

CEDAW AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT: EMPOWERING WOMEN WITH LAW FROM THE TOP DOWN, ACTIVISM FROM THE BOTTOM UP

Marta R. Vanegas & Lisa R. Pruitt[†]

ABSTRACT

The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) is one of the most widely ratified human rights treaties in history, yet many view it as a failure in terms of what it has achieved for women. In spite of the lack of a meaningful enforcement mechanism and various other shortcomings, however, CEDAW has inspired feminist activism around the world and helped raise women's legal consciousness. While CEDAW itself is widely viewed as a product of feminist activism in the international arena, this essay explores the Convention's role as a source of—and tool for—grassroots feminist activism. Our focus is on such activism in rural areas of both developed and developing countries, places where law is often functionally absent.

CEDAW recognizes rural women as a particularly disadvantaged group in need of additional rights. Article 14 addresses rural women exclusively and specifically, stipulating that they—like their urban counterparts—should enjoy a panoply of rights: education, health care, and an array of civil and political rights. Moreover, Article 14 enumerates for rural women rights related to participation in agriculture and development more generally. It also includes the right for rural women to organize self-help groups and cooperatives for purposes of obtaining “equal access to economic opportunities through employment or self-employment,” a right not mentioned elsewhere in relation to all women. Finally, Article 14 enumerates for rural women a wider range of socioeconomic rights than CEDAW elsewhere recognizes for all women. These include rights to various types of infrastructure, including water, sanitation, electricity, transport, and housing.

[†] Marta R. Vanegas is a 2011 graduate of University of California Davis School of Law, where Lisa R. Pruitt is Professor of Law, lrpruitt@ucdavis.edu. Thanks to Susan Machum and Barbara Pini for comments on an earlier draft and to Monica J. Crooms for superb and tenacious research and editorial support. Any remaining errors are ours.

This essay first considers how Article 14 is consistent with contemporary feminism's greater focus on socioeconomic rights as a reflection of women's material concerns and lack of economic power. It considers these rights against a rural backdrop, where socioeconomic deprivations tend to be greater and where Member States face spatial and other distinct challenges to economic development, as well as to the provision of basic services such as healthcare and education. We examine Member States' responses to their Article 14 commitments to empowering rural women, with particular attention to how Member States have encouraged and facilitated self-organization by women, as required by Article 14(2)(e). Member States' periodic reports to the U.N. Division for the Advancement of Women indicate that governments seek to achieve rural women's empowerment through the women's grassroots activism, including via local self-help groups (SHGs) and cooperatives as envisioned by 14(2)(e). Indeed, some evidence suggests that Member States benefit directly from rural women's self-organizing when women's SHGs and cooperatives go beyond facilitating women's economic empowerment to become vehicles for delivering health, education, and other services in rural areas. These women's organizations thus do a range of work under the ambit of rural empowerment.

The essay next considers local women's organizations in four Member States, two developed nations and two developing ones. We analyze how these organizations draw on and benefit from CEDAW's Article 14(2)(e) mandate (however weak a mandate it is, practically speaking) to encourage women's collective mobilization. Thus, the essay sketches a portrait of the potential and actual symbiosis between top-down lawmaking and bottom-up activism to empower women. In short, we focus not on CEDAW's role as an enforceable human rights treaty, but rather on its function as an expressive document that has fostered and facilitated applied feminism.

INTRODUCTION	266
I. BACKGROUND: A SHORT PRIMER ON CEDAW	271
II. SPATIAL INEQUALITY, STASIS, AND ABSENCE OF LAW IN RURAL PLACES	276
III. CEDAW AND MEMBER STATES' COUNTRY REPORTS: TOP-DOWN LAW MAKING.....	279
A. Encouraging Formation of Cooperatives	282
B. Building Local Capacity.....	289
C. Improving Access to Telecommunications	292
IV. BOTTOM-UP ACTIVISM: WOMEN'S GRASSROOTS ORGANIZING	297
A. Canada.....	299
1. Rural Women Making Change.....	301
2. Rural Women's Health Networks	303
B. Australia	307
1. Australian Women in Agriculture	307
2. Rural Women's Network	309
C. India.....	311
1. Self-Employed Women's Association	312
2. The Mann Deshi Mahila Group	314
D. China	316
1. All-China Women's Federation	316
2. Cultural Development Center for Rural Women	317
CONCLUSION.....	319

INTRODUCTION

CEDAW, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women,¹ is one of the most widely ratified human rights treaties in history,² yet many view it as a failure in terms of what it has achieved for women.³ In spite of the lack of a meaningful enforcement mechanism⁴ and various other

-
1. Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, *opened for signature* Mar. 1, 1980, 1249 U.N.T.S. 13 (entered into force Sept. 3, 1981) [hereinafter CEDAW].
 2. See *Short History of CEDAW Convention*, U.N. DIVISION ADVANCEMENT WOMEN, <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/history.htm> (last visited Jan. 3, 2012).
 3. See, e.g., Sandra Coliver, *United Nations Machineryes on Women's Rights: How Might They Better Help Women Whose Rights Are Being Violated?*, in *NEW DIRECTIONS IN HUMAN RIGHTS* 25, 38–44 (E.L. Lutz et al. eds., 1989) [hereinafter Coliver] (comparing the Women's Convention with the Human Rights Commission (HRC) and criticizing the failure of CEDAW to agree on minimum standards); Anne F. Bayefsky, *The CEDAW Convention: Its Contribution Today*, 94 AM. SOC'Y INT'L L. PROC. 197, 200 (2000) (arguing that CEDAW fails to define discrimination, and that instead of promoting equality, it promotes a radical feminist agenda and refuses to recognize any legitimate distinction between men and women); Tracy E. Higgins et al., *Gender Equality and Customary Marriage: Bargaining in the Shadow of Post-Apartheid Legal Pluralism*, 30 FORDHAM INT'L L.J. 1653, 1660 (2007) (quoting U.N. Comm. on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women, General Recommendation 21, Equality in Marriage and Family Relations, ¶ 13, U.N. Doc A/49/38 at art. 16(1)(a) and (b), comm. 15 (1994) [hereinafter General Recommendation 21] (“[A]lthough most countries report that national constitutions comply with CEDAW, ‘custom, tradition and [states’] failure to enforce these laws in reality contravene the Convention.”) (alteration in original); Nancy Kim, *Toward a Feminist Theory of Human Rights: Straddling the Fence Between Western Imperialism and Uncritical Absolutism*, 25 COLUM. HUM. RTS. L. REV. 49, 79–82 (1993) (pointing out weak enforcement provisions of CEDAW and problems with too many countries having entered substantive reservations to its provisions); Susan Smolens, *Violence Against Women: Consciousness and Law in Four Central European Emerging Democracies—Poland, Hungary, Slovakia, and the Czech Republic*, 15/16 TUL. EUR. & CIV. L.F. 1, 8 (2000–2001) (arguing that CEDAW was a failure from the beginning); Jennifer T. Sudduth, *CEDAW's Flaws: A Critical Analysis of Why CEDAW Is Failing to Protect a Woman's Right to Education in Pakistan*, 38 J.L. & EDUC. 563, 563 (2009) (arguing that CEDAW failed to protect a woman's right to education in Pakistan); Amanda Ulrich, *Can the World's Poorest Women Be Saved?: A Critical Third World Feminist Analysis of the CEDAW's Rural Women's Economic Rights and Alternative Approaches to Women's Economic Empowerment*, 45 ALBERTA L. REV. 477, 492–93 (2007) (arguing that CEDAW failed to take into account status and societal context of rural woman, making it unlikely to help rural women reach their full economic potential without attention to local practices concerning power structures, co-ops, and other self-help groups).
 4. See MARILOU MCPHEDRAN ET AL., *THE FIRST CEDAW IMPACT STUDY: FINAL REPORT* 25–26 (2000), available at <http://iwrp.org/projects/cedaw/>; Jessica Neuwirth,

shortcomings,⁵ however, CEDAW has inspired feminist activism around the world⁶ and helped raise women's legal consciousness.⁷ Of course, CEDAW is widely seen as a product of feminist activism, but this essay explores the Convention's role as an expressive document, which has fostered—both directly and indirectly—feminist activism in rural parts of both developed and developing countries.⁸

CEDAW recognizes rural women as a particularly disadvantaged group in need of additional rights.⁹ Article 14 addresses rural women exclusively and specifically, stipulating that they—like their urban counterparts—should enjoy the panoply of CEDAW rights: education, health care, and an array of civil and political rights.¹⁰ Moreover, Article 14 enumerates for rural women rights related to participation in agriculture and development more generally.¹¹ As a

Inequality Before the Law: Holding States Accountable for Sex Discriminatory Laws Under the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women and Through the Beijing Platform for Action, 18 HARV. HUM. RTS. J. 19, 40 (2005) (stating that lack of public visibility of monitoring process only makes it more difficult to hold states accountable).

5. See, e.g., Johanna E. Bond, *Gender, Discourse, and Customary Law in Africa*, 83 S. CAL. L. REV. 509, 525–28 (2010) (discussing several flaws of CEDAW, most notably that it treats culture as a “uniformly negative influence on women’s lives”).
6. See, e.g., Casey Truelove, *UN Commission on the Status of Women Celebrates 15th Anniversary of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action*, 55 HUM. RTS. ADVOC. 2, 3 (2010), available at http://www.humanrightsadvocates.org/wp-content/uploads/2010/05/HRA_Vol55.pdf; Michele Grigolo, *The CEDAW Ordinance of San Francisco: Mainstreaming, Translating and Implementing Women’s Human Rights at the City Level*, (Nov. 2008) (unpublished manuscript), available at www.fondazionefeltrinelli.it/dm_0/FF/FeltrinelliCmsPortale/0389.pdf.
7. See generally SALLY ENGLE MERRY, *HUMAN RIGHTS AND GENDER VIOLENCE: TRANSLATING INTERNATIONAL LAW INTO LOCAL JUSTICE* (2006) (analyzing in part the role CEDAW has played in promoting human rights and curtailing violence against women in male dominated cultures); Sally Engle Merry, *New Legal Realism and the Ethnography of Transnational Law*, 31 LAW & SOC. INQUIRY 975, 977 (2006) (discussing how “human rights ideas” move from the realm of the transnational to the local, where they may be appropriated by social movements and in some places “become part of everyday legal consciousness”).
8. This essay does not consider the possible use of CEDAW in litigation. For more on that topic, see Bond, *supra* note 5, at 528–34.
9. See Lisa R. Pruitt, *Deconstructing CEDAW’s Article 14: Naming and Explaining Rural Difference*, 17 WM. & MARY J. WOMEN & L. 347, 350–51 (2011) [hereinafter Pruitt, *Deconstructing*]; Lisa R. Pruitt, *Migration, Development, and the Promise of CEDAW for Rural Women*, 30 MICH. J. INT’L L. 707, 729 (2009) [hereinafter Pruitt, *Migration*].
10. CEDAW, *supra* note 1, at art. 14(2).
11. *Id.*; see also Pruitt, *Deconstructing*, *supra* note 9, at 355–58 (examining the drafting history of Article 14 to better understand how rural women came to be identified as a

related matter, it includes the right for women to organize self-help groups (SHGs) and cooperatives for purposes of obtaining “equal access to economic opportunities through employment or self-employment,” a right not enumerated elsewhere in relation to all women.¹² Finally, Article 14 enumerates for rural women a wider range of socioeconomic rights than CEDAW elsewhere recognizes for all women.¹³ These include rights to various types of infrastructure, including water, sanitation, electricity, transportation, and housing.¹⁴

This essay first discusses Article 14 in relation to contemporary feminism’s greater focus on socioeconomic rights as a reflection of women’s material concerns and lack of economic power.¹⁵ We

distinct group and how drafters determined which needs were most significant for them).

12. CEDAW, *supra* note 1, art. 14(2)(e).

13. *Id.* at art. 14(2); *see also* Pruitt, *Migration*, *supra* note 9, at 749–50. In some ways, however, Article 14 seems to narrow the education and healthcare rights guaranteed to rural women because the relevant portions of Article 14(2) use narrower language to define these rights than is used elsewhere in CEDAW. Pruitt, *Deconstructing*, *supra* note 9, at 351, 357, 367, 371–72.

14. CEDAW, *supra* note 1, art. 14(2)(h).

15. *See* Hilary Charlesworth, *What Are Women’s International Human Rights?*, in HUMAN RIGHTS OF WOMEN: NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL PERSPECTIVES 58, 60 (Rebecca J. Cook ed., 1994) (arguing that the structure of human rights law has been based on the silence of women and that the reason women are in “an inferior position” is that “they have no real power in either the public or private worlds” and international human rights law “reinforces their powerlessness”); Hilary Charlesworth & Christine Chinkin, *The Gender of Jus Cogens*, 15 HUM. RTS. Q. 63, 69 (1993) (asserting that international law has given primacy to civil and political rights, which tend to protect men in their functioning in public life, while less importance has been “accorded to economic and social rights which affect life in the private sphere”); Leilani Farha, *Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women: Women Claiming Economic, Social and Cultural Rights — The CEDAW Potential*, in SOCIO-ECONOMIC RIGHTS JURISPRUDENCE: EMERGING TRENDS IN COMPARATIVE AND INTERNATIONAL LAW 553, 553 (Malcolm Langford ed., 2008) (asserting the greater significance of socioeconomic rights to women (citing Hilary Charlesworth, Christine Chinkin & Shelly Wright, *Feminist Approaches to International Law*, 85 AM. J. INT’L L. 613, 635 (1991))); INT’L FED’N FOR HUMAN RIGHTS, MONTRÉAL PRINCIPLES ON WOMEN’S ECONOMIC, SOCIAL, AND CULTURAL RIGHTS 1–2 (2002), available at <http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/46f1462e0.html> (repeatedly asserting the significance of CEDAW to “economic, social and cultural rights”); *cf.* Margaret Snyder, *Unlikely Godmother: The UN and the Global Women’s Movement*, in GLOBAL FEMINISM: TRANSNATIONAL WOMEN’S ACTIVISM, ORGANIZING, AND HUMAN RIGHTS 24, 27 (Myra Marx Ferree & Aili Mari Tripp eds., 2006) [hereinafter *Unlikely Godmother*] (“[The focus of the] women and development movement [was] that women be seen not solely as objects of maternal and child care but also, based on mounting research, as active agents of economic productivity on farms and in

analyze this issue against a rural backdrop, where socioeconomic deprivations tend to be greater and where Member States face spatial and other distinct challenges to economic development, as well as to the provision of services.¹⁶ We next examine Member States' responses to their Article 14 commitments to empower rural women, with particular attention to how Member States have encouraged and enabled self-organization by women. Member States' periodic reports to the U.N. Division for the Advancement of Women¹⁷ indicate that governments seek to achieve rural women's empowerment by their grassroots activism, including via the local self-help groups and cooperatives envisioned by Article 14.¹⁸ Indeed, Member States often tout the proliferation of women's collectives in their periodic country reports.¹⁹ Furthermore, evidence suggests that Member States benefit directly from rural women's self-organizing when women's SHGs and cooperatives go beyond facilitating women's economic empowerment to become vehicles for delivering health, education, and other services.²⁰ These groups thus play key roles in different aspects of rural development.

markets, and of social and political change—in other words, of development.”); *id.* at 29 (stating that economic development is an entry point for broad development concerns, such as services addressing other human needs).

16. See, e.g., Lisa R. Pruitt, *Human Rights and Development for India's Rural Remnant: A Capabilities-Based Assessment*, 44 U.C. DAVIS L. REV. 803 (2011) [hereinafter Pruitt, *India's Rural Remnant*] (documenting spatial inequality along the rural-urban continuum in India with respect to health and education services); Lisa R. Pruitt, *Spatial Inequality as Constitutional Infirmity: Equal Protection, Child Poverty and Place*, 71 MONT. L. REV. 1 (2010) (documenting spatial inequality in Montana in the delivery of health and human services and discussing the inability of to achieve economies of scale for the delivery of such services in sparsely populated areas).
17. *Country Reports*, U.N. DIV. ADVANCEMENT WOMEN, <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/reports.htm> (last visited Jan. 3, 2012).
18. See, e.g., Comm. on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women, *Third Periodic Report of States Parties: Lebanon*, U.N. Doc. CEDAW/C/LBN/3 (Jul. 7, 2006) (showing self-help groups in Lebanon help achieve rural women's empowerment); Comm. on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women, *Sixth Periodic Report of States Parties: Nigeria*, U.N. Doc. CEDAW/C/NGA/6 (Oct. 5, 2006) (showing self-help groups in Nigeria help achieve rural women's empowerment).
19. See, e.g., *infra* Part III.
20. See generally *infra* Part III. To be clear, the proliferation of women's organizations cannot be linked directly to CEDAW. However, Member States sometimes list such organizations in their country reports in relation to their Article 14 commitments, which means that the Member State is claiming such a link.

Lastly, we consider several local women's organizations in each of four Member States, two developed and two developing nations.²¹ We analyze how these organizations reflect CEDAW's mandate (however weak a mandate it is) to encourage women's collective mobilization, even as it is unclear that the organizations are aware of their governments' international obligations to do so.²² We thus begin to construct a portrait of the symbiotic relationship between top-down lawmaking and bottom-up activism to empower women.²³ In short, we focus on CEDAW's role not as an enforceable human rights treaty, but rather on its function as an expressive document that appears to have fostered and facilitated the development of women's self-organization, especially in rural areas.²⁴ These women's organizations, in turn, effect rural development and influence its trajectory.

