



MESSAGE OF THE EXECUTIVE SECRETARY

OF THE

CONVENTION ON BIOLOGICAL DIVERSITY

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on the occasion of

INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY

8 March 2018

"Time is now: Rural and urban activists transforming women's lives"

For this year's International Women's Day, I join my voice to the call to action to empower women in all settings, rural and urban, and to draw inspiration from the activists working to achieve women's rights and gender equality. As we know, women environmental leaders come in many different forms – as mayors, company directors, academics, farmers, foresters, and community organizers, they are distinguished in taking strong stands to ensure environmental protection, biodiversity conservation and sustainable practices.

Rural women are critical actors in the implementation of the Convention on Biological Diversity, as they face the challenges associated with biodiversity loss, conservation and sustainable use on a daily basis. However, rural women across the world fare worse than rural men and urban women and men on almost every gender and development measure. Rural women disproportionately experience poverty, and face systemic discrimination in accessing land and natural resources. And yet many rural and indigenous women are at the front lines of struggles to defend land and wildlife and secure natural resource rights, facing threats of violence and often death. For these women, the fight for environmental protection, human rights, and gender equality are one and the same.

Achieving gender equality and women's empowerment is a central element of the sustainable development goals, where it is addressed as both a standalone goal and a cross-cutting component. Engaging rural women is essential to achieving these commitments, as evident in targets to ensure equitable access, ownership and control over land and natural resources, as well as to double



agricultural productivity and incomes of small-scale food producers, with a focus on women. It is clear that empowering rural women can drive change on many fronts towards advancing sustainable development.

One example demonstrating how multiple benefits can be achieved comes from a UN Women project in Guinea, which aimed to empower rural women and improve their livelihoods, food security, and protect biodiversity. Rural women were supported to generate income through cooperatives growing Moringa trees, the pods and leaves of which are vitamin and protein-rich, and are in demand by international markets. A drought-resistant species, the tree also supports biodiversity through soil regeneration, and prevents erosion. The project helped cooperative members share ideas and learn new skills, supporting them to become leaders improving life in their communities.

In working to implement the Convention's 2015-2020 Gender Plan of Action, the Secretariat has been active in engaging a range of partners to address gender issues in biodiversity policy and implementation. Recent efforts, undertaken with generous financial support of the Government of Sweden, include bringing together gender and environment specialists with biodiversity experts in the South East Asia and Pacific region, to develop regional training tools on gender and biodiversity. The approach has been to catalyze engagement, create a space for dialogue, and produce tools to help partners better address gender issues in biodiversity planning – including those of particular importance for rural women.

As we recognize rural women as drivers of sustainable development and vital leaders in conserving biodiversity, I ask you to join with me – in taking action on all fronts to ensure these crucial actors have the opportunities they need to engage fully and effectively, and to lead the way forward.
