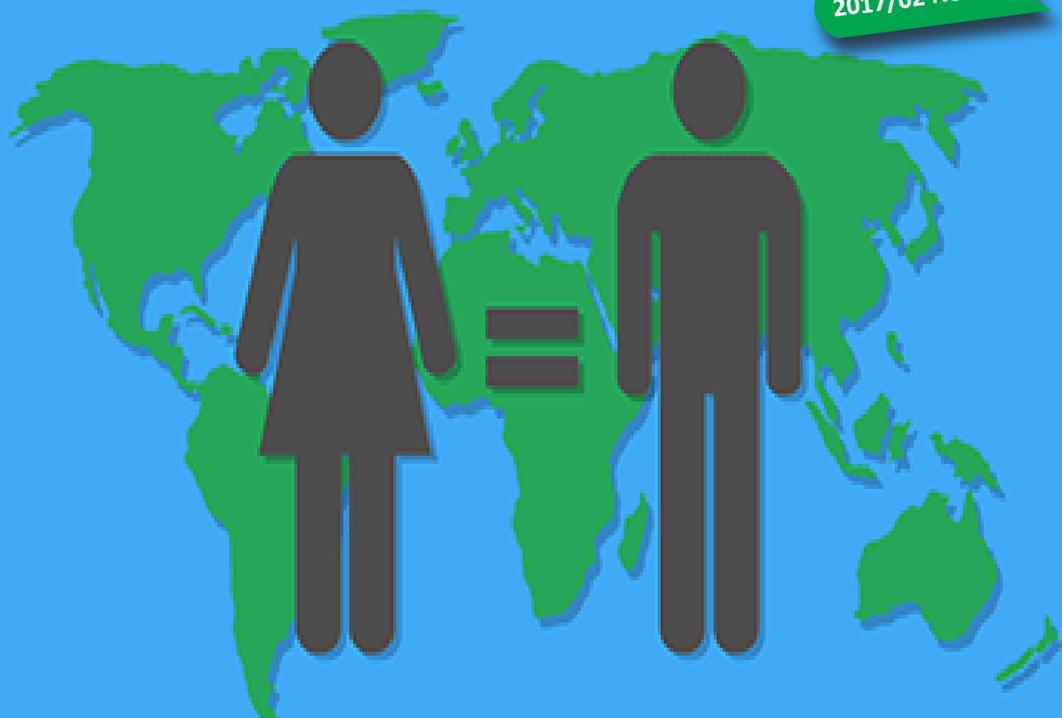


# VOICE OF THE RURAL WORLD

2017/02 No.126



## GENDER EQUITY AND EMPOWERMENT

# VOICE OF THE RURAL WORLD No.126

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Dear Readers,

*Greetings from International Secretariat!*

VMR 126 bring you the reflection on Gender Equality and Women Empowerment. The word gender describes the socially-constructed roles and responsibilities that societies consider appropriate for men and women. Gender equality means that men and women have equal power and equal opportunities for financial independence, education, and personal development. The vital role and empowerment of women in sustainable development has long been recognized by the 1995 Beijing Declaration of the United Nations' Fourth World Conference on Women and the 1992 Rio Declaration. Yet gender discrimination continues to be a key driver of poverty in the world. Gender equality is not only a fundamental human right, but a necessary foundation for a peaceful, prosperous and sustainable world. Providing women and girls with equal access to education, health care, decent work, and representation in political and economic decision-making processes will fuel sustainable economies and benefit societies and humanity at large.

Gender inequalities are still deep-rooted in every society. Women suffer from lack of access to decent work and face occupational segregation and gender wage gaps. In many situations, they are denied access to basic and higher education and health care and are victims of violence and discrimination. They are under-represented in political and economic decision-making processes. Guaranteeing



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the rights of women and giving them opportunities to reach their full potential is critical not only for attaining gender equality, but also for meeting a wide range of international development goals. Empowered women and girls contribute to the health and productivity of their families, communities, and countries, creating a ripple effect that benefits everyone. Throughout the world, women and girls perform long hours of unpaid domestic work. In some places, women still lack rights to own land or to inherit property, obtain access to credit, earn income, or to move up in their workplace, free from job discrimination. In legislatures around the world, women are outnumbered 4 to 1