Our examination of rural women's empowerment is particularly timely because that very topic will be the focus of the 56th Session of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women, set for February-March, 2012, shortly after this essay goes to press.²⁵ The Session will address rural women's role in poverty reduction, hunger eradication and rural development. In preparation for that Session, UN Women and several other international organizations convened

-
21. See *infra* Part IV. In selecting these organizations, we considered their presence and influence as women's collectives, cooperatives, or SHGs that pay significant attention to the unique problems rural women face. By featuring these organizations here, we certainly do not mean to imply that these organizations are in any way better representatives of women's collectives and groups than many others that admirably facilitate collaboration among, and represent the interests of, rural women.
 22. See *infra* Part IV.
 23. Cf. Tony Saich, *Negotiating the State: The Development of Social Organizations in China*, 161 CHINA Q. 124, 125 (2000) ("[T]hese relationships are symbiotic because social organizations have devised strategies to negotiate with the state a relationship that maximizes their members' interests or that circumvents or deflects state intrusion.").
 24. See generally Elizabeth S. Anderson & Richard H. Pildes, *Expressive Theories of Law: A General Restatement*, 148 U. PA. L. REV. 1503 (1999); Diane Marie Amann, *Group Mentality, Expressivism and Genocide*, 2 INT'L CRIM. L. REV. 93, 117-20 (2002) (explaining the expressivist thread of legal scholarship and law's role in influencing society's values); PRACTICING HUMAN RIGHTS: TRACKING LAW BETWEEN THE GLOBAL AND THE LOCAL (Mark Goodale & Sally Engle Merry eds., 2007) (exploring the range of ways in which human rights laws made by transnational actors are translated into local norms, even when the international laws are unenforceable).
 25. UN Women, *Commission on the Status of Women, 56th Session, 27 February to 9 March 2012*, <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/csw/56sess.htm> (last visited Jan. 3, 2012) (noting that rural women's roles in "poverty and hunger eradication, development and current challenges" will be the meeting's "priority theme").

an expert group meeting in September, 2011, *Enabling Rural Women's Economic Empowerment: Institutions, Opportunities, and Participation*.²⁶ Among the recommendations associated with that preliminary meeting is one that aligns with our conclusion regarding the significance of rural women's organizing efforts at the local level: "support . . . strong formal and informal rural institutions that [enhance] women's efforts . . . and ability to negotiate for improved livelihoods . . . and advocate for change."²⁷

I. BACKGROUND: A SHORT PRIMER ON CEDAW

Equality for women has been a fundamental tenet of the United Nations since its inception in 1945.²⁸ Acting on this tenet, the United Nations adopted the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) in 1979; the Convention entered into force in 1981.²⁹ Many hailed CEDAW as the Magna Carta for women's rights, or a Bill of Rights for women.³⁰ More than

-
26. *Id.* Collaborating institutions were UN Women, Food and Agriculture Organization, International Fund for Agricultural Development, and World Food Programme.
27. CATHERINE HILL, *ENABLING RURAL WOMEN'S ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT: INSTITUTIONS, OPPORTUNITIES, AND PARTICIPATION* 38 (2011), available at http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/csw/csw56/egm/Hill-BP-1-EGM-RW-Sep-2011_CH.pdf.
28. H.E. Sheikha Haya Rashed al Khalifa, President of the United Nations General Assembly, Statement at the Informal Thematic Debate of the General Assembly on "The Promotion of Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women" (Mar. 6, 2007), available at <http://www.un.org/ga/president/61/statements/statement20070306.shtml>; *The Four Global Womens' Conferences 1975–1995: Historical Perspective*, U.N. DEP'T PUB. INFO., (May 2000), <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/followup/session/presskit/hist.htm>.
29. *See Short History of CEDAW Convention*, *supra* note 2.
30. Elizabeth Evatt, *Eliminating Discrimination Against Women: The Impact of the UN Convention*, 18 MELB. U. L. REV. 435, 435 (1991); Farha, *supra* note 15, at 554 (quoting STEPHEN LEWIS, *RACE AGAINST TIME: SEARCHING FOR HOPE IN AIDS-RAVAGED AFRICA* 112–13 (2005) (lauding CEDAW's great potential influence and its aggressive assertion of equality throughout)); Rebecca L. Hillock, *Establishing the Rights of Women Globally: Has the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women Made a Difference?*, 12 TULSA J. COMP. & INT'L L. 481, 500 (2005) (citing Harold Hongju Koh, *Why America Should Ratify the Women's Rights Treaty (CEDAW)*, 34 CASE W. RES. J. INT'L L. 263, 266 (2002)); Pruitt, *Migration*, *supra* note 9, at 729; *Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women*, OFF. UNITED NATIONS HIGH COMMISSIONER HUMAN RTS., <http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/cedaw/convention.htm> (last visited Jan. 3, 2012); Christina Hoff Sommers, *The UN Women's Treaty: The Case Against Ratification*, GLOBAL GOVERNANCE WATCH (Mar. 26, 2010), http://www.globalgovernancewatch.org/un_treaty_watch/the-un-womens-treaty-the-

ninety percent of U.N. members (185 countries) are parties to the Convention.³¹ The Convention recognizes that women “suffer from various forms of discrimination because they are women,”³² and it responds with a very broad mandate. The Convention requires Member States to eliminate “direct or indirect discrimination” in all spheres of life, “improve the de facto position of women,” and “address prevailing gender relations” and discriminatory stereotypes.³³

CEDAW was the first treaty to enumerate particular rights for rural populations.³⁴ Indeed, CEDAW’s Article 14 is entirely about

case-against-ratification; *US: Ratify Women’s Rights Treaty*, HUM. RTS. WATCH (July 15, 2010), <http://www.hrw.org/en/news/2010/07/15/us-ratify-women-s-rights-treaty>.

31. Pruitt, *Migration*, *supra* note 9, at 728–29. The United States is the only country to sign but not ratify the treaty. *Id.* at 729; Julia Ernst, *U.S. Ratification of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women*, 3 MICH. J. GENDER & L. 299, 333 (1995) (noting that Article 14(2) might require additional federal spending on, for example, healthcare programs).
32. Simone Cusack & Rebecca J. Cook, *Combating Discrimination Based on Sex and Gender*, in INTERNATIONAL PROTECTION OF HUMAN RIGHTS: A TEXTBOOK 205 (Catarina Krause & Martin Scheinin eds., 2009) (citing CEDAW, *supra* note 1, pmb. ¶ 6); Pruitt, *Migration*, *supra* note 9, at 728.
33. Comm. on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women, General Recommendation No. 25, 30th Sess., 2004, on Article 4, Paragraph 1, of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, on Temporary Special Measures ¶ 7, *available at* <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/recommendations/General%20recommendation%2025%20%28English%29.pdf>.
34. Pruitt, *Migration*, *supra* note 9, at 729; Pruitt, *Deconstructing*, *supra* note 9, at 351; *see also* Marsha A. Freeman, *Women, Development and Justice: Using the International Convention on Women’s Rights*, in OURS BY RIGHT: WOMEN’S RIGHTS AS HUMAN RIGHTS 93, 98 (Joanna Kerr ed., 1993) (“[Article 14] is unique as a statement of human rights because it emphasizes the rights of a particular sub-group to which special attention should be paid.”). Other treaties have since followed suit: the Mexico Conference had adopted a resolution on women in agriculture. Noreen Burrows, *The 1979 Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women*, 32 NETH. INT’L L. REV. 419, 446 (1985). The UN General Assembly adopted two resolutions at its 30th session, one on Women in Rural Areas, GA Res. 3523 (XXX), U.N. Doc. A/RES/3523(XXX) (Dec. 15, 1975), and one on improving women’s economic status, GA Res. 3522 (XXX), U.N. Doc. A/RES/3522(XXX) (Dec. 15, 1975). The 1974 World Food Conference highlighted the need for women’s involvement in rural development in a resolution. Burrows, *supra*. The United Nations continues to pay attention to rural women. *See, e.g.*, U.N. DIV. FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF WOMEN, RURAL WOMEN IN A CHANGING WORLD: OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES 2 (2008), *available at* <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/public/Women%202000%20-%20Rural%20Women%20web%20English.pdf>; *Rural Women and Development*, WOMENWATCH, <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/feature/idrw/> (last visited Jan. 3, 2012).

rural women.³⁵ Article 14(1) recognizes “the particular problems faced by rural women” as well as “the significant roles which women play in the economic survival of their families,” and calls on States Parties to “ensure the application” of the entirety of CEDAW to “women in rural areas.”³⁶ This provision thus requires Member States to see that rural women, like their urban counterparts, enjoy all rights addressed by the Convention.³⁷

Article 14(2) goes further, enumerating particular rights for rural women. It provides:

-
35. CEDAW, *supra* note 1, art. 14; Pruitt, *Migration*, *supra* note 9, at 729. Article 10 also mentions rural women and deals specifically with ensuring that women have equal rights in the field of education. It provides in relevant part:

States Parties shall take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in order to ensure to them equal rights with men in the field of education and in particular to ensure, on a basis of equality of men and women:

. . . The same conditions for career and vocational guidance, for access to studies and for the achievement of diplomas in educational establishments of all categories in rural as well as in urban areas; this equality shall be ensured in pre-school, general, technical, professional and higher technical education, as well as in all types of vocational training.

CEDAW, *supra* note 1, art. 10(a). There is no clear indication of the reason behind the specific inclusion of rural women in this section, though earlier mention of the applicability of Articles 10 and 14 to rural women in particular had been made in Draft 4 in 1974. LARS ADAM REHOF, *GUIDE TO THE TRAVAUX PRÉPARATOIRES OF THE UN CONVENTION ON THE ELIMINATION OF ALL FORMS OF DISCRIMINATION AGAINST WOMEN* 153 (1993). It was in this draft that Article 10’s education rights were applied to women in “rural as well as urban areas.” *Id.*; *see also* Pruitt, *Deconstructing*, *supra* note 9, at 355–58 (discussing the drafting history of Article 14 and the article’s relation to Article 10’s mention of rural women).

36. CEDAW, *supra* note 1, art. 14(1).

37. Nevertheless, some parts of Art. 14 appear to limit or scale back what is required of Member States vis-à-vis rural women. *See* Pruitt, *Deconstructing*, *supra* note 9, at 351 (stating that Article 14 sometimes appears to diminish for rural women the robustness and detail of a right recognized elsewhere in CEDAW); *id.* at 364 (stating that mentioning women’s participation in rural development in Article 14(2)(a) perpetuates the association of the rural with the feminine); *id.* at 367 (lamenting that Article 12 guarantees *equal* health facilities to all women, whereas Article 14(2)(b) guarantees merely *adequate* such facilities to rural women); *id.* at 372–73 (stating that Article 14(2)(d) guarantees lower levels of educational guarantees for rural women than Article 10 does for all women, as an admission that rural educational facilities equal to those of urban areas are not feasible because of spatial inequality); *id.* at 373 (stating that mentioning vocational training, extension services, technical proficiency, and functional literacy training in Article 14(2)(d) perpetuates the association of agriculture and a lower degree of sophistication with the rural).

2. States Parties shall take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in rural areas in order to ensure, on a basis of equality of men and women, that they participate in and benefit from rural development and, in particular, shall ensure to such women the right:

(a) To participate in the elaboration and implementation of development planning at all levels;

(b) To have access to adequate health care facilities, including information, counseling and services in family planning;

(c) To benefit directly from social security programmes;

(d) To obtain all types of training and education, formal and non-formal, including that relating to functional literacy, as well as, inter alia, the benefit of all community and extension services, in order to increase their technical proficiency;

(e) To organize self-help groups and co-operatives in order to obtain equal access to economic opportunities through employment or self-employment;

(f) To participate in all community activities;

(g) To have access to agricultural credit and loans, marketing facilities, appropriate technology and equal treatment in land and agrarian reform as well as in land resettlement schemes;

(h) To enjoy adequate living conditions, particularly in relation to housing, sanitation, electricity and water supply, transport and communications.³⁸

Our focus here is on subsection (2)(e), which instructs Member States to take appropriate measures to ensure that women have the right to organize self-help groups and cooperatives for the particular purpose of access to economic opportunities.³⁹ Bangladesh, a country

38. CEDAW, *supra* note 1, art. 14(2). For a discussion on the significance of this eight-item list, see Pruitt, *Migration*, *supra* note 9, at 729–31.

39. See generally Daman Prakash, *Rural Women, Food Security and Agricultural Cooperatives*, U. WIS. CENTER COOPERATIVES (Feb. 2003), http://www.uwcc.wisc.edu/info/intl/rur_women.pdf (stating that due to social stasis, female participation in agricultural cooperative membership is “rather low,” but women nevertheless increasingly participate in agricultural cooperatives through their respective “heads of the household”).

whose population is predominantly rural,⁴⁰ proposed inclusion of this right.⁴¹ Indeed, the Bangladesh Integrated Development Programme⁴² recognized in the early 1970s that encouraging self-help groups and cooperatives is one of the best practices for eradicating rural poverty.⁴³ Countries as diverse as Ghana and Sweden supported what became Article 14, noting that discrimination in these sectors exists in some countries.⁴⁴

-
40. More than 72% of Bangladesh's population was rural in 2009. See *Rural Poverty in Bangladesh: Statistics*, RURAL POVERTY PORTAL, <http://www.ruralpovertyportal.org/web/guest/country/statistics/tags/bangladesh> (last visited Jan. 3, 2012).
 41. REHOF, *supra* note 35, at 160.
 42. The Programme was later reorganized as the Bangladesh Rural Development Board. See *History*, BANGLADESH RURAL DEV. BOARD., http://www.brdb.gov.bd/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=321&Itemid=379 (last visited Jan. 3, 2012).
 43. *Vision, Overview, Mission, Strategy*, BANGLADESH RURAL DEV. BD., http://www.brdb.gov.bd/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=320&Itemid=378 (last visited Jan. 3, 2012). The Comilla Model was developed in the early sixties by Dr. Akhtar Hameed Khan, a renowned social scientist and social reformer, through an action research work at the Bangladesh Academy for Rural Development (BARD) in Kotbari, Comilla. The model advocated the use of cooperatives in addition to infrastructure investments by the state. The model's "Two-Tier Cooperative System" became the main vehicle of rural development in Bangladesh. *Id.* Bangladesh also proposed what became part of Article 14(2)(f), "the right to participate in all community activities." REHOF, *supra* note 35, at 160; cf. INT'L FUND FOR AGRIC. DEV., RURAL PROPERTY REPORT 2011, at 22–24, 225–26, 228 (2010), available at http://www.ifad.org/rpr2011/report/e/print_rpr2011.pdf [hereinafter IFAD RURAL POVERTY REP.] (stating that strengthening the collective capabilities of rural people may give them the confidence, security, and power to overcome poverty). Collective membership-based organizations play a key role in the rural economy, while also negotiating the interests of people in their interactions with private or governmental organizations. *Id.*
 44. REHOF, *supra* note 35, at 160; Comm. on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women, *Combined Sixth and Seventh Periodic Reports of States Parties: Sweden*, ¶ 328, U.N. Doc. CEDAW/C/SWE/6-7 (Sept. 14, 2006) [hereinafter *Sweden Sixth and Seventh*] (noting that the Swedish rural development program contains measures to promote gender equality, including improving women's chances of finding employment; the gender equality perspective has been written into rural development programs as a criterion that counties must consider when drafting regional implementation plans); Comm. on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women, *Combined Third, Fourth and Fifth Periodic Reports of States Parties: Ghana*, ¶ 190, U.N. Doc. CEDAW/C/GHA/3-5 (Apr. 18, 2005) [hereinafter *Ghana Fourth and Fifth*] (noting the problems of rural women and the importance of women's roles in productions and development); Ghana's Introductory Statement, U.N. CEDAW, 36th Sess., (Aug. 7–25, 2006), available at <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/cedaw36/statements/CEDAW%20STATEMENT%20Ghana.pdf> (describing Ghana's determination and commitment to adopt measures for achieving women's empowerment, gender equality, and equality in Ghana and the rest of the international

II. SPATIAL INEQUALITY, STASIS, AND ABSENCE OF LAW IN RURAL PLACES

One reason for our focus on Article 14(2)(e) is that international organizations from the World Bank to the International Fund for Agricultural Development have long highlighted the significance of cooperatives and self-help organizations to successful rural development.⁴⁵ This focus is based on the nature of rural spatiality; unlike their urban counterparts, impoverished rural populations “are spread over large areas.”⁴⁶ Scholars writing about rurality in the United States have observed an absence of formal law in rural places,⁴⁷ and this phenomenon is similarly characteristic of rural parts of developing countries.⁴⁸ Thus, even where domestic laws confer rights upon women, a state may lack—or be unwilling to commit—resources for promoting, enforcing, and protecting such rights.⁴⁹

community); Tureen Afroz, *CEDAW and the Women's Rights in Bangladesh—A Promised Silver Lining*, WORLD NEWS BANK, <http://www.worldnewsbank.com/tureen-seminar.html> (last visited Jan. 3, 2012) (noting that Sweden entered objections to reservations to CEDAW by Bangladesh, because they go against the object and purpose of the Convention).

45. See, e.g., IFAD RURAL PROPERTY REP., *supra* note 43, at 22–24, 225–26, 228; AXEL WOLZ, THE ROLE OF AGRICULTURE AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT IN ACHIEVING THE MILLENNIUM DEVELOPMENT GOALS, iv–v, 45 (2005), available at <http://www.donorplatform.org/load/9518>.

46. WOLZ, *supra* note 45, at 45.

47. See generally ROBERT ELLICKSON, ORDER WITHOUT LAW: HOW NEIGHBORS SETTLE DISPUTES (1991) (describing how ranchers in Shasta County, California, mediated their disputes informally, without reference to law); David M. Engel, *The Oven Bird's Song: Insiders, Outsiders, and Personal Injuries in an American Community*, 18 LAW & SOC'Y REV. 551, 556–58, 569, 572–73 (1984) (reporting that interpersonal familiarity among rural residents influenced their attitudes about litigation); Lisa R. Pruitt, *Rural Rhetoric*, 39 CONN. L. REV. 159, 202–07 (2006) [hereinafter Pruitt, *Rural Rhetoric*].

48. Pruitt, *Migration*, *supra* note 9, at 750; see also WORLD BANK, FOOD & AGRIC. ORG. & INT'L FUND FOR AGRIC. DEV., GENDER IN AGRICULTURE SOURCEBOOK 127 (2009) [hereinafter SOURCEBOOK] (noting that formal laws and institutions have limited effectiveness beyond major urban areas and that the state and its institutions exert only weak presence in rural places); Bond, *supra* note 5, at 514, 518 n.45, 559–61 (“[M]any contemporary African governments . . . negotiate the boundaries between state- and community-based law.”). Colonial authorities created stratifications between state-sponsored law and laws of indigenous communities. *Id.* Often, traditional leadership preserved by customary law—unwritten, indigenous law that is passed on through generations—undermines new constitutions, leaving women without nondiscriminatory protection. *Id.* Customary law, which is considered the legal expression of cultural norms and values, governs the lives of most African people living in rural areas. *Id.*

49. See SOURCEBOOK, *supra* note 48, at 127.

Without enforcement, such laws become meaningless: local customs and oppressive practices will continue to prevail.⁵⁰ Local sources of authority thus remain more entrenched in rural areas,⁵¹ reinforcing patriarchal norms⁵² and contributing to a relative social and cultural stasis⁵³ that may further constrain women's self-organization and advancement.⁵⁴ Similarly, even when the state makes funds available for women's organizations, the state may do little or nothing to promote women's use of such funds, especially in rural areas.⁵⁵ Without access to the funds set aside, women's organizations in rural areas may fold after an initial fledgling period.⁵⁶

-
50. *Id.*; Pruitt, *Migration*, *supra* note 9, at 750; Bond, *supra* note 5, at 547–48.
 51. Pruitt, *Deconstructing*, *supra* note 9, at 378; Pruitt, *Migration*, *supra* note 9, at 751; Lisa R. Pruitt, *Gender, Geography & Rural Justice*, 23 BERKELEY J. GENDER, L. & JUST. 338, 354, 366, 372 (2008) [hereinafter Pruitt, *Gender, Geography*] (describing rural patriarchy and gender roles).
 52. *See* Bond, *supra* note 5, at 511–13 (noting that the international human rights community views women as victims of their culture and that customary law preserves power disparities between tribal leaders and African women, constraining democratic deliberation and discourse necessary for affording greater rights to women); *cf.* Pruitt, *Migration*, *supra* note 9, at 747 n.337 (noting that, generally, women's statuses in marriages and within families are unequal to men, and are based on traditional, customary, and religious attitudes that confine women to particular roles and that these attitudes are deeply embedded and resistant to change). *See generally* Pruitt, *Gender, Geography*, *supra* note 51, at 344, 353–55 (noting that persistence of traditions in rural areas in developing countries is generally attributed to the homogeneity of the population, high density of acquaintanceship, and a lack of external forces to challenge norms).
 53. Pruitt, *Migration*, *supra* note 9, at 751.
 54. *See* SOURCEBOOK, *supra* note 48, at 130 (stating that women may be reluctant to participate in institutions seen as men's domains); Pruitt, *Migration*, *supra* note 9, at 751.
 55. *Cf.* IFAD RURAL POVERTY REP., *supra* note 43, at 23–24 (stating that membership-based organizations play key roles in negotiating people's interests with governmental sector and private actors); Pruitt, *Migration*, *supra* note 9, at 752.
 56. *Cf.* CANADIAN FEMINIST ALLIANCE FOR INT'L ACTION, WOMEN'S INEQUALITY IN CANADA 57 (2008), *available at* http://www.iwraw-ap.org/resources/pdf/42_shadow_reports/Canada_SR_FAFIA.pdf (stating that in 2006, Canadian Government reduced by CAD 15.3M the budget allocated for Status of Women Canada Program (SWC), which formerly provided modest funds to women's organizations, forcing many local SWC offices to close). This decision eliminated over half the SWC regional staff in Ottawa. *Federal Government Moves to Further Restrict Women's Groups*, FEMINIST ALLIANCE INT'L ACTION (Dec. 1, 2006), <http://www.fafia-afai.org/en/news/2006/federal-government-moves-further-restrict-womens-groups>. Later, the conservative Harper Government further reduced or eliminated funding of at least 35 such organizations (as of April 25, 2011). LIST OF WOMEN'S ORGANIZATIONS WHOSE FUNDING HAS BEEN CUT OR ENDED BY THE HARPER GOVERNMENT, AD HOC COAL. FOR WOMEN'S EQUAL. & HUMAN RIGHTS (2011), *available at* <http://www.womensequality>

Because rural populations tend to be small and sparse, rural residents tend to form relationships that are different in character than those of their urban counterparts.⁵⁷ Rural areas are often characterized by homogeneity as well as by a high density of acquaintance.⁵⁸ Both tend to result in a lack of anonymity⁵⁹ within villages and similar rural locales.⁶⁰ Because of such community characteristics, social norms tend to evolve more slowly in rural areas than in urban places, where greater diversity and anonymity among the populace tend to generate more robust change.⁶¹ The entrenched nature of local authority in rural places similarly results in a reluctance to alter traditions and shared heritage.⁶² Women's organizations and collectives may face significant backlash if they challenge such entrenched local power structures.

