



**MESSAGE OF THE EXECUTIVE SECRETARY  
OF THE CONVENTION ON BIOLOGICAL DIVERSITY  
BRAULIO FERREIRA DE SOUZA DIAS  
on the occasion of the  
INTERNATIONAL DAY OF RURAL WOMEN  
15 OCTOBER 2015**

Rural women are integrally connected to all aspects of local biodiversity – as users, custodians and agents of change. As key land and resource managers, entrepreneurs, and service providers, and with considerable responsibility for household food production, rural women are front line actors in the processes of biodiversity loss, conservation and restoration.

Due to the gendered division of labour, rural women have specialized knowledge of local biological resources which differs from that of men. This knowledge shapes species selection and conservation and is a source of critical information on human use and ecological functions. Such knowledge is also a valuable asset that can be translated into income-generating opportunities for women and their communities, as has been demonstrated by the successful development of many culinary, cosmetic and medicinal products derived from traditional sources. Women's local knowledge is further regarded as fundamental to ensure household food security.

While rural women have a large stake in the benefits of biodiversity, they have less control over its use. A significant gender gap exists in land ownership worldwide; even in countries that grant women the legal right to ownership, customary practice may prevent them from taking control. According to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's (OECD) Social Institutions and Gender Index (2014), women and men have equal rights to own, use and control land in only 37 per cent of the 161 countries analysed. Pervasive discrimination and unequal treatment also limits women's access to productive resources, such as agricultural inputs and extension services, adequate water and sanitation, financial services, and information and technology. It further results in a disproportionate share of time dedicated to unpaid domestic and care work. The lack of secure access to land, other forms of property and key resources, such as financial services, means that rural women have less decision-making power within the household and community, reduced income-generating opportunities and increased food insecurity. These constraints make women and their families not only more vulnerable to poverty, but also more dependent on local biological resources and



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ecosystem services, and thereby more vulnerable to their degradation. Furthermore, women's lack of equal rights and decision-making power means that their knowledge, needs, interests and priorities may not be taken into account in interventions intended to improve the conservation, restoration and sustainable use of biodiversity. This risks jeopardizing the outcomes for communities and the resources on which they depend.

Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development, the 17 Sustainable Development Goals and 169 targets, prioritizes gender equality and women's rights as a cross-cutting issue, reflecting a global consensus on their central relevance to the ultimate objectives of poverty eradication and a sustainable and resilient future. Addressing the needs and rights of rural women is therefore critical to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, particularly Goal 1 ("end poverty in all its forms everywhere"), Goal 2 ("end hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture"), and Goal 5 ("achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls"). Equal rights and secure and equal access to land, including access to ownership and control, are highlighted in the targets of each of these Goals, while ownership and control over other forms of property, financial services, inheritance and natural resources are repeated as targets in goals 1 and 5.

The Convention on Biological Diversity's 2015-2020 Gender Plan of Action is aligned with the approach of Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development, calling for gender to be mainstreamed in the implementation of the Convention, namely in achieving its objectives and those of the Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011-2020 and its Aichi Biodiversity Targets. Aichi Target 14, in particular, puts the focus on women: "By 2020, ecosystems that provide essential services, including services related to water, and contribute to health, livelihoods and well-being, are restored and safeguarded, taking into account the needs of women, indigenous and local communities and the poor and vulnerable." This target is particularly relevant for rural women, whose livelihoods are directly dependent on local biological resources and ecosystem services, and whose needs are often underrepresented and undervalued.

As the Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development comes into effect in January 2016, collective efforts will need to be mobilized to ensure that these goals and targets are translated into action that has a meaningful impact on the health and welfare of our societies and the biodiversity and ecosystem services on which we rely. For rural women, the promise of the Sustainable Development Goals is one of greater empowerment and a greater opportunity to play an active role in shaping their future and that of their families and communities. Men, women, boys and girls will all need to be involved to make this promise a reality.

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