Globally, no country has fully attained gender equality. Scandinavian countries like Iceland, Norway, Finland, and Sweden lead the world in their progress toward closing the gender gap. In these countries, there is relatively equitable distribution of available income, resources, and opportunities for men and women. The greatest gender gaps are identified primarily in the Middle East, Africa, and South Asia. However, a number of countries in these regions, including Lesotho, South Africa, and Sri Lanka outrank the United States in gender equality

Women's empowerment is a critical aspect of achieving gender equality. It includes increasing a woman's sense of self-worth, her decision-making power, her access to opportunities and resources, her power and control over her own life inside and outside the home, and her ability to effect change. Gender issues are not focused on women alone, but on the relationship between men and women in society. The actions and attitudes of men and boys play an essential role in achieving gender equality. An area of focus in attaining gender equality is women's economic and political empowerment.

Gender equity is the process of being fair to women and men.. Equity leads to equality. Gender equality requires equal enjoyment by women and men of socially-valued goods, opportunities, resources and rewards. Women are key agents of change and when women and men are equal, economies grow faster; less people remain in poverty, and the overall well-being of people increases. Lets work together to make it a reality

Enjoy your reading

George Dixon Fernandez  
Secretary General



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# GENDER EQUITY AND EMPOWERMENT



*It should probably be useful to deal with the subject of equality between men and women, to start first with some definitions for a better understanding of these concepts. Because there is a lot of confusion between the concept of gender, it often brings to the woman, and which is a concept quite abstract and the sex that differentiates us, men and women. Then we'll see how gender equality can be used for empowerment, to the power of women. But maybe should we speak of equity, which is different from equality for all, always and in all areas of life in society. Equity is equality with a fair dose of inequality. This concept is at the heart of the "theory of justice" of the philosopher John Rawls, who seeks to think a just society.*

## **A few definitions**

**The gender:** the concept of gender is a political and mobilizer concept which appears for the first time in 1972, but which was broadcasted mainly in the 1980s. Gender refers to the relationship between man and woman, addressing the masculine and feminine roles as they are socially constructed. It allows us to make the difference between biological identity (sex) and the socio-cultural identity (the gender) of human beings .



Gender isn't the only woman or man only. Gender is the man and the woman and their relationships in society. The gender approach is not intended to turn the tables, but to restore the balance. The gender approach allows putting an end to inequality reports taking into account the specific needs of each and other.

Gender in this sense is quite difficult to define in a fixed way. Each society defines somehow the roles assigned to women or men; this varies depending on the culture, the place where people evolve. The gender is a social construction, so isn't a fixed concept, on the contrary, it is in perpetual 'construction'.

**Equality:** to be equal, doesn't mean to be identical. When we'll talk here about equality, it will be of equal rights for all human beings, men and women. It will also be the equity (justice) in the sense of a redistribution of responsibilities but also of access to resources, whether for education, access to land, inheritance... "We all have right to life, the freedom of speech, the right to property, etc., provided that these freedoms do not infringe on the freedoms of others: our legitimate right to ownership does not allow us to fly others, nor our right to express ourselves to insult others". . In other words, everyone is free but these freedoms are sometimes against the freedoms of others. However, we must all be equal as to these freedoms. Where a second rule that admits inequalities. It is normal that some have more than others, particularly because this promotes the will to undertake. However, these inequalities must be for the benefit of the less advantaged members of society. They must also be attached to functions and positions open to all under





conditions of equal opportunities. So, it is just that a business leader wins more than its employees and workers, insofar as it encourages him to undertake, thus allowing employees and workers to work. But if the earnings of the company are at the expense of workers, inequality of wages of the boss is unfair. <sup>[1]</sup>

**Empowerment:** the concept of empowerment has been described for the first time in 1976 by Barbara Solomon in the United States on the basis of the experiences of African-Americans civil rights movements and political work with communities. In French, empowerment is usually translated in capacity building. This term is vague and non-specific. So far, there is no more precise definition accepted by all. The basic consensus is that empowerment is a process of learning, with new freedoms of action that lead to greater self-determination of their own life.



In such a process, human beings discover and develop their own resources or collective resources, carry out new experiences and acquire new capabilities. This process focuses on strengths, resources, skills and ‘know-how’.