Furthermore, while rural residents may be acquainted with one another, as within villages, they are not necessarily in a position to

.ca/Images%20PDFs%202011/2011_April_25_defunded_organizations.pdf.

57. Bond, *supra* note 5, at 540; Pruitt, *Gender, Geography, supra* note 51, at 354; Pruitt, *Migration, supra* note 9, at 751.
58. Pruitt, *Migration, supra* note 9, at 746 n.316 (citing Pruitt, *Gender, Geography, supra* note 48, at 353 n.74).
59. Pruitt, *Gender, Geography, supra* note 51, at 353.
60. *Id.*
61. IFAD RURAL POVERTY REP., *supra* note 43, at 192 (noting an urban bias among policymakers contributes to benign neglect of rural enterprise development); *see* Pruitt, *Migration, supra* note 9, at 752 (citing Fern K. Willits et al., *Persistence of Rural-Urban Differences, in RURAL SOCIETY IN THE U.S.: ISSUES FOR THE 1980s* 69, 73–74 (Don A. Dillman & Daryl J. Hobbs eds., 1982)); WOLZ, *supra* note 45, at 48 (highlighting that rural poor suffer from urban favoritism in development strategies); *see also* Bond, *supra* note 5, at 541 n.194 (noting stark divide between urban, elite women and poorer, rural women). The Protocol to the African Charter on Human and People's Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa—a convention designed to remedy shortcomings of CEDAW—reflects concerns of cosmopolitan African feminists, ignoring their rural counterparts. Urban women largely participated in drafting the Protocol; yet knowledge of the Protocol is still limited in rural areas. Bond, *supra* note 5, at 541 n.194.
62. Bond, *supra* note 5, at 517–20 (stating that, generally, rights of rural women are subject to, and restricted by, local tradition and custom). Customary law—unwritten indigenous law that is passed on through generations—undermines new constitutions, leaving women without nondiscriminatory protection. *Id.* Considered the legal expression of cultural norms and values, customary law governs the lives of African people in most rural areas. *Id.* at 517–18 & n.45. “[P]owerful elites often determine the dominant cultural interpretation and provide what is seen as a definitive interpretation of customary law.” *Id.* at 518; *see also* Pruitt, *Gender, Geography, supra* note 51, at 354 (quoting Fern K. Willits et al., *supra* note 61, at 73) (presenting studies that suggest rural residents are slow to alter traditions and cultural heritage because the predominance of personal, face-to-face social relationships results in strong consensus on values and morals); Pruitt, *Migration, supra* note 9, at 751.

organize across villages in order to improve their lot.⁶³ Lack of infrastructure, larger distances to traverse for meetings, and rigid social norms all contribute to the increased difficulty of organizing that rural women encounter.⁶⁴ The World Bank and other members of the Global Donor Platform have thus called for governments “to provide the necessary legal framework” to facilitate organization by the rural poor.⁶⁵ The International Fund for Agricultural Development’s (IFAD’s) *Rural Poverty Report* lists “strengthening the collective capabilities of rural people” as one of the four key areas that need “particular attention . . . and increasing investment.”⁶⁶ Local organization is the catalyst for decentralization that is capable of bringing true empowerment to disadvantaged groups.⁶⁷ This process requires disadvantaged groups to develop grassroots capacities to articulate demands, thereby gaining greater participation in community decision-making and preventing elites from capturing all the benefits.⁶⁸ In the next part, we consider how CEDAW has motivated Member States to foster such frameworks, and in Part IV, we turn to how feminist activists have used them to stimulate local organization efforts.

III. CEDAW AND MEMBER STATES’ COUNTRY REPORTS: TOP-DOWN LAW MAKING

As an international treaty, CEDAW creates affirmative obligations for the countries that have ratified or acceded to it to “put its

63. See *infra* Parts III.A., III.C. (discussing barriers to organization and their solutions); cf. IFAD RURAL POVERTY REP., *supra* note 43, at 23–24 (stating that despite problems of governance, management, or representation, rural membership based organizations better represent the interests of poor rural people than outside parties can).

64. See *infra* Parts III.B–C discussing some of these problems.

65. WOLZ, *supra* note 45, at 45; see also IFAD RURAL POVERTY REP., *supra* note 43, at 23–24 (stating that rural membership-based organizations play key roles in reducing rural economies’ risk, advance the learning of new techniques and skills, manage collective and individual assets, and market produce; noting that these organizations effectively represent the interests of poor people to governmental or private organizations, even though they are ridden by difficulties of management or participation).

66. IFAD RURAL POVERTY REP., *supra* note 43, at 23–24.

67. See WOLZ, *supra* note 45, at 43.

68. IFAD RURAL POVERTY REP., *supra* note 43, at 24 (stating that despite their own problems of governance and management, rural grassroots organizations can better represent the interest of poor rural people than outside parties); WOLZ, *supra* note 45, at 43 (“When the responsibility and capacity for delivering services is shifted to the local level, communities can shape public support to match local circumstances, and service providers can become more accountable to users.”).

provisions into practice.⁶⁹ Member States also must submit national reports (“country reports”), at least every four years, on “measures which they have adopted to give effect to the provisions of” CEDAW.⁷⁰ The Member States have broad discretion regarding what information to include in their reports.⁷¹ They may include, for example, “factors and difficulties affecting the degree of fulfillment of obligations under CEDAW.”⁷² While the Member States’ reports may be self-serving and present an incomplete picture regarding women’s rights and status in the given state, the reporting mechanism nevertheless provides some information about the practices the Member States encourage and support.⁷³

We consider the official reports of four sizeable and populous Member States to assess their governments’ attitudes towards grassroots women’s organizations and cooperatives, particularly those in rural places as envisaged by Article 14(2)(e).⁷⁴ These reports represent an opportunity to assess the synergy between law’s “top-down” role in endorsing women’s economic and political empowerment on the one hand and feminist activists’ “bottom-up” role in effecting change on the other.⁷⁵ In particular, we consider the significance of feminist activism in rural contexts, where law and legal actors are often assumed to be largely absent⁷⁶ and where patriarchy may be more entrenched.⁷⁷

Specifically, we consider the reports submitted by two so-called “developed countries”—Australia and Canada—and two nations that are far less evenly developed—China and India.⁷⁸ The four countries

69. *Text of the Convention*, UN DIV. FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF WOMEN, <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/cedaw.htm> (last visited Jan. 3, 2012).

70. CEDAW, *supra* note 1, art. 18(1).

71. *See id.*

72. *Id.* at art. 18(2).

73. *Cf.* MERRY, *supra* note 7, at 15. (discussing the differing ways in which Member States may interpret the challenges facing women and express these challenges in their CEDAW country reports; for example, as structural on the one hand or about choice and interest on the other).

74. The CEDAW national reports examined below include those by Canada, Australia, India, and China. *See infra* notes 85, 92, 97, 108.

75. *See infra* Parts III–IV; *see also supra* text accompanying notes 2–10, 17–18.

76. Pruitt, *Gender, Geography*, *supra* note 51, at 338, 347, 369–71; Pruitt, *Migration*, *supra* note 9, at 752; Pruitt, *Rural Rhetoric*, *supra* note 47, at 202–07.

77. *See supra* Part I; *see also* Pruitt, *Gender, Geography*, *supra* note 51, at 373; Pruitt, *Migration*, *supra* note 9, at 751.

78. We do not mean to imply that Canada and Australia are evenly developed or that they lack regional differences in the living standards, including differences associated with the rural-urban continuum. Nevertheless, India and China feature gross disparities between sprawling, modern cities and numerous villages without, for example,

are similar in size and in the extent of their rural regions,⁷⁹ and all also feature megacities with sprawling outskirts.⁸⁰ We consider not

sanitation infrastructure. For an illustration of how dramatically uneven India's development is, see Lisa R. Pruitt, *Human Rights and Development for India's Rural Remnant: A Capabilities-Based Critique*, 44 U.C. DAVIS L. REV. 803 (2011) [hereinafter Pruitt, *India's Rural Remnant*].

79. See generally U.N. Dep't of Econ. & Soc. Affairs, 2008 U.N. Demographic Y.B. 104 ST/ESA/STAT/SER.R/39 (explaining that because of national differences in the characteristics which distinguish urban from rural areas, the UN adopts each country's respective definition of the terms "urban" and "rural"); Australia's population is roughly 22 million. WORLD BANK, 2011 WORLD DEV. INDICATORS 10 (2011). Three quarters of the population resides in urban locales, while the remainder occupies rural locales. *Urban and Non-urban Population*, AUSTRALIAN BUREAU STATS., <http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Previousproducts/1301.0Feature%20Article72006?opendocument&tabname=Summary&prodno=1301.0&issue=2006&num=&view=> (last updated Jan. 24, 2007). "Urban" Australia comprises capital city Statistical Divisions, and Statistical Districts with a population greater than 100,000 people. "Non-urban" Australia refers to the remainder. *Id.* Canada's population is roughly 34 million. WORLD BANK, *supra* at 10. Eighty percent of the population resides in urban locales, while twenty percent occupies rural locales. *Population, Urban and Rural, by Province and Territory*, STATS. CAN., <http://www40.statcan.gc.ca/101/cst01/demo62a-eng.htm> (last updated Sept. 22, 2009). The rural population "refers to persons living outside centers with a population of 1,000, and outside areas with 400 persons per square kilometer." *Id.* China's population is roughly 1.3 billion. WORLD BANK, *supra* at 10. Fifty-six percent of the population lives in rural areas. *Id.* at 126. India's population is roughly 1.2 billion. *Id.* at 11. Thirty percent of the population resides in urban locales, *id.* at 127, while seventy percent occupies rural locales. *Id.* at 10. India uses two principal definitions of "urban." One is "statutory towns," which are considered urban because of their form of local government. They include all places with a municipality, corporation, municipal board, cantonment board, or notified area council, etc. TIAGO WANDSCHNEIDER & PRAVAS MISHRA, THE ROLE OF SMALL RURAL TOWNS IN BOLANGIR DISTRICT, INDIA: A VILLAGE-LEVEL PERSPECTIVE 2 n.2 (Natural Res. Inst. Report No. 2750, June 2003). Such statutory towns were home to 87.4% of the nation's urban population in 1991. Tim Dyson & Pravin Visaria, *Migration and Urbanization Retrospect and Prospects*, in TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY INDIA: POPULATION, ECONOMY, HUMAN DEVELOPMENT AND THE ENVIRONMENT 108, 115 (Tim Dyson et al. eds., 2004) [hereinafter TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY INDIA]. The other definition is "census towns," which are "all other places which have a minimum population of 5,000, at least 5% of the male working population engaged in non-agricultural and allied activities, and a population density of at least 400 persons per square kilometer (or 1,000 persons per square mile)." WANDSCHNEIDER & MISHRA, *supra*, at 2 n.2. Because of the tax consequences of falling into either category, many residents of areas that match these criteria "prefer to retain their rural status." Dyson & Visaria, *supra*, at 115.

80. Note that compared to China and India, Canada and Australia are relatively sparsely populated, especially when one looks just at population density. In 2005, Australia's population totaled roughly 20 million, of which 92% resided in urban and population per hectare of cropland was roughly 0.4%. Total land area was 7.8 million square

only what the countries say they are doing in relation to cooperatives and SHGs in particular, but also how these Member States are approaching two other issues related to women's economic empowerment: capacity building and access to technology.⁸¹

A comparison of these four countries offers access to reciprocal information and knowledge regarding grassroots organizing in developed and less developed countries. Understanding how developed countries facilitate women's grassroots organizing could inform the policies and practices of less developed or more unevenly developed countries. Likewise, examining highly unevenly developed countries' approaches to supporting rural women could suggest some best practices for sustaining grassroots organizations in rural areas of developed countries, as well as in other less-developed nations.⁸²

A. *Encouraging Formation of Cooperatives*

To fulfill their obligations under CEDAW's Article 14(2)(e), many Member States provide funding and administrative assistance to women's cooperatives and SHGs.⁸³ These cooperatives and SHGs

kilometers and over 6% of land comprised cropland. U.N. Dep't of Econ. & Soc. Affairs, *National Trends in Population, Resources, Environment and Development 2005: Country Profiles*, 48–49, U.N. Doc. ESA/P/WP.196 (2006), available at <http://www.un.org/esa/population/publications/countryprofile/australia.pdf>. In 2005, Canada's population totaled roughly 32 million, of which 81% resided in urban areas and population per hectare of cropland was roughly 0.7%. Total land area was 9.9 million square kilometers and over 5% of land comprised cropland. *Id.* at 92–93, available at <http://www.un.org/esa/population/publications/countryprofile/canada.pdf>. In 2005, China's population totaled roughly 1.3 billion, of which 40% resided in urban areas and population per hectare of cropland was roughly 6%. Total land area was 9.3 million square kilometers and over 16% of land comprised cropland. *Id.* at 104–05, available at <http://www.un.org/esa/population/publications/countryprofile/china.pdf>. In 2005, India's population totaled roughly 1.1 billion, of which 28% resided in urban areas and population per hectare of cropland was roughly 8%. Total land area was 2.9 million square kilometers and over 57% of land comprised cropland. *Id.* at 198–99, available at <http://www.un.org/esa/population/publications/countryprofile/india.pdf>.

81. See *infra* Part III.B–C.

82. See Snyder, *supra* note 16, at 48 (“[Feminists in the global North] can draw sustenance from history and from the actions of poor contemporary women.”); Aili Mari Tripp, *The Evolution of Transnational Feminisms: Consensus, Conflict, and New Dynamics*, in *GLOBAL FEMINISM* 51, 61–62 (discussing how, in the 1970s and 1980s, women's U.N. conferences were exhibiting signs of tension between the Global North and South, but mutual understanding slowly grew between the two hemispheres, and that understanding continues to cross-pollinate the discourse on women's rights and development).

83. See *infra* text accompanying notes 86–124.

can then establish businesses or deliver services to the local population.⁸⁴ The SHGs thus enhance the livelihoods of rural women and, indeed, entire rural communities.

In Canada, for example, the Federal Economic Development Initiative for Northern Ontario (FedNor) instituted the Community Futures program, which supports more than sixty Community Futures Development Corporations (CFDCs) throughout rural Ontario.⁸⁵ In turn, these non-profit economic development organizations provide assistance in creating and sustaining small businesses.⁸⁶ FedNor also provides funding to women-targeted projects across the province; between 2003 and 2006, FedNor loaned more than CAD 22 million to more than 500 women-led businesses.⁸⁷ Further, FedNor supports the PARO Centre for Women's Enterprise in Northwestern Ontario, a not-for-profit and grassroots organization focusing on the many unique challenges facing women as entrepreneurs and primary family caregivers.⁸⁸ Lastly, FedNor partners with the Network for Women Entrepreneurs (NWE) in rural and northern Ontario to promote their services to women across the province.⁸⁹ Administered by the Canada-Ontario Business Service Centre, the NWE provides women business owners with access to programs, information, and services specifically tailored to the needs of the province's businesswomen.⁹⁰ In 2005–2006, the NWE served over 18,000 clients.⁹¹

84. See *infra* text accompanying notes 86–124.

85. Comm. on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women, *Combined Sixth and Seventh Periodic Reports of States Parties: Canada*, ¶ 132, U.N. Doc. CEDAW/C/CAN/7 (Aug. 17, 2007) [hereinafter *Canada Sixth and Seventh*].

86. *Id.* ¶ 133; Cathryn Atkinson, *Community Futures Give Small Towns Second Chance*, GLOBE & MAIL (May. 11, 2010), <http://www.theglobeandmail.com/report-on-business/your-business/start/location/community-futures-give-small-towns-second-chance/article1564574/>.

87. *Canada Sixth and Seventh*, *supra* note 85, ¶ 134.

88. *Id.* ¶ 133; see also PARO CENTRE FOR WOMEN'S ENTERPRISE, <http://www.paro.ca/> (last visited Jan. 3, 2012).

89. *Canada Sixth and Seventh*, *supra* note 85, ¶ 134.

90. See *id.*; see also *WD Success Stories 2009-2010: Alberta Women Entrepreneurs—Alberta*, W. ECON. DIVERSIFICATION CAN., <http://www.wd.gc.ca/eng/12241.asp#b1> (last visited Oct. 28, 2011) (stating that Western Economic Diversification Canada has provided CAD 544,000 over three years to implement the Access to Supply Chains program that assists women entrepreneurs in Western Canada to gain better access to domestic and international supply chains).

91. *Canada Sixth and Seventh*, *supra* note 85, ¶ 134. These programs are not unique to Ontario. For example, the Yukon Human Rights Commission involves women's organizations within the Yukon. See *id.* ¶ 715. Limits on funding for such programs, however, restrict what they are able to do: "Due to limited resources, the Commission

Similarly, Australia reports that its National Women's Development Programme "supports women's NGOs."⁹² The Programme views those broadly representative, effective, and viable national women's organizations as contributing actively to government policies and strategies affecting women.⁹³ In 2001–2002, Australia set aside AUD 5.6 million to be used for this program over four years.⁹⁴ In addition, the Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs works to advance the status of women through various programs and services, such as funding NGOs that provide services to women.⁹⁵ In 2008–2009, the Australian government issued more than AUD 1.2 million in grant funding for women's NGOs to improve services to marginalized groups of women and develop projects that encourage effective interaction with women who are not engaged in current policy debates.⁹⁶

The Indian government views SHGs⁹⁷ and women's collectives⁹⁸ as strategically critical for enhancing rural women's livelihoods;⁹⁹

has not been able to develop specific programs for Aboriginal women. It relies on direct requests from community groups and assists as it is best able." *Id.* ¶ 716.

