to get an abortion.

### *Macroeconomics*

**"People think that macroeconomics is technical. It is not. It is a political issue with power dynamics."**

– Crystal Simeoni, FEMNET

Crystal Simeoni opened her presentation with a quote from Audre Lorde, **"I am not free while any woman is unfree, even when her shackles are very different from my own."** Crystal spoke about the dichotomy between the Africa rising narrative and the prevalence and increasing rate of inequalities. She said that macroeconomic policies inform key social and economic sectors that affect everybody, but especially and in a very particular way, women. There is a growing alliance between corporations and states and a fractured relationship between citizens and states. She said that while corporations, the world bank and IMF have a say in African economies, women do not;

they are not in the meetings that decide how national budgets are allocated. Women's empowerment therefore must be understood as having a seat at the table of policy development around macroeconomics, a space that is extremely male dominated. Women's economic empowerment must be understood as more than a women's ability to compete in existing markets, but rather a women's access to and control over the way markets work.

Crystal spoke directly to the issue of **tax justice** and its impact on the lives of women. Africa loses 50 billion dollars annually by illicit financial flows. This is money that could be put into social programs that service the rights of women. While internal corruption is a common topic in development circles, data shows that out of the 50 billion lost a year, only 5 percent is due to corruption. It is important to devise a formula for making sure that tax is collected fairly and distributed equitably. FEMNET is working on collecting data, increasing capacity, and making sure that women are present and active in the conversations around macroeconomics.

In Mercy Kanhume's response to Crystal's presentation, she focused on the lack of family planning and sex education in rural communities. She spoke about her work advising women about family planning in terms of how many kids they want to have and how frequently and stressing the importance of giving birth in hospitals and not in their homes to reduce the risk of complications in general and fistula in particular. She said it is hard work because men have control over these decisions, but that these things can change at the community level by organizing, advocating and making information accessible to women.

### *Unpaid Care Work*

**“Unpaid care work is not a family issue, it is a development issue. Governments and policy makers need to act accordingly.”**

– Bethel Terefe, Oxfam

In her presentation, Bethel Terefe stressed the importance of tackling the issue of unpaid care work. In most cases, unpaid care work is done by women (in eighty three countries, it was shown that women spend 3 times more time than men doing unpaid care work). This issue is extremely important because if women are spending the majority of their time doing unpaid care work, they have less time for education, participation in civic life, self care, leisure and the like. Additionally, the time spent on unpaid care work keeps women in poverty and dependent on their spouses as they



don't have time for income generating work. **Care work in rural areas is particularly intense**, time consuming and laborious. For instance, a UN Women report shows that only 55% of households in Africa have access to water which means that women spend hours fetching water. SDG 5.4 recognizes unpaid work and puts an obligation on governments to address it, and if it is addressed, it can affect all other SDG's.

Advocates should be asking governments for investment and action to realize policy changes in terms of unpaid care work. Possible policy measures include, increasing paid maternity leave, creating systems that support women working in informal sectors, ensuring that water supply is affordable and accessible, investment in clean and efficient cook stoves, investment in roads, electricity, and infrastructure, putting in place affordable day care services, and providing affordable and accessible pre-schooling for young children. Governments should be collecting data related to these issues and that data should be used to inform policy-making processes. Most importantly, the voice and agency of unpaid care workers has to be prioritized and they need to be in the decision-making spaces. The use of mainstream and alternative media and education initiatives can help in this respect.

In Alice Kachere's response to Bethel's presentation, she described a life in the day of a woman in the rural area. Women wake up early in the morning to get the household ready for the day, she gets the kids ready, cooks food and then goes to farm the land. At some point of the day, she fetches water. After a long day of work, she comes home and is expected to have sex with their husbands (sometimes more than once). She said, "we are called the property of a man, but we do everything, we do all of the work in the household and on the farms."

### *Discussion Section:*

- **Interfaith dialogue:** Working with grassroots and faith based leaders has had a big impact and it has been proven to work in terms of SRHR
- **Bold language:** Need to be bold when talking about issues that are seen as controversial. Need to bring it back to a human rights framework and feel unafraid to use language that describes the challenges facing women
- **Testimonials:** Personal stories about unsafe abortions and the overall experiences of women and girls living in rural areas can have an impact on perceptions and policies
- **Civil society engagement:** Civil society's should have a prominent role in addressing macroeconomic policy and should occupy a space in national and

international decision making including conferences like the world economic forum

- **Data:** Civil society organizations and community members have evidence on the ground, they just need to collect it into data, which is the first thing that you need in order to hold governments accountable
- **Movement building:** There is power in numbers; building capacity and seeing the interrelatedness of women's rights issues across the board is vital to addressing women's empowerment
- **Redistribution of unpaid care work and equal pay:** Unpaid care work has to be redistributed so that it is shared between men and women. Additionally, valuing care work is important so that issues of equal pay are addressed and women's labor is valued whether in domestic or public spaces
- **Global military spending:** In a UN Women report it was noted that in 2018 alone, 124 countries in the world will cut social spending and divert that money into militarization and security. This is money that is being moved away from social services for women and an example of why women's movements should get involved in macroeconomic policy making

## 9.0 Group Work and Group Presentations

A girl who is born into a poor household (target 1.2) and forced into early marriage (target 5.3) is more likely to drop out of school (target 4.1), give birth at an early age (target 3.7), suffer complications during childbirth (target 3.1), and experience violence (target 5.2). If she is able to leave that abusive relationship, she needs access to justice (target 16.3), as well as a safe place to live (target 11.1), medical care (target 3.8) and a decent job (target 8.5) so that she can maintain a decent standard of living for herself and any dependents that she may have (target 8.1 and 8.3) which takes us to the issue of unpaid care work (target 5.4).