**These few notions being recalled and given to their rightful place, what is problematic in the concept of gender and how well understood can it contribute to greater social equality between men and women?**

**The disparity between men and women at the economic level**

It is not a sensational revelation to say that the disparity between men and women is always very present. In developed societies, even if this disparity is less visible and less important than some years ago, the differences still exist. In all countries of the world, women earn less money than men. According to the report recently published by the ILO (International Labor Organization), the hourly wage gap would be minimal in Bosnia and the Mexico but reached 16% in France and more than 40% in Azerbaijan and in Benin. In Europe, almost two thirds of the 10% of the lowest paid employees are women, whereas only one third of the 10% are the



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highest paid. Among the 1% the highest paid, Director Generals earn half more than the Directrice-Generals. <sup>[2]</sup>

### **The disparity between men and women at the level of participation in the power**

Here again, the disparity is important. Certainly the differences are reduced since the adoption by many countries of provisions requiring a minimum percentage of women on electoral lists and the better education of girls. However overall, women are underrepresented in decision-making, whether in politics or in business. In Africa, for example, the participation of women in the political process is very uneven depending on the country. On 1st November 2015, among the 20 countries with the most women in Parliament, 7 yet are African countries: Rwanda, Senegal, South Africa, Namibia, Mozambique, Ethiopia and Angola, . The first country in this ranking is the Rwanda, with 63.8% of women. Other countries are far less classified : so in Benin and Nigeria, the women in Parliament represent 7.2% and 5.6% respectively.

### **The disparity between men and women at the level of access to resources**

This chapter deserves special attention, because access to resources is a major problem in many countries, especially in the southern countries where agriculture is still mainly source of jobs. In 2010, a study by the UN food and agriculture organization (FAO) indicates that worldwide less than 20% of the property owners are women. In West and Central Africa as well as in the Middle East and North Africa women represent less than 10% of the owners. In Eastern and southern Africa and parts of Latin America, women seem to have better access to land. They have 30% of individual land titles.

Even when a legal system provides equal access to land, women can face serious difficulties in asserting their rights to land ownership, partly because they are uninformed. In some countries, the legal system and more particularly in matters of inheritance and divorce legislation grant women fewer rights on land than men. The land titles are often registered in the name of the male head of the family. In many countries, it is difficult for women to own land jointly with their husbands. In developing countries, it is customary law, which governs access to large tracts of unregistered land and their use. According to this system, access and usage rights

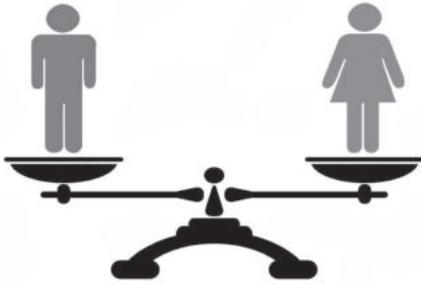


are assigned by the traditional authorities of the group of users, without a written document.

In Senegal, a constitutional reform and legislation have been adopted to ensure the equal rights of men and women in terms of land tenure. Article 15 of the

Constitution adopted in 2001, guarantees both the man and the woman the right to property.

Customary and religious restrictions on the access of women to land are forbidden. In the case of Islamic law, the woman gets in legacy half of that receives the man. But the reality on the ground shows that the traditional lands are currently managed more often according to the customary law, which rarely acknowledges the rights of women on land. Women represent 26 percent of the plots in agriculture, but hold only 13% of the land in rain fed agriculture and the situation is worse in irrigated cultivation. In addition to the weakness of their status, many women are ignorant of the laws that could enable them to assert their rights. When they know, they do not dare to question the social rules, particularly the relationships between men and women.



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In Burundi: The patrilineal system excludes women from access to land heritage, that is to say, agricultural land and dwelling houses, but also the management of the products of the land, even for food tradition grants them the burden of production<sup>[3]</sup>.

There are many examples and there is no doubt that the readers of this VMR edition will recognise situations that they know well in their own country

Talking about access to resources, also refers to access to credit.

Few women in the southern countries have access to it easily, except through micro-credit programs that allow them to at least have access to small sums of money to develop small businesses or to set up income generating projects.



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## Some reflexions

For a decade now, progresses were made around the world to try to solve these problems of inequality of rights, whether at the level of access to land, education or health care. Legislation, under the pressure of development NGOs, evolves but it will still take time to make them really effective.