92. Comm. on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women, *Combined Fourth and Fifth Periodic Reports of States Parties: Australia*, ¶ 129, U.N. Doc. CEDAW/C/AUL/4-5 (Feb. 3, 2004) [hereinafter *Australia Fourth and Fifth*]. There is no consensus in the literature on the use of the term *non-governmental organizations* (NGOs) for women's collectives, cooperatives, and SHGs. See Snyder, *supra* note 16, at 34 (stating that women's NGOs were assisted directly by the international development organizations, including women's voluntary groups, civil society organizations, and community-based organizations). We use these terms interchangeably, unless indicated otherwise.
93. *Australia Fourth and Fifth*, *supra* note 92, ¶ 129.
94. *Id.* ¶ 130. "The funding provides the opportunity to expand, strengthen and enhance the status and position of women in Australia through" national secretariats, targeted projects, capacity building projects, as well as training and mentoring. *Id.*
95. *Overview*, AUSTRALIAN GOV'T DEPARTMENT FAMS., HOUSING, COMMUNITY. SERVICES & INDIGENOUS AFF, <http://www.fahcsia.gov.au/sa/women/overview/Pages/default.aspx> (last modified Dec. 31, 2010).
96. *2008–09 Women's Leadership and Development Program Grants*, AUSTRALIAN GOV'T DEPARTMENT FAMS., HOUSING, COMMUNITY. SERVICES & INDIGENOUS AFF, http://www.fahcsia.gov.au/sa/women/funding/Pages/womens_leadership_development_grant_0809.aspx (last modified June 2, 2011).
97. See Comm. on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women, *Combined Second and Third Periodic Reports of States Parties: India*, ¶¶ 28, 78, 82, 103, 292, 311, U.N. Doc. CEDAW/C/IND/2-3 (Oct. 19, 2005) [hereinafter *India Second and Third*]. The rural poverty alleviation program, Swarnajayanti Gram Swarozgar Yojana (SGSY), emphasizes the importance of SHGs to allow the rural poor access to the financial system, infrastructure support, technology and marketing contacts, etc. *Id.* ¶ 294. Under this program, about 50% of the SHGs are formed exclusively by women. *Id.*

about 84% of Indian SHGs are women-only groups.¹⁰⁰ SHGs and collectives are typically organized at the village level and provide an outlet for rural women to discuss specific problems, explore solutions, and prepare to run for local political office.¹⁰¹ Further, a pilot program seeking to improve rural development earmarks 40% of its benefits for women.¹⁰² The program has increased women's access to land by providing leases exclusively to women's SHGs on community wasteland, fallow land, or surplus land.¹⁰³ As of March 31, 2005, nearly 2 million SHGs had been formed under the pilot program over a six-year span.¹⁰⁴ Of this total, women-only SHGs amounted to 1.36 million groups, including the important Indian Scheduled Caste Development Corporation (SCDC) in the state of Andhra Pradesh.¹⁰⁵ The SCDC provides subsidized credit to women's SHGs to purchase or lease private land in the marketplace.¹⁰⁶ Another program, the Swarnajayanti Gram Swarozgar Yojana (SGSY), seeks to lift beneficiary families out of poverty by providing income-generating assets through combined bank credit and government subsidy.¹⁰⁷

Similarly, Women's Federations in China are major actors in the implementation of governmental development policy.¹⁰⁸ Women's Federations coordinate and provide on-the-job training, and they participate in disbursing micro-loans to rural women.¹⁰⁹ The All-China Women's Federation (ACWF) oversees numerous projects to promote women's employment,¹¹⁰ capacity building,¹¹¹ gender

98. *Id.* ¶¶ 65, 200.

99. *Id.* ¶ 294; *see also supra* note 97 and accompanying text (noting various methods used to enhance the lives of rural women).

100. *Id.* ¶ 292. Thus, nearly 2 million rural poor families have accessed India's financial system through SHGs. *Id.*

101. *Id.* ¶¶ 65, 200; *see also* Chetna Gala, *Empowering Women in Villages: All-Women Village Councils in Maharashtra, India*, 29 BULL. CONCERNED ASIAN SCHOLARS 31, 38 (1997).

102. *India Second and Third, supra* note 97, ¶ 82.

103. *Id.* ¶ 281.

104. *Id.* ¶ 294.

105. *Id.*

106. *Id.* ¶ 281.

107. *See supra* note 97 and accompanying text.

108. *See* Comm. on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women, *Combined Fifth and Sixth Periodic Reports of States Parties: China*, 49–50, 55–56, U.N. Doc. CEDAW/C/CHN/5-6 (June 10, 2004) [hereinafter *China Fifth and Sixth*].

109. *Id.*

110. For example, the *All-China Women's Hand-knitting Association* aims to promote women's self-employment and small business development through teaching women

equality,¹¹² and children's safety.¹¹³ The ACWF also dedicates its efforts to the prevention of human trafficking.¹¹⁴

Indeed, a common use of women's NGOs and SHGs is as guarantors or distributors of micro-loans.¹¹⁵ India's Rural Women's Development and Empowerment Project, for example, allocates income-generating funds to many SHGs.¹¹⁶ The National Bank for Agricultural and Rural Development also focuses on micro-financing SHGs,¹¹⁷ of which about 90% are exclusively women's collectives.¹¹⁸ Women as small borrowers accounted for 14.5% of the loans disbursed.¹¹⁹ China similarly provides micro-credit to rural, women-

small business models for selling handcrafts. *All-China Women's Hand-knitting Association*, ALL-CHINA WOMEN'S FED'N (May 20, 2011), <http://www.womenofchina.cn/html/report/130099-1.htm>.

111. *See China Fifth and Sixth*, *supra* note 108, at 53–54. The ACWF hosts intensive trainings for provincial leaders of women's federations to become better prepared for challenges faced when advocating and promoting women's rights. *Change Attitude and Build Up Capacity*, ALL-CHINA WOMEN'S FED'N (Nov. 8, 2010), <http://www.womenofchina.cn/html/report/107555-1.htm>.
112. *China Fifth and Sixth*, *supra* note 108, at 17. The ACWF conducts advocacy and training workshops on gender awareness for national level policy makers, program managers, and media sectors. *Advocacy on Gender Equality*, ALL-CHINA WOMEN'S FED'N (Nov. 8, 2010), <http://www.womenofchina.cn/html/report/107551-1.htm>.
113. *China Fifth and Sixth*, *supra* note 108, at 20, 34. The ACWF engaged the Enkon project to promote health and safety, education, and crime prevention among China's youth. *Enkon Project (Children's Safe and Healthy Growth Project)*, ALL-CHINA WOMEN'S FED'N (Nov. 8, 2010), <http://www.womenofchina.cn/html/report/107554-1.htm>.
114. The ACWF worked with UNICEF and the Chinese Ministry of Public Security to execute a multi-tiered project to combat human trafficking. *Fighting Against Trafficking in Women and Children*, ALL-CHINA WOMEN'S FED'N (Nov. 8, 2010), <http://www.womenofchina.cn/html/report/107553-1.htm>.
115. Pruitt, *Migration*, *supra* note 9, at 741–42.
116. *India Second and Third*, *supra* note 97, ¶ 310. *See also id.* ¶ 82 (SGSY, the rural poverty reduction program, distributed micro-credit loans to over 220,000 SHGs); *id.* ¶ 103 (government sponsored SHGs of asset-less scheduled caste (SC) women are able to access micro-credit financing for income generating activities); *id.* ¶ 281 (noting that a Scheduled Caste Development Corporation operates in Andhra Pradesh, providing subsidized credit to SC women's SHGs to purchase or lease land for community cultivation); *id.* ¶ 286 (describing a state program in Kerala that created an informal bank of rural women with savings and credit operations, thus encouraging rural women to take up micro-enterprises). Some programs allow for a higher loan-to-value ratio for project lending by women entrepreneurs. *See id.* ¶ 285.
117. *Id.* ¶¶ 78, 225. Several NGOs, such as the Society for Helping the Awakening of the Rural Poor (SHARE) and the Rural Development Organization (RDO), also set up micro-finance schemes for the rural poor. *Id.* ¶ 225. Numerous micro-finance institutions operate as credit cooperatives or credit unions. *Id.*
118. *Id.* ¶ 78.
119. *Id.* ¶ 225.

owned enterprises.¹²⁰ These loans are underwritten either by local women's federations¹²¹ or via rural credit cooperatives.¹²² Such small loans have a 95%–99% loan return rate, making them a sound investment.¹²³ In Canada, FedNor distributes loans to women-owned enterprises.¹²⁴ The Rural Access Program (RAP) in Australia, founded in July 1991, allows people in rural and remote regions to plan, organize, and deliver activities and projects to meet community needs.¹²⁵ Around one-third of the AUD 1.51 million available in 1992–1993 went to women's organizations and their projects.¹²⁶ Another Australian organization, Women's Health in the North (WHIN), provides women with opportunities in economic participation.¹²⁷ In 2005–2007, the Victorian government subsidized WHIN, in partnership with the Spectrum Migrant Resource Center (SMRC), to execute its Enterprising Women project.¹²⁸

At the same time, the country reports also indicate challenges facing women's efforts to organize. The Canadian government mentions the need for increased collaboration among stakeholders in rural communities, particularly in the context of First Nations and indigenous populations.¹²⁹ Australia,¹³⁰ India,¹³¹ and China¹³² echo

120. *China Fifth and Sixth*, *supra* note 108, at 49.

121. *Id.*

122. *Id.* at 49–50.

123. *Id.*

124. *Canada Sixth and Seventh*, *supra* note 85, ¶ 132.

125. Comm. on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women, *Third Periodic Report of States Parties: Australia*, 49, U.N. Doc. CEDAW/C/AUL/3 (Sept. 27, 1995) [hereinafter *Australia Third*].

126. *Id.*; *see also id.* at 50–51 (discussing Women Tasmania initiative, which has a number of programs and project initiatives targeted at women from economically disadvantaged groups and regional areas, including the *Women's Development Small Grants* program, providing small grants to women's groups to assist with projects aimed to meet identified local needs).

127. *Economic Participation*, WOMEN'S HEALTH N., <http://www.whin.org.au/what-we-do/economic-participation.html> (last visited Jan. 3, 2012).

128. The three-year project delivered formal business education to 100 women, and afforded no-interest loans of AUD 2,000 to women establishing microenterprises in Melbourne's northern metropolitan region. *See Enterprising Women-Overview: A Best Practice Model and Resource for Community Workers*, WOMEN'S HEALTH N., <http://www.whin.org.au/overview.html> (last visited Jan. 3, 2012); *Micro loans*, WOMEN'S HEALTH N., <http://www.whin.org.au/business-education-over-program/microloans.html> (last visited Jan. 3, 2012); *History of the Program*, WOMEN'S HEALTH N., <http://www.whin.org.au/business-education-program/history-of-the-program.html> (last visited Jan. 3, 2012).

129. *Canada Sixth and Seventh*, *supra* note 85, ¶ 433 (“Some of the challenges to eliminating the service gaps for First Nation women and girls include accessibility

similar concerns to differing degrees. The so-called “Shadow Reports” published by NGOs active in some Member States also express frustration with the lack of, or reduction in, funding available for women’s grassroots organizations.¹³³

-
- issues for those in remote and isolated communities, lack of culturally appropriate resources and training, and need for increased collaboration among stakeholders including communities and band councils.”).
130. In 2001, Australia launched Working for Women-Strategic Directions 2001–2003, a plan created by Commonwealth Office of the Status of Women (OSW), to strengthen partnerships between government, professions, industry, and women’s groups. The plan’s key goal areas included economic self-sufficiency, women’s security, elimination of violence, maintenance of good health, and achieving optimal status in society. *Australia Fourth and Fifth*, *supra* note 92, ¶ 27.
 131. The Indian government must collaborate with NGOs on various issues, including gender advocacy, scheme implementation, and monitoring and reforming laws. *See India Second and Third*, *supra* note 97, ¶ 362. India’s tenth plan to address violence against women highlights the need for close collaboration with NGOs to yield awareness about this important issue in society. *Id.* ¶ 83.
 132. The Chinese government encourages the establishment of women’s organizations in rural enterprises to help monitor the implementation of relevant laws and regulations pertaining to women. *China Fifth and Sixth*, *supra* note 108, at 54. China’s government calls upon the entire society to contribute to a national “hand-in-hand” poverty reduction project, whereby “various social forces . . . carry out . . . efforts to reduce poverty.” *Id.* at 56; *Chinese Grassroots NGOs Struggle with Scarce Funds*, HAUSER CENTER. NONPROFIT ORGS. (Nov. 16, 2010, 3:44 PM), <http://hausercenter.org/chinampo/2010/11/chinese-grassroots-ngos-struggles-with-scarce-funds/> (describing how a project aiming to establish book corners in Chinese classrooms was successfully completed through collaborative efforts between a NGO and private foundation). Difficulties facing grassroots organizations, including lack of funding and inability obtaining legal identification, can be addressed by collaborative efforts between the NGOs themselves, government, corporations, and foundations. *Id.*
 133. *See* CANADIAN FEMINIST ALLIANCE FOR INT’L ACTION, *supra* note 56; NAT’L ALLIANCE OF WOMEN, INDIA SECOND NGO SHADOW REPORT ON CEDAW, ch 5 pt. 4 (2006), *available at* <http://www.iwraw-ap.org/resources/pdf/india%20final%20shadow%20report%20jan%202007.pdf>; Inaction and Non-compliance: British Columbia’s Approach to Women’s Inequality, Submission of the B.C. CEDAW Group to the U.N. Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women 20–21, 60–61 (2008), *available at* http://www.iwrawap.org/resources/pdf/42_shadow_reports/canada_sr_bc_cedaw_group.pdf; *see also* *Canada Sixth and Seventh*, *supra* note 85, ¶ 715–716 (noting limits on funding to assist women entrepreneurs and a lack of specific programs for aboriginal women); Belinda Leach, *Rural Women Making Change: Women’s Organizations*, UNIV. OF GUELPH, <http://www.rwmc.uoguelph.ca/page.php?p=46> (last visited Jan. 3, 2012); *cf.* WOLZ, *supra* note 45, at 47–48 (emphasizing that strengthening and empowering common-interest groups, like women’s groups and federations, is the starting point of pro-poor development efforts); IFAD RURAL POVERTY REP., *supra* note 43, at 104–05 (explaining that local organizations, like farmers associations and microfinance institutions, must be utilized to disseminate index insurance as a risk management tool). The IFAD RURAL POVERTY REP. states: “[I]t remains up to the public sector and NGOs to . . . establish

B. Building Local Capacity

One of the significant problems rural women face when organizing SHGs is the lack of communication among localities and organizations within a region.¹³⁴ The governments of Member States can alleviate this problem by providing a platform for women to share information about themselves and their organizations.¹³⁵ Women's secretariats, alliances, and registers are the primary vehicles for developing and networking local capacity, ensuring that talented and ambitious women remain involved with their local communities.¹³⁶ In Australia, a National Rural Women's Secretariat was established in 2002, based on the success of three earlier women's secretariats.¹³⁷ Its goal is to strengthen the "diversity of women and women's organisations throughout the community."¹³⁸ The Australian government allocated funding specifically for training and mentoring women in community and organizational capacity building.¹³⁹ The Australian states also do the work of building the

the preconditions that will enable private insurers to invest in this area." *Id.* This will require major institutional development and investments, including private-public partnerships. *Id.*

134. *See supra* notes 63–65 (discussing spatial challenges to regional organization among villages).
135. *See supra* note 65 and accompanying text.
136. *See generally infra* notes 137–39 and accompanying text (addressing Australia's efforts to utilize such organizations); *supra* note 66 and accompanying text.
137. *See Engaging with Women's Organisations*, AUSTRALIAN GOV'T DEPARTMENT FAMS., HOUSING, COMMUNITY SERVICES & INDIGENOUS AFF., http://www.fahcsia.gov.au/sa/women/proserv/equal/Pages/engaging_womens_org.aspx#3 (last updated June 6, 2011).
138. *Australia Fourth and Fifth*, *supra* note 92, ¶ 130.
139. *Id.* The Australian government offers a range of opportunities to specifically enhance the leadership skills of women in regional and rural areas. State and Territory Rural Women's Award winners attended a national leadership seminar in March 2001 and also received funds to help develop their management, business, or leadership skills. *Id.* ¶ 141. The government also funds an annual scholarship for one mature age rural woman to participate in the Australian Rural Leadership Programme. *Id.* Further information about the Rural Women's Award is available at <http://www.ruralwomensaward.gov.au>. *See also id.* ¶ 167 (discussing the importance of the Annual Women's Summit, and stating that the inaugural Victorian Women's Summit, held for rural women in May 2000, was attended by over 200 women from diverse organizations and backgrounds); *id.* ¶ 510 (discussing the strategies of the Department of Primary Industries to promote women in leadership); *id.* ¶ 515 (discussing the South Australia (SA) Rural Network); *id.* ¶ 516 (discussing Shaping the Future: SA Rural Women's Developing Leaders Course, held every two years for twenty-five rural women from across the state to attend); *id.* ¶ 523 (discussing other initiatives aimed at addressing

capacities of rural women interested in leadership.¹⁴⁰ For example, the state of Victoria created a register of women, the VicWomen Directory, listing over 1,500 women interested in, and available for, board appointments.¹⁴¹ The government encourages its departments to consult the Directory when making recommendations for new appointments and reappointments.¹⁴² Based on the success of the VicWomen Directory, the Australian government is planning to develop a register specifically to increase the representation of indigenous women on boards, committees, and tribunals.¹⁴³ In 1996, Agriculture, Fisheries, and Forestry Australia (AFFA) established “Balance”—a database of women with experience and expertise in rural areas to encourage more appointments of women to departmental boards and committees.¹⁴⁴ Australia also acknowledges the importance of coordination among governmental and non-governmental organizations, especially in rural areas.¹⁴⁵ The Regional Forums Australia Programme (RFAP) was established in 1999 to foster partnerships among businesses, local communities, and governments to improve the economic viability of rural communities.¹⁴⁶

Canada reports a great need for local capacity building, leadership, organizational development, and coordinated services, particularly with regard to “Northern, aboriginal, immigrant, and rural communities.”¹⁴⁷ Canada’s Rural Secretariat (RS) aims to improve the quality of life in rural communities so that these regions can compete in the global economy. The Secretariat accomplishes such

the needs of rural women); *id.* ¶ 525 (discussing other initiatives for rural and remote area women).

140. *See, e.g., Australia Fourth and Fifth, supra* note 92, ¶ 151 (discussing New South Wales (NSW) programs to support rural women’s leadership, including NSW Agriculture’s Rural Women’s Network leadership training pilot program for women in isolated communities); *id.* ¶ 457 (discussing Women Tasmania programs, such as the Women in Decision Making and Leadership Programme, which includes leadership training and mentoring programs for young women from disadvantaged areas).

141. *See id.* ¶ 166; *Victorian Women’s Register*, DEPARTMENT HUM. SERVICES, <http://www.dhs.vic.gov.au/for-business-and-community/community-involvement/women-in-the-community/women-as-leaders/victorian-womens-register> (last visited Jan. 3, 2012).

142. *See Australia Fourth and Fifth, supra* note 92, ¶ 166.

143. *Id.*

144. *Id.* ¶ 477. AFFA also participated in the OSW Executive Search Pilot Programme to “head-hunt” suitable women for positions on Commonwealth boards. *Id.*

145. *See id.* ¶ 473.

146. *Id.* ¶ 472.

147. *See Canada Sixth and Seventh, supra* note 85, ¶ 551.

improvements by encouraging and facilitating partnerships among federal departments, provinces, and rural stakeholders.¹⁴⁸ Moreover, it ensures that federal policies and programs respond to the needs of rural communities.¹⁴⁹ These partnerships foster knowledge building, policy development, and the implementation of rural development strategies.¹⁵⁰

In China, the All-China Women's Federation and its "local federations" provide the platform for the government's efforts to develop the local leadership capacity of women. The ACWF organizes leadership training courses for women "cadres," develops a database of women of excellence, and recommends qualified women candidates for leadership posts.¹⁵¹ Also, India's Awareness

148. *What is the Rural Secretariat?*, CANADA'S RURAL PARTNERSHIP, <http://www.rural.gc.ca/RURAL/display-afficher.do?id=1230067130367&lang=eng> (last modified Dec. 23, 2008).

