**CONCEPT NOTE[[1]](#footnote-1)  
National Human Right Institutions and gender equality for women and girls living in rural areas.**

**The role of national human rights institutions**

National Human Rights Institutions (NHRIs) help promote and protect the human rights of rural women and girls. NHRIs play a crucial role in the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda, in addition to robust civil society participation.[[2]](#footnote-2) Through the Sustainable Development Goals, governments have set the concrete deadline of 2030 for the elimination of gender inequality so that women and girls are not left behind.[[3]](#footnote-3) NHRIs act as a national mechanism to promote and protect the human rights of women and girls, including those living in rural areas.

CSW 62’s priority theme of *Challenges and opportunities in achieving gender equality and the empowerment of rural women and girls* is an important opportunity to highlight the role of NHRIs in promoting women’s and girls’ rights in rural areas. At the international level NHRIs officially engage with UN bodies and mechanisms such as the Committee on the Elimination of All forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW Committee), they submit information and parallel reports to other treaty bodies that cover gender equality, and deliver stakeholder reports to the Universal Periodic Review which encompass women’s economic empowerment. At a domestic level, NHRIs monitor and encourage implementation of United Nations recommendations relating to gender equality and can also provide grievance mechanisms for women suffering from discrimination or human rights abuses.

This paper briefly outlines some of the ways that NHRIs can promote and protect the human rights of women and girls living in rural areas.

**NHRI role in promoting and protecting the human rights of women and girls living in rural areas**

Across the world, many countries have laws and policies that protect women and girls from discrimination and promote gender equality. However, the situation on the ground can often be very different.

Entrenched roles, attitudes and stereotypes, especially relating to women/girls in rural and regional areas also mean that many experience poverty, discrimination and unequal access to health services and the education and justice systems. Women and girls living in rural areas can also be particularly vulnerable to violations of their human rights, such as gender-based violence, harassment and human trafficking.

NHRIs have a role to play in addressing these issues at the national level and bringing those issues to the attention of the international UN system, including CSW.

A key role of a NHRI is to act as a bridge to between the State and civil society and to use its mandate to promote gender equality and eliminate discrimination in keeping with the Universal Declaration of Human and all other international Conventions.

NHRIs can use their legal mandates to promote and protect the rights of women and girls in rural areas by:

* Encouraging States to ratify and domesticate international human rights treaties into national legislation, policies and practices relating to gender equality
* Promoting the rights of rural women and girls to education and employment
* Encouraging rural women’s labour market participation
* Promoting rural women’s equal access to credit and banking support for self-employment
* Monitoring the position of rural women’s economic, social, cultural, civil and political rights
* Reporting to national, regional and international bodies on the realisation of rural women’s rights, including UN treaty bodies and the UPR
* Using national inquiry powers to investigate issues that impact upon rural women and girls
* Providing accessible complaint mechanisms, including by receiving complaints from rural women suffering from direct and indirect discrimination
* Engaging and collaborating with rural women stakeholders in the development of policies.

**Enhancing NHRI independent registration and participation at CSW**

NHRI involvement in CSW 62 provides an important opportunity to highlight the role of NHRIs in promoting and protecting the human rights of women and girls living in rural areas. However, NHRIs are yet to be able to engage independently at CSW sessions as they can at the Human Rights Council as UN-recognised institutions with an independent and unique role from government and civil society. This is despite many years of advocacy since 2009 and the 2015 General Assembly Resolution (A/RES/70/163) and the 2017 General Assembly (A/RES/72/181) that calls on enhanced independent participation of NHRIs in relevant UN mechanisms and processes including CSW.

Given their important role in promoting and protecting the human rights of women and girls, NHRIs are continuing their advocacy for the enhanced recognition and participation of NHRIs compliant with the Paris Principles to allow for their future contribution to CSW.

GANHRI is advocating for the same participation of NHRIs at CSW as they enjoy at the UN Human Rights Council including:

* Independent registration and ID badge to participate at CSW (distinct and separate to government and NGO registration)
* Standing to submit written and oral statements
* Standing to organise Side Events and Parallel Events
* Identified seating within the CSW chamber
* Observer status for negotiations on the Agreed Conclusions and CSW Resolutions

Among the UN bodies based in New York, the UN Open-Ended Working Group, in its decision 7/1 on “Modalities of participation of NHRIs in the work of the Open-ended Working Group on Ageing” (December 2016) agreed to include NHRIs to independently participate in its work as set out in A/AC.278/2016/L.1. This arrangement could be considered and adopted by CSW.

GANHRI and APF will be publishing a report on NHRI case studies that reveal the role of NHRIs in using their official mandates to promote and protect human rights to empower rural women and girls. This report will be tabled and available at the NHRI side-event that will be held at the Australian UN Mission on Friday 16 March from 13:15-14:30. The side-event will also feature NHRIs speaking on their work relation to women and girls living in rural areas including the challenges and opportunities within their respective countries.

1. Prepared by the Asia Pacific Forum of National Human Rights Institutions. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions (2016*) Protecting and Enlarging the Space for Public Debates and Participation of All Civil Society Actors for the Implementation of SDGs and Human Rights.* GANHRI Background Paper. July 12, 2016. Geneva, Palais des Nations, Switzerland. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. UN Secretary General’s High-Level Panel on Women’s Economic Empowerment (2016*) Leave no One Behind: A Call for Action for Gender Equality and Women’s Economic Empowerment.* [↑](#footnote-ref-3)