According to the latest report of the WEF (World Economic Forum) which offers a classification describing the “improvements” according to the country in recent years, it was discovered that Nicaragua, Nepal, Bolivia, Slovenia and France were the five countries that had the highest reduction in gender inequalities in 2016.

Back on the notion of empowerment which has four essential components: the participation, the skill, self-esteem and critical consciousness (individual, collective, social and political consciousness). When these four components are interacting, an empowerment process is then switched on. This proactive process focuses on the forces, rights and skills of individuals and the community, rather than deficits or needs (Gibson, 1991, Anderson, 1996).

Education is therefore a major challenge both for the development of skills, which will allow better participation, thus creating confidence and self-esteem to develop critical conscience, both on a personal and collective point of view.

## Some major challenges

### Food security and empowerment

The majority of the population living in poverty lives in rural areas. Women experience more difficulties to access the resources, markets, information, while they play a key role in the production, processing and marketing of food. Ensuring equal access to land, inputs, and technical training and entrepreneurship opportunities, there would be no doubt probably will speed up a lot of progress.

### Education

The right to education is a prerequisite for creating opportunities in economic, social and political life. The access and maintaining girls in school must be taken into account to give them the same opportunities as boys in training, job search and of autonomy.



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## Health

The issue of family planning is a challenge for both men and women. Often still women are in charge of the children. We advocate for policies supporting the families, allowing both men and women to assume their parenting without putting their professional career in difficulty.

## Job and responsibility in politics

Just like in other areas, women should have opportunities in the spheres of decision, whether at the professional level or in politics. This would be possible if the conditions which enable them to exercise these responsibilities are met. That is the access to training, the fair distribution of household tasks and common support of children.

## In conclusion

The concept of gender avoids enter in conflictual relationship between man and woman, and throws us into the problem of the issue of development, creation of wealth, of school and health infrastructure challenges that are far more important. The gender approach advocates equitable development, which does not only focus on productivity, but allows for changes of status and social condition allowing the reduction of poverty and social justice within populations.

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<sup>[1]</sup> plug Philo: equality vs. fairness - Libre.be - November 2011

<sup>[2]</sup> The scientist.com - 06 March 2017

<sup>[3]</sup> Ifad.org, 2010



# RESOLUTION

## FIMARC Executive Committee – Assesse - Belgium

May 2017

We, the Executive Committee members of FIMARC (International Federation of Rural Adult Catholic Movements) from Asia, Africa, Latin America and Europe, representing rural movements and communities from more than 50 countries in the world, gathered in Assesse, Belgium from 18-25th of May 2017 for the FIMARC formation session on “PEASANT RIGHTS ON SEEDS”, to deepen our common understanding, to share our own experiences from different continents and to define concrete next steps in order to support and advance the enforcement of peasant rights on seeds all over the world.

Seeds are the core of life, the source of our food. Quality seeds are the basis of health and well-being of all humans. Good, healthy and safe food is a fundamental human right. Seeds are the heart of agriculture. Farmer’s right to seeds means right to life.

Historically small-holder farmers (peasants) were the custodians of production, usage, preservation and exchange of traditional seeds. Communities, family farmers and particularly women played a vital role in this regard. Seeds were treated indeed as a common good for the community and humanity but it has become a commodity through privatization to control our food system and to make profit. Seed laws in most of the countries dictate what kind of seeds can’t be sold, used and even be exchanged by the farmers. Intellectual Property frameworks, marketing regulations, certification and mandatory seed registration mechanisms work together towards a single goal: absolute corporate control over seeds.

Even if some national constitutions and laws mention the right on traditional seeds and biodiversity, yet many governments are manipulating these laws for supporting agro industries and to give more priority for hybrid varieties and genetically modified seeds instead of farm saved seeds and peasant farming. The small-holder farmers (peasants), who are insisting on their traditional seed rights are being criminalized, seeds are privatized and turned into commercial commodities, which has terrible effects, not only on small-holder farmers (peasants), but on all human beings, nowadays and in future:

- 
- Extreme reduction of biodiversity
  - Loss of traditional varieties
  - Increase of agricultural chemistry, pollution and environmental devastation
  - Negative effects on the health of humans and also of our planet
  - Existential threat for small-scale family farms
  - Prevention of food sovereignty

FIMARC believe that traditional varieties of vegetables and grains are a vital heritage. They are the key to our food security and food sovereignty at present and in future. While hundreds of varieties of a crop were once grown, now only two or three are left, or the crop itself may have been abandoned. The seed companies which breed the so called new resistant varieties requires the gene traits of the old varieties which are being lost.