149. *Id.*

150. One example of such a partnership is the RS Community Development Program (RSCDP), part of a Canadian federal initiative seeking to increase the capacity of rural and northern communities to leverage local assets and competitive advantages. *Programs*, CANADA'S RURAL PARTNERSHIP, <http://www.rural.gc.ca/RURAL/display-afficher.do?id=1230068932797&lang=eng> (last modified Dec. 29, 2011). Their applicant guide encourages participation by non-profit organizations, associations, universities, co-operatives, NGOs, and local and provincial governments. *Applicant's Guide-Community Development Program, Building Rural and Northern Partnerships*, CANADA'S RURAL PARTNERSHIP, <http://www.rural.gc.ca/RURAL/display-afficher.do?id=1299516906622&lang=eng> (last modified Nov. 25, 2011). Another program, Peacebuild, is a network that promotes dialogue on human security policy between Canadian NGOs, government agencies, and individuals. *Mission/Vision*, PEACEBUILD, <http://www.peacebuild.ca/about-mission-vision-e.php> (last visited Jan. 3, 2012). Peacebuild's Gender and Peacebuilding Working Group (GPWG) aims to strengthen and promote collaboration between Canadian organizations, activists, and academics. *Gender and Peacebuilding*, PEACEBUILD, <http://www.peacebuild.ca/work-groups-gender-pb-e.php> (last visited Jan. 3, 2012). GPWG facilitates collaboration efforts in programming and policy by providing a forum for the exchange of resources, and dialogue between members of civil society and government. *Id.* In its annual report, Peacebuild publishes a list of its organizational and individual members. See PEACEBUILD, ANNUAL REPORT 2008–2009, at 13 (2009), available at <http://www.peacebuild.ca/documents/ARfinal0809.pdf>. Peacebuild emphasizes that "peacebuilding" is an umbrella concept reflecting a comprehensive approach to peace and security. The term was adopted when former United Nations Secretary-General, Boutros Boutros-Ghali, announced his Agenda for Peace in 1992. *What is Peacebuilding*, PEACEBUILD, <http://www.peacebuild.ca/about-what-is-pb-e.php> (last visited Jan. 3, 2012).

151. *China Fifth and Sixth*, *supra* note 108, at 27. The women recommended by the local Women's Federations were elected to leadership positions in local people's congresses and government nearly 50% of the time. *Id.*

Generation Programme (AGP), introduced in 1986–1987, aims to create awareness among rural and poor women on various social issues so that they can realize their potential in the family and society.¹⁵² Both the local government and women’s grassroots organizations are involved in the implementation of the awareness program, which emphasizes the participation of women in their regional institutions.¹⁵³

C. *Improving Access to Telecommunications*

Technology can play a critical role in closing the opportunity gap between rural and urban communities,¹⁵⁴ in part by fostering networking among women in different communities and in part by facilitating training and instruction that may otherwise be accessible only in metropolitan regions.¹⁵⁵ Many developed countries have

152. *India Second and Third*, *supra* note 97, ¶ 361.

153. *Id.*

154. IFAD RURAL POVERTY REP., *supra* note 43, at 128–30 (describing how improvements in information technology (IT) and its accessibility bolster use of devices like computers and mobile phones in rural areas). Advancements in IT are resulting in rapid dissemination of real-time information, improving risk management in rural markets. *See id.* at 128–29; *see also* WOLZ, *supra* note 45, at 20 (noting that adequate public investment in rural infrastructure is important for promoting growth of agriculture and the non-farm economy in rural locales and that access to transport and communication is essential for integrating rural poor with markets). Mobile phones are enhancing women’s engagement and autonomy in the market by allowing them more direct access to buyers and excluding men’s intermediation. *See* IFAD RURAL POVERTY REP., *supra* note 43, at 129. The same is true in the United States, where rural advocacy groups have lobbied for rural broadband. *See* Kim Severson, *Digital Age Is Slow to Arrive in Rural America*, N.Y. TIMES, Feb. 17, 2011, at A1, available at <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/02/18/us/18broadband.html?ref=us> (“In rural America, only 60 percent of households use broadband Internet service, according to a report released . . . by the Department of Commerce.”); Hilary Shelton, *Guest Commentary: Rural America – the Digital Divide’s Last Frontier*, GADSDEN TIMES (July 12, 2011, 6:09 PM), <http://www.gadsdentimes.com/article/20110712/NEWS/110719917> (reporting that twelve million homes in the United States lack access to basic high-speed Internet services, the majority being in rural areas). Broadband service provides access to online suppliers that offer better prices in the agricultural marketplace. *Id.* The article argues that the United States government should reform less efficient broadband infrastructure programs to provide broadband to areas in greatest need. *Id.*

155. *See* CTR. FOR RURAL STRATEGIES, SCHOLARS’ ROUNDTABLE: THE EFFECTS OF EXPANDING BROADBAND TO RURAL AREAS 7 (Sharon Strover & Nick Muntean eds., 2011), available at http://www.ruralstrategies.org/sites/all/files/Broadband_Investment.pdf (“Some of our research in Texas revealed the significance of what we called ‘soft outcomes,’ namely the impact of information that would contribute indirectly to better job outcomes by, for example, finding new locations to market one’s services or learning something about one’s craft For certain

utilized technology to offer training programs that help rural women retool and become competitive players in the economy.¹⁵⁶ In Australia, for example, the Regional and Rural Women's Roundtable of 1999 identified improved access to telecommunications as the greatest area of concern for rural women.¹⁵⁷ Notably, this concern was listed ahead of several other needs, such as building social capital and social cohesion; economic and business development; the provision of services including health, childcare, transportation, counseling, and banking; and skill building and training.¹⁵⁸

The same concerns appear in the 2010 Government of Queensland report that documents the lack of progress in this area and reiterates the recommendations of the Rural Women Symposium Working Group.¹⁵⁹ The report asserts, again, that appropriate access to communication infrastructure such as phones, mobile phones, and Internet is essential for promoting healthy, sustainable, and economically viable rural communities.¹⁶⁰ Residents of rural Queensland continue to struggle with unreliable landline maintenance, poor mobile phone coverage, variations in availability and cost effectiveness of information technology networks, and lack of access to affordable training on information technology skills.¹⁶¹

These persistent deficits are all the more surprising given that, between 1992 and 2003,¹⁶² Australia pioneered the establishment of Telecentres—local hubs that were to provide up-to-date computing and telecommunications services for rural and remote areas as a way of enhancing economic, educational, and social opportunities.¹⁶³ However, the pace of development of these centers did not match that

populations, using the Internet did not lead immediately to new jobs, but it could make subtle improvements to their lives.”).

156. See, e.g., *Australia Fourth and Fifth*, *supra* note 92, ¶¶ 467, 523.

157. *Id.* ¶ 467.

158. *Id.*

159. RURAL WOMEN'S SYMPOSIUM WORKING GRP., PRIORITIES AND RECOMMENDED ACTIONS: A REPORT OF THE RURAL WOMEN'S SYMPOSIUM WORKING GROUP app. A (2010), available at <http://203.210.126.185/dsdweb/v4/apps/web/secure/docs/4478.pdf>.

160. *Id.*

161. *Id.*

162. See Bruce Arnold, *Telecentres*, CASLON ANALYTICS (Dec. 2006) <http://www.caslon.com.au/telecentresnote1.htm>; AUSTRALIAN GOV'T DEP'T OF COMM'N, INFO. TECH & THE ARTS, ANNUAL REPORT 2003–2004, at 217 (2004), available at http://www.archive.dcita.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0005/15953/DCITA_Annual_Report_2003-04.pdf.

163. *Australia Third*, *supra* note 125, at 50.

of the expanding importance of telecommunication.¹⁶⁴ Most centers closed within five years of their establishment due to lack of funding and community interest.¹⁶⁵ Nevertheless, women participated in most community Telecentre committees,¹⁶⁶ and a quarter of successful Telecentre applications were coordinated by local (i.e., rural) women.¹⁶⁷

To further increase rural women's access to telecommunication services, Australia initiated the Networking the Nation program in 1997.¹⁶⁸ The program, which co-opted the previously installed Telecentres,¹⁶⁹ is managed by several local women's NGOs, and it allows rural women to take advantage of improved communications, online training, up-to-date commodities information, worldwide marketing opportunities, and the ability to work from home.¹⁷⁰ Furthermore, Australia established a national interactive computer network that provides information on education and training opportunities to men and women living in rural areas.¹⁷¹

164. *Id.* ("Funding of [AUD] 2.8 million over four years from 1992–93 has been provided to assist community organisations to establish telecentres. By 30 June 1993, the Minister for Primary Industries and Energy had announced funding for 13 telecentres, with three being fully operational. . . . Additional funding of [AUD] 300,000 was provided in the 1993–94 Budget to increase the coverage of the program by increasing the number of Telecentre approvals from 33 to 45.").

165. Arnold, *supra* note 162.

166. *Australia Third*, *supra* note 125, at 50.

167. *Id.*

168. *Australia Fourth and Fifth*, *supra* note 92, ¶ 493.

169. *See* Media Statement, Gov't of W. Austl., State Funding Helps Kalannie Telecentre Secure Its Future (Sept. 18, 2006), available at <http://www.mediastatements.wa.gov.au/Pages/WACabinetMinistersSearch.aspx?ItemId=128540&minister=O&page=30> (announcing grant of AUD 137,877 to establish Kalannie Telecentre); *cf.* Arnold, *supra* note 162.

170. *Australia Fourth and Fifth*, *supra* note 92, ¶ 493. For example, the Australian Virtual Centre for Women and the Law project is managed by the National Women's Justice Coalition and "includ[es] 600 community organi[z]ations, using almost 170 e-mail groups created and supported through the project." *Id.* The Women's Justice Network, which aims to provide legal information, advice, and referrals to women in southwest Queensland, comprises a network of community organizations and legal advice services connected through computer video conferencing facilities and a legal information database. *Id.*

171. *See id.* ¶ 476. The formal name of the interactive computer network was the Education Network Australia, known as EdNA. *Id.* With its online delivery of courses, rural women were afforded flexibility in participating in education and training. *Id.* Alas, EdNA closed in the end of July 2011, due to the rapid pace of development of the competition in this area. Bernard Lane, *Edna's Demise a Sign of the Times*, AUSTRALIAN (July 7, 2011, 11:51 AM), available at <http://www.theaustralian.com.au/higher-education/ednas-demise-a-sign-of-the->

In 2010, Australia launched its National Broadband Network (NBN) initiative, providing 93% of Australian homes, schools, and businesses with open access to a high-speed broadband network.¹⁷² According to the Australian Department of Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy, the NBN provides rural and regional Australia with “unprecedented opportunities” for businesses to overcome the distance that once hindered connections with distant markets.¹⁷³ Today, Australian rural women actively use online training and participate on message boards for employment or business advice.¹⁷⁴ These programs bring together governmental and grassroots women’s organizations to solve particular problems.¹⁷⁵

Telecommunication improvement remains an important objective for each of the other nations, too,¹⁷⁶ though all of the nations face challenges in relation to serving sparsely populated areas. China reports that it set up more than 24,000 science and technology guidance centers for improving rural women’s access to telecommunication services.¹⁷⁷ The World Bank, however, observed in 2009 that China lacks a coherent and comprehensive strategy for “rural informatization” and that widespread access at public facilities is lacking.¹⁷⁸

India’s federal government allocates significant resources—about 17% of its budget—to improving the nation’s telecommunication

times/story-e6frgcjx-1226089748336. Accordingly, some question the ability of the Telecentres to effect widespread change. See Arnold, *supra* note 162.

172. NAT’L BROADBAND NETWORK, NATIONAL BROADBAND NETWORK: PROGRESS UPDATE-AUGUST 2011 (2011) [hereinafter NBN PROGRESS UPDATE], available at <http://www.nbn.gov.au/wp-content/uploads/2011/05/august-update.pdf>.

173. *Id.*

174. *Australia Fourth and Fifth*, *supra* note 92, ¶ 493. The Australian Virtual Centre for Women and the Law, a project managed by the National Women’s Justice Coalition, hosts a wide range of online discussion groups and associated services for rural women. *Id.* As of 2003, the project had approximately 5,000 participants. *Id.* Most notably, the Australian Women’s Justice Network provides advice and legal information, and is comprised of a network of community organizations. *Id.*

175. See *id.* ¶¶ 493, 509. (“The [Queensland] Office for Women established a partnership with the Queensland Rural Women’s Network to extend internet access and training to women around the state through the *BridgIT* programme.”).

176. See IFAD RURAL POVERTY REPORT, *supra* note 43, at 36, 194.

177. *China Fifth and Sixth*, *supra* note 108, at 54.

178. Christine Zhen-Wei Qiang et al. *Rural Informatization in China* 35, 40 (World Bank, Working Paper No. 172, 2009), available at <http://www.worldbank.org/research/2009/06/10787163/rural-informatization-china>.

network.¹⁷⁹ By comparison, it allocates just 2% of its budget for water supply and sanitation purposes.¹⁸⁰ The village councils in several Indian states now have computerized databases to improve rural women's access to administrative data and to facilitate their use of governmental programs and schemes.¹⁸¹ The Indian government also provided 148 low-female-literacy districts with IT infrastructure "to establish connectivity in these regions with other regions for free flow of information and awareness generation."¹⁸²

While neither the Canadian government report nor the shadow reports indicate the need for any action in this critical area,¹⁸³ a digital divide that aligns generally with the rural-urban axis persists in that nation.¹⁸⁴ To respond to this rural deficit, Canada's 2010 Economic Action Plan provided CAD 225 million to a program aimed at extending broadband coverage over a three-year period.¹⁸⁵ As of February, 2011, the plan had approved ninety-one projects in eight provinces and territories. These will provide broadband to some 230,000 homes.¹⁸⁶

-
179. Dileep Mavalankar & Manjunath Shankar, *Sanitation and Water Supply: The Forgotten Infrastructure*, in INDIA INFRASTRUCTURE REPORT 2004: ENSURING VALUE FOR MONEY 314, 318 (Sebastian Morris ed., 2004), available at <http://www.iitk.ac.in/3inetwork/html/reports/IIR-2004/Chap%2013%202003.pdf>; Pruitt, *India's Rural Remnant*, *supra* note 78, at 827.
180. Mavalankar & Shankar, *supra* note 179, at 318. This comparison may be misleading if the state governments invested substantially more in water sanitation and infrastructure than did the central government. See Pruitt, *India's Rural Remnant*, *supra* note 78.
181. *India Second and Third*, *supra* note 97, ¶ 174.
182. *Id.* ¶ 201.
183. See generally *Canada Sixth and Seventh*, *supra* note 85; CANADIAN FEMINIST ALLIANCE FOR INT'L ACTION, *supra* note 56, at 57; *About*, RURAL WOMYN ZONE, <http://ruralwomyn.wordpress.com/about/> (last visited Jan. 3, 2012) ("Rural Womyn Zone is an online community that provides a safe place where rural women gather and identify and share their solutions to the problems [they and other isolated women confront].").
184. DILLAN THECKEDATH & TERRENCE J. THOMAS, PARLIAMENTARY RESEARCH SERV., NO. 2011-57-E, IN BRIEF: RURAL BROADBAND DEPLOYMENT 1 (2011), available at <http://www.parl.gc.ca/Content/LOP/ResearchPublications/2011-57-e.pdf>.
185. See Iain Marlow, *Rural Canada Loses as Politics and Business Fail to Get Broadband down the Last Mile*, GLOBE & MAIL (Nov. 15, 2010), <http://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/national/time-to-lead/internet/rural-canada-loses-as-politics-and-business-fail-to-get-broadband-down-the-last-mile/article1799640/>.
186. THECKEDATH & THOMAS, *supra* note 184, at 3 (reporting a broadband target of five megabits per second for downloads for all Canadians).

IV. BOTTOM-UP ACTIVISM: WOMEN'S GRASSROOTS ORGANIZING

As the prior part illustrates, the four Member States we examined all report that they utilize women's networks, cooperatives, and SHGs to achieve the broader goals of CEDAW. As noted above, rural women face a range of distinct obstacles to economic independence and self-realization.¹⁸⁷ Lack of transportation, home and farm responsibilities, and lack of anonymity and privacy¹⁸⁸ may all impede their access to services. Given these challenges, as well as the limited resources available in rural communities, women's organizations fill in the void and provide services and information to women.¹⁸⁹ While under CEDAW's Article 14(2)(e) the Member States are obliged to support women's economic organizations, once established, such organizations themselves also work towards achieving CEDAW's broader goals, including women's de facto equality.¹⁹⁰ They do so, for example, by delivering educational services (as required by Articles 10 and 14) and networking that fosters opportunities in both the public and private sectors (thus

187. See *supra* Part I.

188. See *supra* notes 49–64 and accompanying text.

189. Leach, *supra* note 133; see also *Links and Resources*, RURAL WOMEN'S ISSUES COMM. SASK., http://ruralwomensask.ca/links_organizations.html (last visited Jan. 3, 2012). Rural Women Making Change (RWMC) projects extend internationally; "[c]ollaboration is underway with rural women's organizations in Britain, Europe, Australia, Mexico, and Trinidad and Tobago." *Rural Women Making Change: About RWMC*, U. GUELPH, <http://www.rwmc.uoguelph.ca/page.php?p=1> (last visited Jan. 3, 2012). International groups within the RWMC network include Women's Network PEI (Canada), New South Wales Rural Women's Network (Australia), Queensland University of Technology (Australia), Sudha Chauhan (India), Ashish Sharma (India), Centre for Women's Development and Research (CWDR) (India), Professional Institute for Development and Socio Environment Management (India), Our Iron Fists (Nepal), Women Acting Together for Change (WATCH) (Nepal), Federal University of Technology - Stella Odurukwe (Nigeria), Nigerian High Tech Women (NHTW) (Nigeria), Swat Youth Front (Pakistan), WIKH Development Foundation (Pakistan), Demapeda Research and Development for Change (South Africa), University of Valladolid (Spain), Gender Centre for Research and Training (Sudan), IDM Women Research, Consultancy and Training Group (IDM-WORECOT) (Tanzania), Kagoma Community Based Organisation (KACOBA) (Uganda), Mukono Womens Entrepreneurship Networks and Associations (Uganda), Women Organizing for Change in Agriculture and Natural Resource (United States), National Agricultural Information Services (Zambia), Davidzo Muchawaya (Zimbabwe). *Rural Women Making Change: The RWMC Network*, U. GUELPH, <http://www.rwmc.uoguelph.ca/page.php?p=1> (last visited Jan. 3, 2012).

