

# National Regional, Rural, Remote and Very Remote Community Legal Network

<https://clcs.org.au/4rs-network/>



23 February 2026

*By email* to NGO Reps on the Australian Delegation to the UN Commission on the Status of Women 70's session

## Summary of 4Rs Network input about CSW70 outcomes Rev.2

Dear both,

This is a summary of the key issues and themes raised, which are set out with track changes and comments in the word document attached.

### 1. Visible reflection of the diversity of women and girls throughout

- The initial recital of international instruments needs to be supplemented by other drafting early in the outcomes to make the full diversity of women and girls visible
- Consideration should be given to expanding the term 'all women and girls' in the current draft to ensure it communicates diversity. Adjusting to 'the full diversity of all women and girls' throughout is suggested.

### 2. Visible reflection of where women and girls live throughout

- When drafting in documents uses language such as the following it helps to emphasise geographic inclusion, which is often absent as an issue unless specifically highlighted. This absence invites backdoor discrimination and excuses whereby women and girls in non-urban areas are structurally subordinated even though language is rhetorically inclusive
- The following are examples of language which would enhance the drafting of the outcomes by helping to emphasise geographic inclusion i.e.
  - 'wherever women and girls live',
  - 'accessible to women and girls where they are located or live',

- ‘geographically inclusive of the diversity of women and girls in the places where they live’
- ‘Geographically equitable and inclusive for women and girls including women and girls in rural, remote, isolated, maritime and non-urban areas’

### **3. Visible inclusion of indigenous women and girls throughout**

- There are several references to indigenous women and girls in Rev 2 but this is not carried through holistically and it does not reflect that indigenous women and girls are among the most marginalised, discriminated and subordinated and that justice and access to justice for indigenous women and girls requires specific treatment, momentum and accountability.
- The human rights of indigenous women and girls should be visibly reflected throughout the outcomes, including ensuring that the expression of the outcomes, justice and access to justice ensure cultural safety for indigenous women and girls.

### **4. Visible inclusion of women and girls in rural, remote, isolated, maritime, non-urban and crisis affected areas throughout**

- The majority of the world’s multi-dimensionally poor are in non-urban areas, women and girls included.
- Safety nets to ensure the human rights of women and girls in non-urban areas are systemically absent around the world, justice and access to justice systems are often critically insufficient, inaccessible and fail women and girls in non-urban areas. These failings interlink with social, political and commercial determinants of inequality and inequity including spatial and geographic inequality within states and sub-national areas.
- Accounts of ‘intersectionality’ often fail to include where women and girls are located (geography, place, location) and associated multi-dimensional power relations which may apply. Intersectional treatments often fail to engage with the lived experiences and obvious effects of power relations which contribute to conditions in many non-urban areas, including via the absence of safety nets. A far more engaged, principled and human rights-based approach, is required.
- The widespread ‘normalisation’ of greater levels of disadvantage in rural, remote, isolated and non-urban areas, normalises multiple forms of structural discrimination and inadequate human rights inclusion.
- This is critically important in Australia, which is the 6th largest country in the world by landmass, one of the most urbanised and one with the greatest challenges to achieve effective, accessible, geographic justice coverage and

access to justice where women and girls are located including in very remote, remote, rural and regional areas.

- These factors also mean Australia should provide leadership.
- Consequently, consistent, visible language inclusion of women and girls in rural, remote, maritime and non-urban areas throughout the outcomes document is proposed. This would build on the current inclusions which while very important are also not logically carried through across the outcomes.
- Additionally, women and girls in crisis affected areas should be visibly and fully included for similar reasons, with this carried through across the outcomes.

#### **5. Broadest and most extensive approaches to ‘justice’ and ‘access to justice’ supported**

- The human rights of the full diversity of women and girls and achieving substantive equality wherever women and girls are located, including in non-urban areas, requires the broadest and most extensive approaches possible to the problems of ‘justice’ and ‘access to justice’, and what is required for human rights compliant, effective and sustainable improvements.
- This approach is particularly important for the full diversity of women and girls in non-urban areas to make real and sustained progress against the backdrop of the entrenched patterns of systemic and chronic justice and access to justice shortfalls and failures

#### **6. References to ‘justice’ and ‘access to justice’ must mean in the lives of women and girls**

- References to ‘justice’ and ‘access to justice’ in the outcomes should be expressed to mean justice and access to justice in the lives of women and girls and according to their lived experience.
- This means ‘justice’ and ‘access to justice’ as an actuality achieved according to the full diversity of women and girl’s experiences, including practice.