Varieties that do not have a world market lose their place and may no longer be sold. Soon they vanish, forever. The lack of genetic diversity in food crops greatly increases their vulnerability to pests and disease –

And at a time when the global climate is changing in unpredictable ways, nobody knows what sort of crops may be needed in the future -- the meagre number of commercial varieties available could prove useless in the new conditions. It has been proven that peasant traditional varieties can long last as well as be adaptive to changing climate and also could be more sustainable in respective climatic and geographical zones.

Traditional and locally appropriate peasant agriculture is more and more pressured by agribusiness and multinational biotechnology companies, which have just one priority, to increase shareholder values. FIMARC condemn the ongoing privatization of seeds. While we reject all practices of patents on seeds and living organisms, we strongly claim for our rights as farmers and rural communities to produce, use, reuse and exchange our own traditional seeds and plant varieties.

FIMARC strongly demands, that any legislation on seeds first and foremost has to look at peasants rights on seeds. Small-holder farmers (peasants) are the stewards of seeds and genetic resources. Peasant rights on seeds have to be protected.

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FIMARC will continue its strong efforts, to support the adoption of a declaration of “Rights of Peasants and other People working in Rural Areas” by the United Nations, including an article on the peasant rights on seeds.

FIMARC and its member movements strongly commit themselves to ...

- ...study and analyse the seed issues, the impact of seed regimes and national framework (laws, rules and regulation), that deny the peasant rights on seeds.
- ... inform and educate women, men, youth and children about seed issues and peasant rights to seeds.
- ...build local resistance, in order to protect our own seed systems, traditional knowledge and practices.
- ... challenge the corporate control over seeds through private research and technologies.
- ... inform about the important role of family farming and particularly of women in agriculture, seed preservation and protection of biodiversity.
- ... inform about the ongoing process in the United Nations, in order to adopt a declaration of “ Rights for Peasants and other People working in Rural Areas”.
- ... establish and deepen links between farmers and consumers, in order to prevent jointly the ongoing process of seeds privatization.
- ... facilitate forums and exchanges on local, national and global level, in order to support the rights of small-holder farmers (peasants) on seeds.
- ... identify and put to practice viable seed preserving methods, appropriate to the concrete region of the specific movement.

Executive Committee of FIMARC  
Assesse, May 24th, 2017

## FIMARC NEWS

### CFS 43 SESSION; 17-21 OCTOBER 2016, FAO, ROME, ITALY

The Committee on World Food Security (CFS) held its 43rd Session from 17 to 21 October 2016 at FAO Headquarters in Rome. Wolfgang Scharl (President, FIMARC), George Dixon Fernandez (Secretary General), Jean Claude Germon (Treasurer), Rony Joseph (FIMARC Asian Coordinator) and Fr. Tomas Jose Spanghero (Chaplain) participated in the CFS 43 on behalf of FIMARC.

### FOLLOW UP WITH NATIONAL MOVEMENTS

Wolfgang Scharl, FIMARC President participated in the national board meeting of KLB, Germany held on 13/06/2016, .Delegate meeting of KLB in February 2016 and made a presentation on Peasant Rights. Wolfgang also participated in the KLJB national meeting and spoke about Family Farming. Jean Claude Germon,

FIMARC Treasurer Participated in the CMR General Assembly in Paris from 16-17 April 2016 and made presentations on the main objectives of FIMARC as well as the Erasmus +Project. Jean Claude also made a presentation about FIMARC in the CMR Administration Council of 2016. Rony Joseph had a meeting with Thailand Movement of FIMARC in March 2016 together with CCHD RTRC Agricultural Training centre responsible's. George Fernandez, Secretary General of FIMARC and Rony Joseph (FIMARC Asian Coordinator) visited the national movements of FIMARC in Asia such as INAG (India), CEC (Srilanka) ,PKMP (Philippines) and SPSTN (Indonesia) to support and orientate our work on People led development process (PLDP). Manuel Moran (Latin American Coordinator of FIMARC visited Honduras, Guatemala to make solidarity to the communities who are effected due to river blockage by sugar cane factories.



In Philippines with a group of land less women



In Philippines - a group of fishermen



# VMR

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