190. See *supra* Part III.A.

enhancing women's participation in the political sphere and in global commerce).¹⁹¹ These organizations have also undertaken valuable research into the factors that distinguish the livelihoods and circumstances of rural women from those of their urban counterparts, and they have become advocates for rural women.¹⁹²

In this part, we discuss a few exemplary women's organizations in each country, presenting these as ad hoc case studies of feminist activism.¹⁹³ While some of these organizations receive funds as a consequence of CEDAW's mandate, we found no direct or express link between most organizations and the Member States' CEDAW commitments. Nevertheless, all of these organizations do work consistent with CEDAW's aspirations because all seek to improve rural women's de facto position within society,¹⁹⁴ some addressing

191. See *supra* Part III.B–C.

192. See, e.g., Leach, *supra* note 133. “Eight research projects comprise the Rural Women Making Change’s research program. These projects are categorized into three domains: 1) Rural Women’s Organizations as Intermediaries, 2) the Rural Everyday, 3) Gender and Rural Policy in the Trans-local. *Rural Women Making Change: Research Projects*, U. GUELPH, <http://www.rwmc.uoguelph.ca/page.php?p=2> (last visited Jan. 3, 2012). See also *The History of RWICS*, RURAL WOMEN’S ISSUES COMM. SASK., http://www.ruralwomensask.ca/about_history.html (last visited Jan. 3, 2012) (“In June 2004, the Prairie Women’s Health Centre of Excellence (PWHCE) and the Centres of Excellence for Women’s Health (CEWH) [published] *Rural, Remote and Northern Women’s Health: Research and Policy Directions*. . . . This was a comprehensive, national project on the health concerns of women who live in rural, remote and northern Canada.”). See generally Myra Marx Ferree, *Globalization and Feminism: Opportunities and Obstacles for Activism in the Global Arena*, in GLOBAL FEMINISM, *supra* note 16, at 15 (stating that women’s associations fund and collect studies and disseminate information, train researchers and policymakers to develop greater awareness of gender inequities and greater commitment to redressing them).

193. We are not examining here the effectiveness of “women’s policy” departments in these countries. Most developed and many developing countries have established “women’s policy machineries” within the government, creating the impression that the cause of women’s equality was obviated. See Ferree, *supra* note 192, at 12 (“Paradoxically, sometimes the creation of women’s policy machinery seems to be mistaken for an end in itself or a substitution for active mobilization to exert pressure for change, and thus in practice can lead to demobilization by the women’s movements that helped to create them.”).

194. Cf. *id.* at 7. (“Feminist activists and activism typically are embedded in organizations and institutions with multiple goals. . . . It is not true by definition that a person or group that calls itself feminist necessarily puts this particular goal in first place, since in practice it could be discovered to be displaced by other values Nor is it true by definition that a person or group that does not call itself feminist does not have feminist goals, since the identity can carry other connotations in a local setting (whether of radicalism or exclusivity or cultural difference) that an activist may seek to avoid by choosing another label.”). The distinction between feminist groups and women’s organizations should not be overwrought. See *id.* (“Regardless of their

socioeconomic rights and some addressing civil and political rights enumerated by CEDAW (e.g., health, education, political involvement, as well as inclusion in agriculture and other means of rural development).¹⁹⁵ We thus consider the impact of these organizations in terms of creating opportunities for rural women to enhance their livelihoods, network with other women's organizations,¹⁹⁶ and achieve progress towards the broad array of rights enumerated by CEDAW.¹⁹⁷

A. *Canada*

Rural Canadian women have diminished their isolation by establishing or joining women's groups and organizations that are both regional and national in scope.¹⁹⁸ Most of these groups consist

goals, mobilizations that use gender to mobilize women are likely to bring their constituents into more explicitly political activities, empower women to challenge limitations on their roles and lives, and create networks among women that enhance their ability to recognize existing gender relations as oppressive and in need of change.”).

195. *See, e.g., id.* at 8.

196. *See id.* at 5 (stating that grassroots involvement is growing in scope and significance in many parts of the world); *id.* at 13 (“[Networks of women’s organizations are] becoming potentially powerful transnational actors in their own right.”).

197. *See id.* at 5 (stating that nongovernmental groups are involved in “a complex process of political renegotiation [of global relationships] that hides under the label globalization”).

198. Margrit Eichler & Marie Lavigne, *Women’s Movement*, CANADIAN ENCYCLOPEDIA, <http://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.com/index.cfm?PgNm=TCE&Params=A1ART A0008684> (last visited Jan. 3, 2012). Co-operation among the various groups has intensified since the 1970s. *Id.*

Some of the national groups include the National Action Committee on the Status of Women, the Canadian Research Institute for the Advancement of Women, the Canadian Congress for Learning Opportunities for Women, the National Association of Women and the Law, the Canadian Day Care Advocacy Group, Federation nationale des femmes canadiennes-françaises, the National Organization of Immigrant and Visible Minority Women of Canada, National Watch on Images of Women in the Media Inc., the Women’s Legal Education and Action fund, Disabled Women’s Network Canada, the National Congress of Black Women of Canada, the Native Women’s Organization of Canada, the National Council of Women, the Voice of Women, the Canadian Association of Sexual Assault Centres, and many more.

Id. *See generally* Marika Morris, *Some Facts and Dates in Canadian Women’s History of the 20th Century*, CANADIAN RES. INST. ADVANCEMENT WOMEN (2000), <http://criaw-icref.ca/millennium> (informing that throughout the twentieth century, groups of women formed, fighting for women’s rights and improved

of women from the Anglophone provinces, while the French-Canadian women of Québec have created a series of counterparts.¹⁹⁹ Much of the actual work for equality falls to expressly feminist organizations, permanent and ad hoc groups alike.²⁰⁰ These include a community-university research alliance, public foundations, and nonprofit organizations.

In the current economic downturn, however, the greatest challenges to the women's movement, similar to other "socially committed groups," are the policy changes mandated by the governmental impetus for deficit and debt reduction, which affects the social programs in the provinces.²⁰¹ The poor, the rural, the less skillfully represented (i.e., especially the poor and rural women) thus bear a disproportionate burden of the consequences of their

laws regarding women); *Evaluation of the Women's Program*, STATUS WOMEN CAN., <http://www.swc-cfc.gc.ca/account-resp/pr/wpeval-evalpf/wpe-epf-4-eng.html> (last modified Oct. 28, 2011) (noting that the Royal Commission on the Status of Women has acknowledged the special role played by voluntary women's organizations in providing services to their communities, since the 1970s). Some anecdotal evidence suggests that, Canadian women's organizations are increasingly co-opted by conservative and decidedly anti-feminist groups, creating the illusion of a proliferation of women's organizations but without actually working toward the goals of a women's movement. See *supra* note 194 for our discussion of the distinction between feminist vs. non-feminist groups.

199. See Eichler & Lavigne, *supra* note 198. By organizing primarily along the lines of mother tongues, the resulting women's organizations likely tend to ignore indigenous women's voices.
200. *Id.*; see also, e.g., *Resources*, AD HOC COAL. WOMEN'S EQUAL. & HUM. RTS., <http://www.womensequality.ca/resources.html> (last visited Jan. 3, 2012); CANADIAN FEMINIST ALLIANCE FOR INT'L ACTION & NAT'L ASS'N OF WOMEN & THE LAW, SUBMISSION TO THE UNITED NATIONS COMMITTEE ON ECONOMIC, SOCIAL, AND CULTURAL RIGHTS ON THE OCCASION OF ITS REVIEW OF CANADA'S 4TH AND 5TH PERIODIC REPORTS NAWL 2 (2006), available at <http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/cescr/docs/info-ngos/canadianfeminist.pdf> (noting the Feminist Alliance for International Action (FAFIA) is an alliance of fifty Canadian women's organizations seeking to fulfill commitments to women under international human rights treaties and ensure the Canadian government's respect).
201. *Women's Groups Fear Federal Cuts Coming*, CANADA.COM (Sept. 22, 2006), <http://www.canada.com/vancouver/news/story.html?id=84d34765-83d6-4ee6-bc27-4dfb6357dae7&k=54136> (emphasizing that a leading Canadian women's rights group had to close its office for lack of federal funding and other federally financed organizations share similar fear); Eichler & Lavigne, *supra* note 198; Rupert Taylor, *Funding Cuts to Women's Groups by Conservative Government*, SUITE 101 (May 4, 2010), <http://www.suite101.com/news/funding-cut-to-womens-groups-by-conservative-government-a233585> (reporting that the Harper administration cut funding to eleven Canadian NGOs).

government's efforts to balance the books.²⁰² This results in "previously unthinkable" cooperation of women's groups with other grassroots equity-seeking organizations to voice their concerns about poverty in the countryside.²⁰³

1. Rural Women Making Change

Rural Women Making Change (RWMC) is a Community University Research Alliance funded in 2005 by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, a federal government organization.²⁰⁴ RWMC connects rural women's organizations to one another, while also conducting research activities that provide data to both the government and the wider public.²⁰⁵ For example, researchers at universities and labor organizations collaborate on a range of projects that examine rural women's work and everyday lives, thereby simultaneously formulating policy regarding gender and rurality in Canada.²⁰⁶ RWMC also developed a research database

-
202. CANADIAN FEMINIST ALLIANCE FOR INT'L ACTION, *supra* note 56, at 9 (stating Canadian government's recent elimination of programs women rely on have made women's lives harsher, particularly the poorest women); Eichler & Lavigne, *supra* note 198.
203. Eichler & Lavigne, *supra* note 198. For example, "in 1995 the Bread and Roses March involved women marching for 10 days to Québec City to" bring attention to poverty in the province. *Id.*; see also WOMEN TOGETHER ENDING POVERTY, SUBMISSION TO THE MINIMUM WAGE POLICY REVIEW 2 (2010) http://wtep.ca/www.wtep.ca/Events_2010-2011_files/Minimum%20Wage%20Policy%20Review%20Presentation.pdf ("Women Together Ending Poverty or WTEP is a diverse grassroots women's group [formed specifically] to educate and empower . . . other women to take action on the root causes of poverty.").
204. *About RWMC*, *supra* note 189. The Canadian Government's Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) funds "postsecondary-based research, research training and knowledge mobilization activities in the social sciences and humanities." *Funding*, SOC. SCI. & HUMAN. RES. COUNCIL CAN. <http://www.sshrc-crsh.gc.ca/funding-financement/index-eng.aspx> (last modified Oct. 20, 2011).
205. *Rural Women Making Change, Program Objectives and Approach*, U. GUELPH, <http://www.rwmc.uoguelph.ca/page.php?p=22> (last visited Jan. 3, 2012). "Research activity reports, both progress or final," are required for some SSHRC grants. *Reporting and Supporting Evidence*, NAT. SCI. & ENG'G RES. COUNCIL CAN., http://www.nserc-crsng.gc.ca/Professors-Professeurs/FinancialAdminGuide-GuideAdminFinancier/Reporting-Rapports_eng.asp#research (last updated Sept. 15, 2011). RWMC Partners and Supporters include over fifteen local women's groups including Antigonish Women's Resource Centre, CAW Local 88, Women's Committee, Rural Women Take Action on Poverty, and Women's Employment Resource Centre. See *Rural Women Making Change: Partners and Supporters*, U. GUELPH, <http://www.rwmc.uoguelph.ca/page.php?p=14> (last visited Jan. 3, 2012).
206. *About RWMC*, *supra* note 189.

of documents prepared by other rural women's organizations.²⁰⁷ One RWMC project aims to understand how and why women access rural women's organizations and the types of services these rural organizations provide across Canada.²⁰⁸ To this end, RWMC researchers catalogued some 250 active Canadian rural women's organizations and considered the services they offer and how women access them.²⁰⁹ This government-funded community-university research initiative thus enhanced the networking ability of small and start-up grassroots organizations.

Government support for women's organizations is not unusual in Canada. For example, the Canadian Women's Foundation (CWF) is a national public foundation dedicated to improving the lives of women and girls, specifically focusing on helping women and girls "who face the highest risks and who live in urban and rural communities with the fewest services, including remote northern communities."²¹⁰ CWF raises money for researching the best practices for ending violence against women, moving low income women out of poverty, and empowering girls with confidence, courage, and critical thinking skills.²¹¹ The Foundation then finances programs by grassroots organizations that embody its specific goals.²¹²

207. See *Rural Women Making Change: Search the RWMC Library*, U. GUELPH, <http://www.rwmc.uoguelph.ca/search.php> (last visited Jan. 3, 2012).

208. *Rural Women Making Change: Women's Organizations*, *supra* note 133. A database of more than 250 such organizations will be available on the RWMC's website. *Id.*

209. *Id.* Canadian organizations within the RWMC Network include Ministry of Citizenship & Immigration, Women's Resource Centre, University of Guelph, Jane Gould, National Farmers Union Ontario Local 7, National Farmers Union, Women's Committee, CAW Local 88, Women's Committee, Women's Employment Resource Centre, Centre for Families Work and Well-Being, Women Today of Huron, Grey Bruce Domestic Violence Coordinating Committee, Aboriginal Resource Centre - University of Guelph, The Ontario Trillium Foundation, Centre for Research and Education on Violence Against Women, Rural Women's Support Program South East Wellington, Federated Women's Institute of Ontario, Rural Women Take Action on Poverty. *Id.*

210. *Our Approach*, CANADIAN WOMEN'S FOUND., <http://www.canadianwomen.org/our-approach> (last visited Jan. 3, 2012). It is unclear whether, as a national public foundation, the organization receives any monetary support from the Canadian government: all the programs and grants appear to be funded by private donations. *See id.*

211. *Mission and Vision*, CANADIAN WOMEN'S FOUND., <http://www.canadianwomen.org/mission-and-vision> (last visited Jan. 3, 2012).

212. In 2009–10, CWF raised more than CAD 3.4 million to distribute among Canadian women's groups, of which more than a thousand were grassroots organizations. CANADIAN WOMEN'S FOUND., ANNUAL REPORT 2009/2010, at 2 (2010), available at <http://www.canadianwomen.org/sites/cwf.openwebgroup.ca/files/PDF%20-%20>

Another body aiming to enhance the status of rural women in Canada is the Federated Women's Institutes of Ontario (FWIO), a non-profit organization working with and for women in rural and small-town Ontario.²¹³ Through education projects like the Rose Program, FWIO provides community support and promotes community action through information seminars and events such as the Outdoor Farm Show.²¹⁴ FWIO's advocacy committee has played a pivotal role in influencing many changes to provincial laws and practices.²¹⁵

2. Rural Women's Health Networks

In perhaps no field is cooperation between governments and NGOs more essential than in relation to health services. Most health organizations understand that sharing not only information and research but also the burden of providing services will enhance their efficacy and efficiency.²¹⁶ One of the Canadian organizations that

Annual%20report%202009-2010.pdf. Among the 2010 grant recipients were the Native Canadian Center of Toronto: Daughters of Earth, *Funders*, NATIVE CANADIAN CTR. TORONTO, <http://www.ncct.on.ca/funders.php> (last visited Jan. 3, 2012), North End Women's Center, N. END WOMEN'S CTR., N. END WOMEN'S CTR., 2010-2011 ANNUAL REPORT 20 (2011), *available at* <http://www.newcentre.org/wp-content/uploads/2010/12/Annual-Report-2011.pdf>, Women Building Futures, WOMEN BUILDING FUTURES, WOMEN BUILDING FUTURES, ANNUAL REPORT 2010, at 8 (2010), *available at* http://www.womenbuildingfutures.com/Portals/49/pdf/reports/2010-WBF_Annual%20Report_Online.pdf, and the Interior Indian Friendship Society, *Rites of Passage*, CANADIAN WOMEN'S FOUND., <http://www.canadianwomen.org/node/296> (last visited Jan. 3, 2012).

213. *Home*, FEDERATED WOMEN'S INSTS. ONT., <http://www.fwio.on.ca/> (last visited Sept. 28, 2011).

214. *ROSE on the Road at Canada's Outdoor Farm Show!*, FEDERATED WOMEN'S INSTS. ONT., <http://www.fwio.on.ca/News.php> (last visited Jan. 3, 2012).

215. *Voice Your Concerns! Take Action!*, FEDERATED WOMEN'S INSTS. ONT., http://www.fwio.on.ca/Voice_Your_Concerns.php# (last visited Jan. 3, 2012). In February 2011, FWIO's president met with Canada's Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs to discuss the organization's concern regarding the continued closure of small abattoirs in Ontario. *FWIO Advocates for Small Abattoirs*, FEDERATED WOMEN'S INSTS. ONT., http://www.fwio.on.ca/Current_Concerns.php (last visited Jan. 3, 2012) (detailing Minister's statement that she and FWIO, "[have] made progress in recent years" and she looked forward to continuing working with FWIO, while maintaining a shared commitment to food safety).

216. For example, The Canadian Breast Cancer Network (CBCN) is a survivor-directed, national network of organizations and individuals that represents the concerns of all Canadians affected by breast cancer, including those at risk for it. The organization's aim is to develop and encourage networking among concerned groups and individuals. *About CBCN*, CANADIAN BREAST CANCER NETWORK, <http://www.cbcn.ca/index.php?>

delivers health services in rural areas is the Canadian Women's Health Network (CWHN), created in 1993 as a voluntary national organization to improve the health and lives of girls and women in Canada and around the world.²¹⁷ CWHN is a broad network of researchers and activists, employees of provincial and federal health ministries, and women's organizations, working toward improving women's health and providing equal access to health services.²¹⁸ CWHN undertook to collect, catalogue, and distribute research pertaining to women's health issues in Canada.²¹⁹

CWHN advocates that improving women's health requires Canadians to address social and economic conditions such as education, housing, environment, and gender because all influence physical, mental, and social well-being.²²⁰ In 2005, CWHN participated in the preparation of *Women's Health in Canada, Beijing and Beyond*, the Health Section for Canada's "NGO Report" to the 49th session of the U.N. Commission on the Status of Women.²²¹

pageaction=content.page&id=41&lang=en (last updated Aug. 29, 2011). To this end, the CBCN provides a separate webpage for rural women with breast cancer, *Rural Women*, CANADIAN BREAST CANCER NETWORK, <http://www.cbcn.ca/index.php?pageaction=content.page&id=71&lang=en> (last updated July 8, 2010), and includes a list of rural women's organizations there, *Rural Women's Organizations*, CANADIAN BREAST CANCER NETWORK, <http://www.cbcn.ca/index.php?pageaction=content.page&id=612&lang=en> (last updated Jan. 28, 2010). These organizations are mostly organized by state or region, although some of them are national organizations or feminist sub-groups of other national organizations. *Id.*

217. *About Us*, CANADIAN WOMEN'S HEALTH NETWORK, <http://www.cwhn.ca/en/about> (last visited Jan. 3, 2012). A declared goal of CWHN is to improve women's situation around the world; thus, Canadian rural women's health care is only one of many problems of concern to the organization. *See id.*

218. *Id.*

219. *Id.*

220. *Id.*

221. The Economic and Social Council invited eligible NGOs to participate in the 49th session of the Commission on the Status of Women. The two themes were (i) "implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action and the outcome documents of the [twenty-third] special session of the General Assembly;" and "(ii) Current challenges and forward-looking strategies for the advancement and empowerment of women and girls." U.N. Econ. & Soc. Council, Annotated Provisional Agenda and Proposed Organization of Work, Comm'n on the Status of Women, 49th Sess. 1-2, U.N. Doc. E/CN.6/2005/1 (Dec. 20, 2004), available at http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/csw/csw49/E_CN.6_2005_1_13Dec04.pdf; OLENA HANKIVSKY & THE CANADIAN WOMEN'S HEALTH NETWORK, *WOMEN'S HEALTH IN CANADA: BEIJING AND BEYOND I* (Susan White ed., rev. ed., 2005), available at <http://www.cwhn.ca/resources/pub/beijingBeyond.pdf>; *Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs): Making Statements and Oral Intervention*, DIV. ADVANCEMENT WOMEN, <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/Review/english/ngo-mak.htm#ngo4> (last visited

The report outlined CWHN's recommendations in women's health policy as part of Canada's Platform for Action (PFA) to further gender equality, in accordance with Article 2 of CEDAW.²²²

The CWHN recognizes the unique circumstances rural women face: it collaborates with Canada's regional Centres of Excellence for Women's Health, a loosely related network of organizations established in 1996.²²³ The Centres' health research agenda addresses the socioeconomic factors—including the poverty of rural and remote regions—that affect the health of Canadian women.²²⁴ The Centres support policy-oriented and community-based research and the analysis of the social and other determinants of women's health.²²⁵ One of these Centres, the Prairie Women's Health Centre for Excellence (PWHCE), for example, studied the impact of diminishing support for government programs serving Saskatchewan farm communities, and it advocated for a mental health system that is more responsive to local women's needs.²²⁶ The study was part of an action plan designed by hundreds of prairie women to improve their health and well-being.²²⁷

Additionally, the PWHCE, in cooperation with the National Network on Environments and Women's Health, proposed the establishment of an initiative to conduct a national pilot study on rural and remote women's health.²²⁸ The Atlantic and British Columbia Centers of Excellence, the CWHN, and the Women's Health Bureau of Canada collaborated to produce a directive of best

Jan. 3, 2012); *Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs): Participation Eligibility*, DIV. ADVANCEMENT WOMEN, <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/Review/english/ngo.htm#ngo2> (last visited Jan. 3, 2012).