Lopa Banerjee used the illustration above of a young girl's life to demonstrate the multiple and intersecting nature of the SDG declarations and to make clear that different dimensions of well-being, deprivation and discrimination are deeply intertwined. She spoke to the importance of keeping this in mind when assessing the already drafted agreed conclusions for CSW62 and developing the African common position – key messages and draft policy recommendations – of the CSW62 as is the purpose of the group work session. She stressed that CSW is a standards setting body and that the recommendations outlined from this meeting should be in line with the task of creating a holistic framework for addressing multiple deprivations and setting standards for the rights of women and girls living in rural areas. She ended by saying that the participants in the room “have more knowledge and experience than the negotiators in New York, so let's bring it!”

The participants split up into six groups, which looked into 1) strengthening the normative and legal frameworks and eliminating laws and policies that discriminate against rural women and girls, 2) implementing economic and social policies for the empowerment of rural women and girls, 3) strengthening the collective voice, leadership and decision making and 4) looking into the review theme for CSW62. The presentations of the group work reviewed proposed changes and recommendations of the draft conclusions based on the conditions, experiences and lived realities of African women and girls living in rural areas. This meeting and the group work in particular resulted in the draft Africa common position for CSW62, which will be presented in New York.

The discussion session included recommendations on the themes and topics discussed during the two-day meeting, including strong language against GBV and harmful practices against women and girls living in rural areas; assurance of land and land tenure security and access to economic resources; entry into leadership positions; access to

lifelong education, family planning, and SRHR; putting a feminist lens on macro and micro economic issues; advocating for gender disaggregated budget; and increasing access to ICT. Additionally, there were recommendations to take advantage of last years AU theme (demographic dividend) by including text focused on youth and to address the issue of civil registration/birth certificates (as many women are not formally registered on local or national levels and therefore do not have access to resources, including land).

A focus on semantics in order to make the language in the text more direct came up often in the discussions. For example, changes in the language from “ensure” to “enforce” and “gender sensitive” to “gender responsive.” In that same vein, participants made the recommendation to include accountability mechanisms to ensure that the language gets translated into action. Participants agreed that including best practices when creating policy recommendations and instituting legal frameworks could help in holding governments accountable.

In order to make sure that these instruments and the resources available are accessible to women and girls living in rural areas, participants urged that these documents be translated into local languages. Additionally, there was a suggestion of including testimonials and asking that reporting also include testimonials in order to strengthen the collective voice.

The Africa common position including key messages and policy recommendations can be found on this [link](#).

## 10.0 Beijing 2020 and Closing Session

**“We need to reclaim Nairobi. Before Beijing, there was Nairobi. Nairobi forward-looking strategies midwived Beijing and it will shape 2020. We need to be unapologetic when speaking about feminism and work towards reinforcing the energy of feminist movements in Africa. Between now and 2020, the question should be, how can we recommit and unite as advocates and as feminists. People have raised their hands and they will help us.”**

– Nyaradzayi Gumbonzavada, Rozaria Memorial Trust

### *Beijing 2020*

Before closing the session, Memory Kachambwa addressed the outlined discussion points for 2020 in order to get consensus from the room. 2020 marks the 25<sup>th</sup> year of Beijing and the 5<sup>th</sup> year of the SDG's. After a short discussion, participants agreed on the discussion points which include, 1) Apex events 2025, 2) participation of CSO's in all events, 3) national preparatory meetings, and 4) ensuring high level political commitment and accountability.

Following the tone of the meeting, in the spirit of owning this space, and in recognition of the visa challenges facing African citizens going to the United States, participants suggested a push to make the next CSW and the 2020 meeting take place in Africa. Lopa Banerjee also made a commitment that UN Women would support at least 3-4 people from the meeting to attend the CSW62 in NY.

### *Closing*

The meeting ended with a revitalized energy and sense of unity ahead of the CSW62 in New York. Participants spoke about re-energizing the women's movement, committing and re-committing to the struggle for women's rights, controlling the narrative, shaping the language, and occupying decision-making spaces.

Closing remarks were made by Emma Kaliya, Chair of the FEMNET Board, who stressed the need to be bold and speak as one unit. She said, **“We need to celebrate our arrogance. It is our arrogance that started this journey and that made Nairobi what it was... We must also remember that CSW is two weeks, but the fight is 365 days.”**

## Annexes

- [Photos from the regional strategy meeting in Addis Ababa](#)
- [African Women's CSW62 advocacy position policy recommendations](#)
- [Storify: #CSW62Africa Africa Regional Strategy Meeting](#)

#CSW62Africa



“ We no longer want 50 chickens as "economic empowerment" hand outs!  
**We want REAL investment!** ”

*Participant at the FEMNET Pre-CSW62 Regional Strategy Meeting in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia (19-20 February 2018)*