#### **7. References to equality must mean substantive equality**

- The outcomes will be enhanced if the differences between formal and substantive equality are outlined to clarify that references to equality in the outcomes means substantive equality.
- This is particularly important for the full diversity of women and girls in rural, remote, isolated, maritime and non-urban areas because systems and approaches which rely on formal equality often dramatically let them down. Reasons for this include that formal equality is often ‘urbanist’, that is it reflects

structural urbanism and urban normativity, often disconnected from and not effective for a wide diversity of non-urban contexts.

## **8. Mainstreaming requires nuance and safety nets**

- Emphasis on mainstreaming in the draft reflects the intention to achieve full implementation via all relevant structures
- However, more nuance is required to avoid references to ‘mainstreaming’ being interpreted as ‘assimilation’ or ‘homogenisation’ - that is contrary to the human rights of the full diversity of women and girls, including rights of self-determination, the rights of groups facing structural discrimination including indigenous peoples.
- Additionally, none of the references to mainstreaming, clearly articulate safety-nets however safety nets are required to achieve substantive equality. This is a major factor for indigenous and non-indigenous women and girls facing disadvantage in rural, remote, maritime and non-urban areas because mainstreaming can be or become urbanist, or urban normative - failing equity, substantive equality and human rights for all including in non-urban areas.

## **9. Preventative justice and access to justice responses are not sufficiently reflected**

- Equality, justice and access to justice for women and girls requires integrated emphasis on justice and access to justice operating preventatively as well as in response to all aspects of human rights, equality, wellbeing and inclusion.
- The approach to justice and access to justice in the draft should be revised to reflect.
- This includes ways justice and access to justice can contribute in human-rights advancing ways to reducing threats to the safety of women and girls, reducing criminality towards women and girls, reducing use of carceral and other justice responses which impinge on human rights or are ineffective in achieving the structural, systemic, human rights, equality and equity objectives intended.
- Women and girls in rural, remote, isolated, maritime and non-urban areas are often disproportionately impacted due to rates of disadvantage, poverty, gaps in services, supports, therapeutic, diversionary and other holistic options.

## **10. Accountability to the full diversity of women and girls**

- Many inclusions in the draft outcomes aim to achieve real progress however the mechanisms to promote, drive, ensure and assess progress often do not include

accountability to women and girls affected at all. Further, accountability to the full diversity of women and girls affected is absent.

- Human rights, empowerment, and sustainable improvements require accountability to women and girls affected including the full diversity of women and girls in rural, remote, isolated, maritime and non-urban areas.

#### **11. Online services, mobile services, and models - who decides?**

- The lived experience needs of women and girls in rural, remote, isolated, maritime and non-urban areas and their preferences and agency are rarely reflected in how justice and access to justice are ‘delivered’ or to be ‘accessed’ by them. Generally, these women and girls have little influence over decisions about justice and access to justice services. Decisions are often made far away; women and girls are treated as recipients of services which external actors determine.
- Resource constraints relating to justice, courts, and legal aid services often mean these agencies apply priorities which may have little relationship to the justice, legal and access to justice needs of the women, girls and others concerned. The effects of different models on the diversity of women and girls, is often approached narrowly by external decision makers, who are generally not required to consider or address broader effects and connections.
- Online platforms implemented by justice systems and various legal assistance agencies, are examples of process and delivery models which may have very different effects across the diversity of women and girls including across the diversity of women and girls in non-urban areas.
- Mobile services can be an example of a service model which may be decided upon externally, whether or not it is a model that meets needs in the way that women and girls in non-urban areas would choose if they could guide or direct these decisions.
- The issue of who decides and who or what decisions are accountable to, may indicate vertical accountability to an organisational or government hierarchy with little if any horizontal accountability to the women and girls whose justice and access to justice is in question.
- Approaches which may seem like a solution to external actors, or the ‘best available option’, may instead be superficial, tangential or ineffective in relation to the nature and extent of the justice and access to justice needs. Justice systems and legal assistance providers may themselves be caught in systems, which provide little flexibility.

- Whether decisions, resource levels and models are accountable to the justice and access to justice needs of women and girls in non-urban areas is a major pivot point in striving for substantive justice and access to justice.

Please also see the comments on the text of Rev 2 attached.

Regards,

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