222. HANKIVSKY & THE CANADIAN WOMEN'S HEALTH NETWORK, *supra* note 221, at 5 (noting that this report directly addresses Article 12 of CEDAW, calling on states to "take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in the field of health care").

223. *About CEWH*, CENTRES EXCELLENCE WOMEN'S HEALTH, <http://www.cewh-cesf.ca/en/about.shtml> (last visited Jan. 3, 2012).

224. *Id.*

225. *Id.*

226. *Id.*; see also N. GERRARD & G. RUSSELL, AN EXPLORATION OF HEALTH-RELATED IMPACTS OF THE EROSION OF AGRICULTURALLY FOCUSED SUPPORT PROGRAMS FOR FARM WOMEN IN SASKATCHEWAN (2000), available at <http://www.pwhce.ca/explorationHealthRelated.htm>.

227. See GERRARD & RUSSELL, *supra* note 226.

228. REBECCA SUTHERNS ET AL., CTRS. OF EXCELLENCE FOR WOMEN'S HEALTH, RURAL, REMOTE AND NORTHERN WOMEN'S HEALTH: POLICY AND RESEARCH DIRECTIONS FINAL SUMMARY REPORT 3 (2003), available at http://www.cewh-cesf.ca/PDF/cross_cex/RRN_Summary_CompleteE.pdf.

practices and policies for providing optimal health services to rural women.²²⁹ A report of the collaboration, *Rural and Remote Women's Health: Policy and Research Directions*,²³⁰ asserts that gaps in publicly funded policy development contradict Canada's commitment to CEDAW and impede equitable access to services and power.²³¹

The PWHCE, supported by the Women's Health Contribution Program of Health Canada, actively organizes the rural women of Manitoba and Saskatchewan, and assists them to articulate an agenda for change.²³² Other organizations in the region, including the North End Women's Center, Women and Health Protection (WHP),²³³ the Saskatoon Anti-Poverty Coalition (SAPC),²³⁴ and Equal Justice for All (EJA),²³⁵ also support the PWHCE.²³⁶ Thus, we see again the wide collaboration between grassroots groups and national umbrella

229. *Id.*

230. *Id.*

231. *See id.* at L8–9. As nearly one-third of Canadians live in rural and remote areas, and more than half of Canada's population is comprised of women, the report calls for a "policy change network." *Id.* at L9–10. Members of policy change networks participate in the policy process and interact with each other regularly, distinguished from other community groups by the members' shared focus on material interests. *Id.* at L10. Actions typical of policy change networks include making clear policy recommendations; producing user friendly kits containing briefing papers, background information, and contact lists; and maintaining a central office with staff to oversee projects. *Id.*

232. ELAINE ENARSON, PRAIRIE WOMEN'S HEALTH CTR. OF EXCELLENCE, PRAIRIE WOMEN PREPARED FOR DISASTER: AN EMERGENCY PLANNING GUIDE FOR WOMEN'S COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS (2009), available at <http://www.pwhce.ca/pdf/disasterI/MainReport.pdf>.

233. Formed in 1998, WHP is a coalition of activists and academics, including researchers, journalists, and health professionals working towards developing an improved health protection legislative framework. *The Working Group*, WOMEN & HEALTH PROTECTION, <http://www.whp-apsf.ca/en/about.html> (last visited Jan. 3, 2012).

234. The Saskatoon Anti-Poverty Coalition works to eliminate poverty by increasing community involvement in creating a long term anti-poverty strategy. *Welcome to Our Blog*, SASKATOON ANTI-POVERTY COALITION BLOG (Aug. 12, 2008, 12:32 PM), <http://saskatoonanti-povertycoalition.blogspot.com>.

235. Equal Justice for All, a grassroots antipoverty organization in Saskatoon, worked with PWHCE on a participatory action research project focused on the experiences of women living on social assistance. *Women and Poverty*, PRAIRIE WOMEN'S HEALTH CENTRE EXCELLENCE, http://www.pwhce.ca/program_poverty.htm (last visited Jan. 3, 2012).

236. *About CEWH*, *supra* note 223 Joanne Havelock et al., Presentation at the Atlantic Centre of Excellence for Women's Health: Photovoice Process Reflecting Women's Lives (Mar. 17, 2009), available at <http://www.acewh.dal.ca/pdf/Looking%20Back%20presentations/Havelock%20-%20PhotoVoice%20Process%20Reflecting%20Women's%20Lives.pdf>; *Women and Poverty*, *supra* note 235; *The Working Group*, *supra* note 233.

organizations, as the PWHCE facilitates the networking and collaboration of the relatively small grassroots organizations.

B. Australia

Australia enjoys a robust cooperative sector.²³⁷ While its best known cooperatives are in the agricultural sector, other services are frequently provided by cooperatives, especially in rural areas.²³⁸ Surprisingly, the registration and operation of a cooperative in Australia is more cumbersome than that of an incorporated business.²³⁹ Australian cooperatives previously operated under their respective state's laws, which hampered their ability to grow into national organizations.²⁴⁰ In 1996, the states, territories, and the Commonwealth agreed on a national scheme for cooperative legislation.²⁴¹ This harmonization of laws permitted cooperatives to recruit members and operate in states other than the one of registration.²⁴² Among the organizations discussed, Australian Women in Agriculture thus operates on the national stage, while Rural Women's Networks operate within individual states.

1. Australian Women in Agriculture

Because many rural livelihoods are grounded in agriculture, numerous rural organizations are agriculture-oriented. For example, Australian Women in Agriculture (AWiA) is Australia's premier

237. See *Welcome to Australian Co-operative Links*, CO-OPERATIVE DEV. SERVS. LTD., <http://www.coopdevelopment.org.au/coopl原因.html> (last visited Jan. 3, 2012). This site lists more than 600 Australian cooperatives. *Id.* There are about 2,000 cooperatives in Australia, possibly more. See *id.*; see also *Cooperative Society*, OUROMMUNITY.COM.AU, http://ourcommunity.com.au/directories/directories_article.jsp?articleId=2102 (last visited Jan. 3, 2012) (stating that there are about 2,400 cooperatives in Australia).

238. See *South Australian Co-operatives.*, CO-OPERATIVE DEV. SERVICES LTD., <http://coopdevelopment.org.au/salinks.html> (last visited Jan. 3, 2012).

239. See *Co-operative Society*, *supra* note 237 ("[T]he Associations Incorporation Act runs to 134 pages, the Co-operatives Act 148.").

240. See *Australian National Co-operatives*, CO-OPERATIVE DEV. SERVICES LTD., <http://www.coopdevelopment.org.au/natlinks.html> (last visited Jan. 3, 2012) (stating that a 1986 study found that legislative inconsistencies between states created barriers to development of national agricultural co-operatives).

241. *Id.*

242. *Id.* ("According to the Regulatory Impact Statement for the proposed National Co-operatives Law, there were 26 'foreign co-operatives' (co-operatives operating in another state or territory) registered in Australia in 2009.").

organization of rural women.²⁴³ Since its founding in 1993, AWiA has evolved into a national body whose members seek to improve the lives of Australian farm women.²⁴⁴ The membership is composed of 263 individuals with diverse backgrounds (including farming and research) and eight corporate sponsors.²⁴⁵ AWiA's influential advice is sought by various state, local, and national governments whenever rural issues are addressed.²⁴⁶ AWiA also aims to partner with a number of industry bodies,²⁴⁷ government departments, and other organizations²⁴⁸ to broaden its members' opportunities for success.²⁴⁹

-
243. AWiA-AUSTRALIAN WOMEN AGRIC., LTD., <http://www.awia.org.au> (last visited Jan. 3, 2012).
244. *See About Us*, AWiA-AUSTRALIAN WOMEN AGRIC., LTD., http://www.awia.org.au/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=48:about-us&catid=30:about-us&Itemid=22 (last visited Jan. 3, 2012).
245. AUSTRALIAN WOMEN IN AGRIC., LTD., ANNUAL REPORT AUSTRALIAN WOMEN IN AGRICULTURE 2009–2010, at 11–12, 27 (2010), *available at* http://www.awia.org.au/images/annual_report/annualreport2010.pdf (stating that AWiA corporate sponsors contribute AUD 500 as a yearly fee; these sponsors include Rabobank and Westpac Bank); *Our People*, AWiA-AUSTRALIAN WOMEN IN AGRIC., LTD., *available at* http://www.awia.org.au/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=49&Itemid=253 (last visited Jan. 3, 2012). Westpac further provides beneficial services like non-profit interest rates and online credit card processing. ANNUAL REPORT AUSTRALIAN WOMEN IN AGRICULTURE 2009–2010, *supra* at 11.
246. *See Women Farmers Lead the Way*, BUZZ July 2010, at 1 *available at* http://www.awia.org.au/images/the_buzz/jul2010.pdf.
247. *See* ANNUAL REPORT AUSTRALIAN WOMEN IN AGRICULTURE 2009–2010, *supra* note 245, at 16 (detailing the collaboration between Many Australian Photographers (MAP) and AWiA). MAP donated 50% of the cost of its photo book, *Beyond Reasonable Drought*, to AWiA in exchange for promoting the book and handling sales through AWiA administration. *Id.*
248. *Id.* AWiA is a member of The National Rural Women's Coalition and Network, Inc. (NRWCN). *Id.* “[NRWCN] is a collaborative national voice for over 250,000 women” living in rural Australia. *Id.* NRWCN was established in 2002 to provide recommendations to government, and includes Australian Local Government Women's Association (ALGWA), Country Women's Association of Australia (CWAA), Foundation for Australian Agriculture Women (FAAW), National Rural Health Alliance (NRHA), Rural Doctors Association of Australia (RDAA), Women's Industry Network Seafood Community (WINSOC). *Id.*
249. *New AiWA Projects Ready for Launching*, BUZZ, July 2010, at 8 (July 2010), http://www.awia.org.au/images/the_buzz/jul2010.pdf (detailing AWiA workshops that train women in agriculture, forestry and fisheries to become successful leaders, business owners and technologically savvy). In 2010, a delegation of AWiA members met with various government officials, including the Minister of Agriculture and the Minister for the Status of Women, to discuss issues on AWiA's agenda and to develop partnerships with politicians. ANNUAL REPORT AUSTRALIAN WOMEN IN AGRICULTURE 2009–2010, *supra* note 245, at 14.

Thus, AWiA is a prime example of a bottom-up, grassroots organization influencing rural policy makers at higher scales.

2. Rural Women's Network

The Rural Women's Network (RWN) in the state of Victoria illustrates the case for wide-ranging collaboration between governments and grassroots organizations in achieving CEDAW's goals.²⁵⁰ The Victoria Department of Planning and Community Development (DPCD), through its Office of Women's Policy (OWP),²⁵¹ established the first informal RWN in 1986 to foster the networking efforts of rural women.²⁵² The Victoria RWN publishes a quarterly newsmagazine, the *Network*,²⁵³ while also organizing educational seminars and events such as the Rural Women Leading Change Program²⁵⁴ and the Rural Women in a Changing Climate Forum.²⁵⁵ Within two years of its establishment, the DPCD hired a full-time researcher to explore the relationship between farm women and the Victorian Department of Agriculture and Rural Affairs.²⁵⁶ Furthermore, in 1989, the Department appointed two part-time officers for the Women in Agriculture project,²⁵⁷ a scheme that aims to modify programs and service delivery to attract and serve women clients.²⁵⁸

250. See *Rural Women's Network*, DEPARTMENT HUM. SERVICES, <http://www.dhs.vic.gov.au/for-business-and-community/community-involvement/women-in-the-community/regional-and-rural/about-the-rural-womens-network> (last visited Jan. 3, 2012).

251. *Women's Policy in Victoria*, DEPARTMENT HUM. SERVICES, <http://www.dhs.vic.gov.au/about-the-department/our-organisation/organisational-structure/our-divisions/industry,-workforce-and-strategy-division/office-of-womens-policy> (last visited Jan. 3, 2012).

252. See *History of the Rural Women's Network*, DEPARTMENT HUM. SERVICES, <http://www.dhs.vic.gov.au/for-business-and-community/community-involvement/women-in-the-community/regional-and-rural/about-the-rural-womens-network/history-of-the-rural-womens-network> (last updated Sept. 2, 2011); *Rural Women's Network*, *supra* note 250.

253. *Rural Women's Network Magazine*, DEPARTMENT HUM. SERVICES, <http://www.dhs.vic.gov.au/for-business-and-community/community-involvement/women-in-the-community/regional-and-rural/about-the-rural-womens-network/rural-womens-network-newsletter> (last updated Sept. 1, 2011).

254. *History of the Rural Women's Network*, *supra* note 252.

255. *Id.*

256. *Id.*

257. *Id.*

258. *Id.*

Other Australian states have followed suit: the government in New South Wales founded its RWN in 1992, in response to concerns regarding opportunities for rural women to network, share ideas, access information, and participate in decision making.²⁵⁹ Currently, the RWN in New South Wales is overseeing various community projects, including Shaping Our Futures Together (SOFT)²⁶⁰ and Daring to Dream.²⁶¹ New South Wales' RWN was recognized in Australia's most recent CEDAW report in 2004 for its leadership training workshops.²⁶² Additionally, the RWN in New South Wales serves as the link between rural women and local service and support providers like the Women's Legal Resource Center and the Women's Information and Referral Service.²⁶³ Moreover, RWN links rural women to various national grant opportunities addressing health, education, technology, science, community development, business, etc.²⁶⁴

The Australian government's increased interaction with rural women's networks has brought more women's organizations into engagement with the government.²⁶⁵ For example, in the same year the Victoria Department of Conservation and Environment appointed a project worker for women's participation in natural resource management, the Victoria RWN established a women's environment network called CONSERVE.²⁶⁶ Further, in 1997, the RWN formed the Rural Women's Working Group to advise the Standing Committee of the Agriculture and Resource Management Ministers

259. *About the Rural Women's Network*, NSW DEPARTMENT PRIMARY INDUSTRIES, <http://www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/rwn/about> (last visited Jan. 3, 2012).

260. SOFT is a two-day course during which rural women participate in workshops on community-based leadership training. *Rural Women's Network Projects and Activities*, NSW DEPARTMENT PRIMARY INDUSTRIES, <http://dpi.nsw.gov.au/rwn/activities> (last visited Jan. 3, 2012).

261. The Daring to Dream projects publicizes the efforts of "rural women who are playing key roles as innovators, achievers [or] agents of change within agriculture, industry, business, community, sport, the arts and natural resources." *Id.*

262. *Australia Fourth and Fifth*, *supra* note 92, ¶ 151.

263. *Support Services and Help Lines*, NSW DEPARTMENT PRIMARY INDUSTRIES, <http://www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/rwn/support> (last visited Jan. 3, 2012). WIRS is a confidential telephone contact point for women seeking up-to-date and accurate information about organisations and services for women in NSW. *Id.*

264. *Grants, Funding and Scholarships*, NSW DEPARTMENT PRIMARY INDUSTRIES, <http://www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/rwn/funding> (last visited Jan. 3, 2012).

265. *See id.*

266. *History of the Rural Women's Network*, *supra* note 254.

of Victoria.²⁶⁷ That year, the RWN established the Rural Women's Leadership Bursary Program in partnership with Victoria's Office of Women's Policy.²⁶⁸ In 2011 the Bursary Program awarded AUD 350,000 to more than twenty organizations to increase women's leadership opportunities nationwide.²⁶⁹

C. India

India's rural landscape is "studded with SHGs," connecting individuals with banks and cooperatives.²⁷⁰ Self-help groups, which execute various anti-poverty programs for the government, are increasingly formed and supported by government agencies, in addition to those created by NGOs.²⁷¹ Apparent synergies exist between SHGs and local politics because village women can gain experience with governance processes (e.g., regular meetings, decision making, fund allocation) through membership in SHGs, SHG clusters, or federations.²⁷² SHGs also make women more visible within their villages, which helps women succeed when they run for office.²⁷³ Several studies show that membership in an SHG is a critical component of the political experience of women who run

267. *Id.* In spite of its commitment to rural women and their special circumstances, however, the Victoria RWN relocated first to Ballarat, the third largest city of Victoria, and, in 1996, to the bustling city of Melbourne. *See id.*

268. *Id.*

269. *Round Two of the Women's Leadership Grants – Year in Review – Working Closely with Industry, Government, and other Partners*, VICTORIA DEPARTMENT HUMAN SERVICES, <http://www.dhs.vic.gov.au/about-the-department/our-organisation/annual-reports/departments-of-human-services-annual-report-2010-11/year-in-review/year-in-review-housing> (last updated Sept. 15, 2011); *see also, e.g., The PACEsetters Project: Stories*, MULTICULTURAL CENTRE WOMEN'S HEALTH, http://www.mcwh.com.au/healthprom/pacesetters_stories.php (last visited Jan. 9, 2012) (presenting stories of immigrant and refugee women's leadership).

270. Kim Wilson, *Foreword* to EDA RURAL SYS. PRIVATE LTD., SELF HELP GROUPS IN INDIA: A STUDY OF THE LIGHTS AND SHADES, at i (2006), *available at* <http://www.edarural.com/documents/SHG-Study/Executive-Summary.pdf>. This study examined 214 self-help groups in 108 villages in four states and nine districts to understand the promotion and operation of self-help groups, how members related to one another, how groups interacted with their communities, as well as the effect groups had on their social, political, and economic environments and vice versa. *Id.* at ii.

271. EDA RURAL SYS. PRIVATE LTD., SELF HELP GROUPS IN INDIA: A STUDY OF THE LIGHTS AND SHADES 1 & n.2 (2006), *available at* <http://www.edarural.com/documents/SHG-Study/Executive-Summary.pdf>.

272. *Id.* at 5.

273. *Id.*

for elected office.²⁷⁴ SHGs are thus instrumental to building local capacity among women. Further, about a third of Indian women's SHGs actively deliver services to their communities.²⁷⁵ These services include improving education, health care, veterinary care, the water supply, and village roads. The SHGs also contribute funds and labor for protecting natural resources.²⁷⁶

1. Self-Employed Women's Association

The Self-Employed Women's Association (SEWA) is an organization of poor women workers who are not formally employed, a designation that includes an overwhelming 93% of women in the Indian labor force.²⁷⁷ Because they do not receive medical coverage and other benefits, these women are the least protected segment of the labor force.²⁷⁸ Their work in the informal sector remains undercounted, undervalued, and mostly invisible to government agencies.²⁷⁹ Established in 1972, SEWA aims to achieve secure employment and social security benefits for women workers.²⁸⁰ SEWA is more than an organization of women; it is also a political movement working to draw the state's attention to the informal sector.²⁸¹ SEWA executes its strategy through the joint action of unions and cooperatives.

