Parliamentary Assembly
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COUNCIL OF EUROPE
CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

Recommendation 1321 (1997)[1]

Improving the situation of women in rural society

Parliamentary Assembly

1. The Assembly refers to its Recommendation 1296 (1996) on a European Charter for Rural Areas and to Recommendation 1269 (1995) on achieving real progress in women's rights as from 1995, as well as to the World Summit on Social Development (Copenhagen, 9-13 March 1995) and the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action adopted by the 4th World Conference on Women (Beijing, 4-15 September 1995).

2. Society in general, and even rural women themselves, have greatly undervalued and often completely ignored the role of women in maintaining and developing the living countryside with its rich and diversified heritage and traditions.

3. Women in rural society and especially in farming have always been an "invisible work force". Too little has been done to fully recognise women's role on farms and in rural communities - legally, economically, technologically and in statistics.

4. A full recognition of women's role in rural development would greatly contribute to rural prosperity and would, in particular, help sustainable rural development in the poorer countries and regions of the world.

5. Women's work of raising children and of running a (rural) household should be fully recognised as having merit and as qualification for other jobs, and should be taken into account in statistics. It should be remunerated.

6. To strengthen the family and the rural household, parents should, during their children's pre-school years, have a free choice between placing their children in nurseries or receiving a monthly sum of money per child corresponding to the cost of keeping a child in a public nursery scheme.

7. Policies attracting women and young girls to stay in the countryside must be encouraged since those policies which lead to their leaving will eventually result in a total abandonment of rural areas.

8. The situation of women in rural regions in the European economies in transition is a particularly grave problem because of the dismantling of the former social and economic structures.

9. Consequently, the Assembly recommends that the Committee of Ministers:

9.1. include in its intergovernmental work programme specific activities of relevance to rural women;

9.2. initiate this work by convening a conference to analyse the situation of women in rural areas, inviting representatives of organisations with specific interest and knowledge in this field, with a view to identifying priority areas where positive action is needed. The Parliamentary Assembly and the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of Europe should be associated with this work;

1. See Doc. 7735, report of the Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development, rapporteurs: Mrs Johansson and Mr Korkeaoja. Text adopted by the Standing Committee, acting on behalf of the Assembly, on 19 March 1997.

9.3. call on member governments, governments of countries having special guest or observer status with the Assembly, the European Union, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development and the United Nations to:

a. Improve statistical data and information

1. improve the collection, analysis and dissemination of data, distinguishing by sex and place of residence for both west European countries and the central and east European countries, within the framework of mainstream statistical information systems (such as Eurostat);

2. develop new (and comparable) concepts, definitions and standards of economic indicators in order to accord greater visibility to, and promote greater understanding of, the relative economic contributions of women and men through paid and unpaid work in both the formal and informal sectors of rural economies;

3. provide gender training programmes for statisticians and other users and producers of statistics, with a special emphasis on the nature and context of rural women's activities (different housekeeping activities, childcare, agricultural activities, etc.);

4. carry out research to identify the ways in which economic, political and social reforms differentially affect various segments of the population (based on place of residence, gender, age, economic status, race, ethnicity, etc.);

5. promote participatory research and data collection methodologies in rural areas in order to complete the gaps and weaknesses in statistical records.

b. Increase women's participation in decision making

1. create an environment that encourages rural women's increased participation in decision-making fora through the provision of childcare facilities at meetings and holding meetings at hours compatible with family schedules;

2. develop and promote personal-skills training courses for rural women on leadership, public speaking, decision making and self-assertion;

3. create new channels for enabling women to have an input into the decision-making process by promoting participatory approaches and involving women's groups and associations in decision-making processes at all levels;

4. encourage dialogue and the building of links between local women's associations and networks and rural development organisations and authorities;

5. promote affirmative action policies in technical ministries such as agriculture and rural development.

c. Make an integrated approach to equality a primary concern

1. ensure a gender perspective is incorporated into the mandates and activities of organisations through the development of concrete action plans and programmes;

2. disseminate information among the organisations/institutions on the situation of rural women, their concerns, and the required strategies to be taken for their advancement;

3. develop methodologies which allow the particularities of each sex and the needs of rural women to be taken into account in the planning processes at all levels;

4. provide training and awareness-raising programmes for decision makers, as well as for staff of those ministries/government bodies dealing with rural issues, on the experiences and needs of women in rural areas and the importance of recognising gender in rural development policies and planning.

d. Assure equal access to social services and cultural revival

1. ensure that rural and urban women have equal access to social institutions and services;

2. promote and disseminate information on the rich and diversified rural cultural heritage, and the role of women in maintaining it, among rural communities and between these and urban centres;

3. promote initiatives which will provide rural girls and women with satisfactory and rewarding possibilities for filling their leisure hours.

e. Increase women's participation in the economy

1. Work

1. broaden the range of income-generating opportunities for rural women, and especially for young women, by providing more balanced support for rural activities, including part-time work, and by fully exploiting the opportunities offered by new communication technologies for the maximum of occupations that can be exercised in the countryside (see Assembly Recommendation 1122 (1990) on the revival of the countryside by means of information technology);

2. promote women entrepreneurs by assuring adequate training and access to resources. The direct marketing and sale of farm products by the farmer and his/her spouse must be facilitated and promoted;

3. develop legislative initiatives that promote equality in the wage system, including more flexible working arrangements, and increase the status of women in agriculture, home enterprises, female-dominated professions, and in the informal sector. The income derived from family farming or family businesses should be shared equally between the spouses;

4. establish a proper social status for helping spouses, providing them with their own social security and pension protection;

5. increase rural women's ability to enter into paid employment by improving the infrastructure of rural communities, in particular by strengthening the provision of social and other services in rural areas, such as facilities for childcare and care of the elderly, health-care centres, information and library facilities, public transportation, as well as marketing facilities;

6. improve rural women's access to information and advice about employment and training opportunities through local media outlets (TV, radio, newspapers, etc.);

7. encourage a better sharing of domestic and family responsibilities between women and men through school and community education campaigns, and through legislative initiatives that provide for more flexible working arrangements for both women and men, without subsequent loss in pay or status of employees.

2. Education and training

1. establish local training institutions and programmes in rural areas and promote more innovative training models that fit women's daily schedules, including the development of part-time courses, community-based initiatives, correspondence courses, and distance learning at all educational levels, fully exploiting new information technology (see Assembly Recommendation 1122 (1990));

2. promote training courses for rural women in entrepreneurship, village and farm tourism, agro-forestry, fish farming, integrated production methods such as organic farming, as well as in business planning, accounting, financing and loan procedures, issues regarding taxation and marketing, etc., but also in non-traditional rural occupations which can be performed anywhere by the use of new communication technology (architecture, translation, etc.);

3. create and strengthen local advisory training programmes, extension services and basic and higher education for rural women to increase their awareness about, and access to, less traditional career and business opportunities.

3. Land

1. undertake legislative and administrative reforms to give rural women, and especially married women, full and equal rights to land ownership;

2. review land redistribution programmes to ensure safeguards for households where the head of the family is a woman, as well as for the rights of married women to joint shares of property.

4. Credit

1. revise fiscal regulations for farms and businesses to take account of the particular characteristics of rural enterprises;

2. promote special credit programmes to facilitate the setting up of small businesses by rural women;

3. review the access to financial credit by married women