



## CSW 68 Gender and Poverty Brief Rural Women and Poverty

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Globally, over 70% of people in poverty live in rural areas. Agriculture continues to be a key source of economic livelihood for rural communities, and women make up about 43% of the global agricultural workforce. However, women are less likely than men to have access to new agricultural technologies and services.<sup>1</sup> Gender inequality exacerbates the disparities between rural and urban areas, such as access to education, health care, job opportunities, technologies (including the internet), childcare resources, and access to fuel, water, food, and shelter. Globally, fewer than one in five landholders are women, and women are denied the right to inherit their spouse's property in over 100 countries.<sup>2</sup> Additionally, climate change threatens the reliance on land and agriculture for rural women and necessitates policy protections for the environment.

The US is not immune to the intersectional inequalities faced by rural communities. During the early Covid-19 pandemic years of 2020-21, rural (nonmetro) areas in the US witnessed a growth rate faster than metro areas (a trend not seen since the 1990's), as many people moved from metro areas to rural areas.<sup>3</sup> One-fifth of the rural US population are people of color and women of color are among the lowest paid workers. Among full time rural workers, Black and Hispanic women make 56 cents for every dollar made by white rural men. Rural women (across racial groups) earn only 64 cents for every dollar earned by men overall.<sup>4</sup> The loss of jobs, school closures, increased need for food assistance, and rising health care costs during the pandemic revealed the *need for improved infrastructure and social systems that address gender and racial inequalities in the workforce and at home.*

As climate change leads to increased risk to wildfire, storms, and droughts, more attention should be paid to the *role of rural women in reducing climate change risks.* Some nations and regions are experiencing rural abandonment (especially in persistently poor areas). As climate change worsens, some rural communities are abandoned for areas with more economic opportunity and environmental stability. In the US and globally, the inclusion of Native Peoples, Indigenous populations, and rural women in climate change mitigation is essential. This not only involves inclusion at the levels of information sharing, but also in policy development, scientific and technological exploration, and institutionalizing indigenous practices of land management and care. For example, in Jordan, the production of high-quality native seedlings has led to increased land restoration, an effort led by a women-run plant nursery.<sup>5</sup>

### Fast Facts

- Across all races and ethnicities, women have higher rates of poverty in comparison to their male counterparts.<sup>6</sup> This disparity increases in comparisons of rural versus urban areas. In a 2019 US study, the USDA reported that about 1/3 of all rural female-headed households were poor, in comparison to about 16% of male-headed households in rural areas. The poverty rate increases by 10% for rural female-headed households with children (42.6%).<sup>7</sup>
- Across all racial groups in the US, poverty rates are higher in rural areas than in urban areas by 15.4% in 2019.<sup>8</sup> Rural Black or African American residents had the highest incidence of poverty

at 30.7%, compared to 20.7% for Black residents in urban areas. Rural Native Americans had the second highest rate of poverty at 29.6%.<sup>8</sup>

- According to the 2020 US Census, there are 2.7 million Native American, Alaska Native and Native Hawaiian people living in rural areas across the US. This is about 4.9% of all rural people living in the US.<sup>9</sup>
- In the US, the poverty rate for children is about 1 in 5, but for rural children it is about 1 in 4, with even higher rates for rural children of color.<sup>10</sup>

## Recommendations

- 1) Address the needs of rural women and girls, especially widows and other female householders, in policies to protect rights to **land ownership** and land use.
- 2) Fund and prioritize **learning opportunities** for all women, girls, and people in rural areas in the development of new technologies and agricultural innovations. **Involve rural women as experts** in the creation of new policies and technologies.
- 3) Prioritize internet access as a tool to end the **digital divide** in rural communities, and to expand employment and educational opportunities. Use **gender mainstreaming** in the development of programs that enhance the use of information and communications technologies in rural areas, with the involvement of rural women throughout the process of investigation and program development.
- 4) In the US, **prioritize rural Native American communities**, organizations, and leaders in initiatives to build and improve educational opportunities, communication technologies, healthcare facilities, economic opportunities, financial institutions, and access to clean and safe soil and water.

## Resources

Institute for Research on Poverty. 2020. [Many rural Americans are still 'Left Behind.'](#)

Henry-Nickie, Makada and Regina Seo. 2022. [Creating community-determined rural policies: How Native women transform challenges into impactful social entrepreneurship.](#) Governance Studies at Brookings.

CORI. 2023. [Who lives in rural America? The geography of rural race and ethnicity.](#)

UN Convention to Combat Desertification. 2022. [Study on differentiated impacts of desertification, land degradation and drought on women and men.](#)

UN Women. 2022. [Three challenges for rural women amid a cost-of-living crisis.](#)

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<sup>1</sup> IFAD. [Ten things to know about gender equality and rural poverty.](#)

<sup>2</sup> Halonen, Tarja. 2023. ["Securing Women's Land Rights for Increased Gender Equality, Food Security and Economic Empowerment."](#) UN Chronicle

<sup>3</sup> Dobis, Elizabeth A., Thomas P. Krumel, Jr., John Cromartie, Kelsey L. Conley, Austin Sanders, and Ruben Ortiz. 2021. [Rural America at a Glance.](#) USDA. Economic Research Service.

<sup>4</sup> Gallagher Robbins, Katherine, Jocelyn Frye, and Annie McGrew. 2018. ["The Gender Wage Gap among Rural Workers."](#) Center for American Progress.

<sup>5</sup> Halonen, Tarja. 2023. ["Securing Women's Land Rights for Increased Gender Equality, Food Security and Economic Empowerment."](#) UN Chronicle

<sup>6</sup> Bleiweis, Robin, Diana Boesch, and Alexandra Cawthorne Gaines. [The Basic Facts about Women in Poverty.](#) Center for American Progress.

<sup>7</sup> USDA. 2019. [Rural Poverty & Well-Being.](#)

<sup>8</sup> USDA. [Data show US poverty rates in 2019 higher in rural areas than in urban for racial/ethnic groups.](#) Chart detail.

<sup>9</sup> CORI. 2023. [Who lives in rural America? The geography of rural race and ethnicity.](#)

<sup>10</sup> Institute for Research on Poverty. 2020. [Many Rural American Are Still 'Left Behind.'](#)