SEWA's integrated approach to poverty reduction focuses less on creating jobs and more on strengthening workers' capacities to overcome structural constraints and enter competitive markets.²⁸²

274. See JOY DESHMUKH-RANADIVE, WOMEN'S SELF-HELP GROUPS IN ANDHRA PRADESH—PARTICIPATORY POVERTY ALLEVIATION IN ACTION 3 (2004), available at <http://info.worldbank.org/etools/docs/reducingpoverty/case/82/fullcase/India%20SHGS%20Full%20Case.pdf> (noting that social inclusion and participation in the political process are also impacted by SHGs); DEEPTI UMASHANKAR, WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT: EFFECT OF PARTICIPATION IN SELF HELP GROUPS 65 (2006), available at <http://www.iimb.ernet.in/microfinance/Docs/Students/women%20empower%20Deepti.pdf> (highlighting that women's participation in SHGs has enabled them to become prospective leaders in the political field).

275. See EDA RURAL SYSTEMS PVT LTD., *supra* note 271, at 7.

276. *Id.*

277. *About Us*, SELF EMPLOYED WOMEN'S ASS'N, http://www.sewa.org/About_Us.asp (last visited Jan. 3, 2012).

278. *Id.*

279. *Id.*

280. *Id.*

281. *Id.*; see also Tripp, *supra* note 82, at 67 ("[SEWA] is an advocacy organization and at the same time a movement of poor, self-employed women workers themselves.").

282. Ela R. Bhatt, *Approaches to Poverty Removal*, SELF EMPLOYED WOMEN'S ASS'N, http://www.sewa.org/Archives_Poverty_Removal.asp (last visited Jan. 3, 2012) (discussing four-pronged, integrative approach).

The organization's holistic approach²⁸³ concentrates on the simultaneous development of capital, capacity building, loss prevention (through access to health insurance, childcare, and disaster relief), and promotion of collective organizing.²⁸⁴ Additionally, SEWA provides various support services, such as communication services; Internet connectivity; access to food, seed, and fodder depositories; health care; child-care; insurance; legal aid; and access to application forms for governmental poverty-alleviation schemes.²⁸⁵

In rural areas, SEWA establishes hubs, called SEWA Sanskar Kendras (SSKs), with one for every ten to fifteen villages.²⁸⁶ SSKs distribute information on a broad range of topics including alternate cropping systems; optimization of agricultural inputs;²⁸⁷ producer-oriented marketing opportunities;²⁸⁸ emerging market trends;²⁸⁹ and functional schemes of government.²⁹⁰ The SSKs also establish Community Learning Centers (CLCs) that provide skills-training related to computers and information technology, education on health and social issues, and disaster preparedness.²⁹¹ Finally, the CLCs provide meeting space for various livelihood cooperatives (e.g.,

283. Tripp, *supra* note 82, at 67 (labeling SEWA's approach "holistic").

284. *See* Bhatt, *supra* note 282.

285. *Id.*; SEWA Services, SELF EMPLOYED WOMEN'S ASS'N, http://www.sewa.org/Sewa_Services.asp (last visited Jan. 3, 2012).

286. *About Us*, SEWA SANSKAR KENDRA, http://www.sewasanskarkendra.org/About_Us.asp (last visited Jan. 3, 2012).

287. *Information Dissemination*, SEWA SANSKAR KENDRA, http://www.sewasanskarkendra.org/Information_Dissemination.asp (last visited Jan. 3, 2012) (explaining that agricultural inputs are seeds, fertilizer, water and pesticides. SEWA helps small farmers avoid input loss by providing storage banks for seed, grain and fodder when possible).

288. *See* SEWA BHARAT, 2008–2009 SEWA BHARAT ANNUAL REPORT 40, 72 (2009), available at <http://www.sewabharat.org/annualreport.pdf>. In Bhagalpur, SEWA encourages the silk weaving industry to revive the heritage, while weavers bring home continuous income. SEWA also trains women in candle making, bag making, tailoring, embroidery, knitting, painting, and catering. SEWA is developing a rural business model for organic agriculture with links to corporate investors. *Id.* at 72.

289. *Id.* at 44–46. (describing how SEWA capitalized on the heightened popularity of *agarbatti* (incense) by establishing a scenting unit called "SEWA Shram Sugandhit Producer Company" in 2008, while training women in scent rolling and enabling them to become shareholders in the company).

290. *Information Dissemination*, *supra* note 287 ("[The SSK disseminated information about] government schemes on agriculture, poverty alleviation, rural employment, social safety nets, food for work program[s], and livestock related services").

291. *Capacity Building*, SEWA SANSKAR KENDRA, http://www.sewasanskarkendra.org/Capacity_Building.asp (last visited Jan. 3, 2012).

groups of artisans, grain farmers, and salt workers).²⁹² Providing meeting space for such SHGs is an extremely important function in rural areas, where such facilities are in short supply.

2. The Mann Deshi Mahila Group

Another similar cooperative is the Mann Deshi Mahila Group, comprised of three distinct organizations that serve myriad related needs: the Mann Deshi Mahila Sahakari Bank (MDMSB), the Mann Deshi Foundation, and the Mann Deshi Mahila Bachat Gat Federation.²⁹³ First, the MDMSB is a “regulated cooperative bank,” what would be called a credit union in the United States, run by and for women.²⁹⁴ The Bank was founded by illiterate rural women who, after considerable struggle, won a banking license from the Reserve Bank of India, the top banking regulatory authority.²⁹⁵ The Bank now has 127,000 clients and assets in excess of USD 6 million, making it the largest microfinance bank in Maharashtra state.²⁹⁶ MDMSB, which boasts a repayment rate of 98%, is a pioneer in India’s burgeoning microfinance sector, offering its clients individual and group loans, savings, insurance, and pension plans.²⁹⁷

Secondly, the Mann Deshi Foundation is an NGO that provides a variety of non-financial services to Mann Deshi Bank clients. These include financial and business management training, community radio, and women’s health and farming workshops.²⁹⁸ Lastly, the Mann Deshi Mahila Bachat Gat Federation is an umbrella organization of more than 2,400 SHGs that serve rural women entrepreneurs.²⁹⁹ Thus, the Mann Deshi Group is a women’s cooperative formed primarily to assist with microfinance and economic development, but its components are also active in building local capacity and providing rural telecommunication services (e.g., a community radio).³⁰⁰

3. Mahila Samakhya Programme

292. *Id.*

293. *Who Are We*, MANN DESHI MAHILA BANK, <http://www.manndeshi.org/index.html> (last visited Jan. 3, 2012).

294. *Id.*

295. *Background & History*, MANN DESHI MAHILA BANK, <http://www.mann-deshi.org/history.html> (last visited Jan. 3, 2012).

296. *Id.*; *Who Are We*, *supra* note 293.

297. *Background & History*, *supra* note 297; *Who Are We*, *supra* note 293.

298. *Who Are We*, *supra* note 293.

299. *Id.*

300. *See id.*

The Mahila Samakhya Programme³⁰¹ seeks to encourage Indian women to undertake critical reflection about the structural conditions that beget female oppression, and to provide them with the resources and information they need to change these conditions.³⁰² The program trains women, while also conducting and documenting research, evaluations, and monitoring.³⁰³ The Mahila Samakhya pilot program ran in ten districts throughout the states of Gujarat, Karnataka, and Uttar Pradesh;³⁰⁴ these districts were selected on the basis of regional representation, efficient coordination between federal and state governments, and the supportive presence of women's organizations at the local level.³⁰⁵

The program emphasizes a bottom-up approach.³⁰⁶ The State Project Office (SPO) heads the program with the support of committees comprising the State Education Minister, federal and local bureaucrats, village-level workers, and women's organizations. At the district level, District Implementation Units administer the program with support from local NGOs and training groups. While this implementation strategy achieves policy uniformity across the states, the *sahayoginis* (members of the village collectives) "are the core strength of the programme, and thus, they enjoy an extremely high degree of autonomy in determining the agenda and the key thrust areas of the programme at the local level."³⁰⁷ With the support of district level staff, the national project director, and the federal education secretary, several grassroots women's collectives established informal women's courts to assist local women with domestic disputes, including divorce. They also register complaints of domestic violence, sexual harassment, and rape.³⁰⁸

301. Gopika Solanki, *A Fine Balance? Multilevel Governance and Women's Organising in India*, in *FEDERALISM, FEMINISM AND MULTILEVEL GOVERNANCE* 179 (Melissa Haussman et al. eds., 2010). The program offers opportunities for feminist activists to interact with officials and politicians at the federal, state, and district levels. The program is registered as an NGO to maximize its autonomy at the state level. *Id.*

302. *Id.* The Royal Netherlands Government initially funded the Mahila Samakhya Programme, which runs in nine Indian states, as a grant-in-aid. Currently, the Indian government and the Department for International Development of the United Kingdom fund the program, with the latter committed to funding it until at least 2014. *Id.*

303. *Id.*

304. *Id.* at 179.

305. *Id.*

306. *Id.*

307. *Id.* at 179, 181

308. *Id.*

D. China

It is somewhat difficult for Western researchers to get accurate information regarding the rapidly changing grassroots sector in China. While the party-state opened the economy to outside capital, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) still monitors social organizations and obscures the emerging plurality of voices in order to maintain the façade of social and political unity.³⁰⁹ Nevertheless, while the state “appears to exert extensive formal control, its capacity to realize this control is increasingly limited.”³¹⁰ Due to the complex and bureaucratic requirements for registering an organization,³¹¹ many grassroots groups operate without such registration, in a legal twilight zone, labeling themselves “clubs,” “forums,” or “salons.”³¹² Others succeed in registering or operating under the umbrella of a sponsoring organization.³¹³

1. All-China Women’s Federation

The All-China Women’s Federation (ACWF) is the largest NGO aimed at improving women’s status in China.³¹⁴ Founded in 1949, the ACWF promotes “the further liberation of women”³¹⁵ by uniting women’s organizations associated with different ethnicities and across a range of geographical areas.³¹⁶ The Federation’s stated foundational principle is to protect women’s rights and interests and to promote equality between men and women.³¹⁷ The ACWF is comprised of local women’s federations and their members.³¹⁸ The local federations operate at various levels according to the state administrative divisions;³¹⁹ women workers’ committees of trade unions in factories, mines, and enterprises are all members of the ACWF.³²⁰ Since 1949, ACWF has engaged in international

309. Saich, *supra* note 23, at 125–27.

310. *Id.* at 125.

311. *Id.* at 129–32.

312. *Id.* at 135.

313. *Id.*

314. *Facts and Data, ALL-CHINA WOMEN’S FED’N*, <http://www.women.org.cn/english/english/fact/mulu.htm> (last visited Jan. 3, 2012).

315. *Id.*

316. *See id.*

317. *Id.*

318. *Id.*

319. *Id.* Over 60,000 sub-federations operate at or above the township or neighborhood level; 980,000 women’s representatives’ committees and women’s committees function at the grassroots-level; and about 5,800 women are local group members at various levels. *Id.*

320. *Id.*

exchanges to represent women's concerns and safeguard women's rights.³²¹ Members of ACWF were elected to the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women in 1982, and ACWF members also served for five subsequent sessions.³²² As an umbrella organization, the ACWF encompasses over 3,500 local NGOs, women's SHGs, and cooperatives.³²³ It thereby effectively obscures the political plurality of women's organizations within China and gives the appearance of a politically unified society.³²⁴

Some senior leaders of the ACWF are key members of a highly effective group of feminist activists initially organized around the magazine *Rural Women Knowing All* (RWKA).³²⁵ This group provides sexual health care to rural women, establishes hotlines for migrant women, and creates awareness of the high rates of suicide among young rural women.³²⁶ In addition to RWKA magazine, the *China Women's Daily*, the official publication of the ACWF, highlights issues facing rural women.³²⁷

2. Cultural Development Center for Rural Women

The Cultural Development Center for Rural Women (CDCRW) is an NGO seeking to promote the social development of China's rural women.³²⁸ The organization emerged from its original core activity of publishing the magazine *Rural Women* (the successor to *Rural Women Knowing All*³²⁹) to become a major non-profit organization with an integrated program that "supports the poor by combining development projects, news media and information services, and dissemination of the results of research."³³⁰ The CDCRW aims to create opportunities for self-empowerment and development for and by rural women, while also seeking to improve the quality of life for migrant women in China's burgeoning new cities.³³¹ The CDCRW strives to raise rural women's skill levels, including those of young

321. See *Multilateral Exchanges*, ALL-CHINA WOMEN'S FED'N, <http://www.women.org.cn/english/english/major/multitex.htm> (last visited Jan. 3, 2012).

322. *Id.*

323. See Saich, *supra* note 23, at 134.

324. See *id.*

325. *Id.* at 138.

326. *Id.*

327. *Id.*

328. *About Us: The Cultural Development Center for Rural Women*, RURAL WOMEN, <http://www.nongjianv.org/web/english/aboutus/center.html> (last visited Jan. 3, 2012).

329. See *supra* note 325 and accompanying text.

330. *About Us: The Cultural Development Center for Rural Women*, *supra* note 328.

331. *Id.*

women who dropped out of formal education, and to enhance their participation in politics.³³² The organization can fairly be described as “holistic,” in that it is also concerned with several aspects of rural women’s health, including suicide prevention, improving access to reproductive health facilities, and generally enhancing poor rural women’s quality of life.³³³ Further, the CDCRW supports the struggle for migrant women’s civil and labor rights, and it strives to enhance the social space for migrant women’s development.

Echoing the language of CEDAW’s Article 14(2)(a),³³⁴ the CDCRW provides opportunities for rural women to fully participate in community development.³³⁵ Since its inception in 1993, the organization has fostered rural women’s participation in their communities through a series of projects, including microfinance programs, literacy classes, and various educational endeavors.³³⁶ For example, the CDCRW established the Practical Skills Training Center for Rural Women in 1998, China’s first non-profit school for public welfare.³³⁷ In addition to raising rural women’s overall capacity, the center provides training in specialized areas like entrepreneurship and Chinese law.³³⁸ Courses offered by the Center are designed to tap into women’s potential and increase their self-confidence and self-reliance as a key component of local capacity building.³³⁹ This leads to an increase in the number of women participating in community development and poverty alleviation,

332. *Id.*

333. *Id.*

334. *See supra* text accompanying notes 34–38.

335. *About Us: Cultural Development Center for Rural Women*, *supra* note 328. Oprah’s Book Club Grant Program issued a grant to CDCRW. Oprah’s Angel Network, *Beijing Cultural Development Center for Rural Women*, OPRAH.COM (Jan. 1, 2006), <http://www.oprah.com/angelnetwork/Beijing-Cultural-Development-Center-for-Rural-Women-Angel-Ne>.

336. *About Us: Cultural Development Center for Rural Women*, *supra* note 328; *see also Profiles: Wu Qing*, SCHWAB FOUND. SOC. ENTREPRENEURSHIP, <http://www.schwabfound.org/sf/SocialEntrepreneurs/Profiles/index.htm?name=129203&sorganization=0&sarea=0&ssector=0&stype=0> (last visited Jan. 3, 2012).

337. *Practical Skills Training Center for Rural Women*, RURAL WOMEN <http://www.nongjianv.org/web/english/aboutus/school.html> (last visited Jan. 3, 2012) (noting that the Training Center for Rural Women empowers women through teaching practical skills, like hairdressing, waitressing, nursing, elder care, and computer training, in programs running from five days to three months that are offered to women, ages 16–19, coming from poor families in rural locales).

338. *See id.* *Ambassador Visits Training Center for Rural Women*, MINISTRY FOREIGN AFF. DEN. (May 13, 2011), <http://www.ambbeijing.um.dk/en/menu/TheEmbassy/News/AmbassadorVisitsTrainingCenterForRuralWomen.htm>.

339. *About Us: Cultural Development Center for Rural Women*, *supra* note 328.

especially by leaders of grassroots organizations.³⁴⁰ Further, the CDCRW has hosted various seminars regarding problems affecting rural women.³⁴¹ Interactive discussions at these seminars generate recommendations for policy changes regarding women's issues, which the CDCRW presents to the Chinese government and international bodies.³⁴² Further, CDCRW trains and assists grassroots women activists for their involvement in local politics and self-government, creating a support network for women village leaders.³⁴³

CONCLUSION

As this review of women's organizations in Australia, Canada, China, and India demonstrates, women's grassroots organizations may be instrumental in influencing and, indeed, effecting governmental policies. This is the case even if such policies are mandated only by the Member States' "weak" CEDAW obligations.³⁴⁴ Governments benefit both from these organizations' delivery of education, health care, and other services, as well as from the valuable input generated by these bodies' research groups and think-tanks.³⁴⁵ While the law is a blunt tool—and scholars have debated its effectiveness for advancing the feminist agenda³⁴⁶—law can also play an expressive role, often aspirational or idealistic that nevertheless helps to achieve feminist ends. Not all rural women's grassroots organizations are explicitly or apparently feminist in their

340. *See id.*

341. *Id.*

342. *See, e.g., Trust Fund Grantees*, UN WOMEN, http://www.unifem.org/gender_issues/violence_against_women/trust_fund_grantees.php (last visited Jan. 3, 2012) (describing proposal to develop regional sex education program to inform rural girls in Hubei Province on how to avoid sexual abuse, in which the Beijing CDCRW proposes to create a community activity center for girls who are left behind by their parents to go work in urban centers). The organization has "sponsored two seminars on Rural Women's Development and Countermeasures, two seminars on Migrant Women's Legal Rights and two seminars on Rural Women's Participation in Politics as well as many other workshops, discussion meetings and news releases." Jeff Plantilla, *Directory of Asia-Pacific Human Rights Centers: China Centers*, DIRECTORY ASIA-PACIFIC HUM. RTS. CENTERS, <http://hurights.pbworks.com/w/page/11947497/China%20Centers> (last visited Jan. 3, 2012). The CDCRW's newsletter, *Seeds*, and its website publish the work produced in these symposia. *See id.*

343. Plantilla, *supra* note 342.

344. *See supra* Parts I–IV.

345. *See supra* Parts I–IV.

346. *See* CAROL SMART, FEMINISM AND THE POWER OF LAW 81, 85 (1989).

goals,³⁴⁷ but all nevertheless tend to increase women's political presence in society, including in capacities related to rural development.³⁴⁸ This is consistent with the broad goals CEDAW enumerates, as well as with Article 14's more specific ones.³⁴⁹

The mutually beneficial cooperation between Member States and NGOs is critical to understanding and leveraging CEDAW's potential for fostering grassroots women's organizations. That symbiotic process may begin with the government supporting women's organizations either directly or indirectly.³⁵⁰ The government's role is direct when it funds the groups and their work in whole or in part, and it is less direct when it merely provides the grassroots organizations a legal framework and favorable bureaucratic environment. In turn, women's organizations may assume the Member State's function of providing services, an arena in which local and more nimble grassroots organizations may enjoy a comparative advantage. The services provided, in turn, assist rural women to reach their full potential, thereby fueling increased grassroots organization and action. Neither Member State nor NGO nor community nor individual is working in isolation. Rather, all are critical parts of a complex system aimed at the common goals of women's empowerment and rural development.

347. See Ferree, *supra* note 193, at 3, 6–11.

348. See *id.* at 7. *But cf. supra* note 197.

349. It is also consistent with priorities articulated in a working document associated with the 56th Session of the Commission on the Status of Women, which will focus on rural women's empowerment: increasing women's presence in the public sphere. Hill, *supra* note 27, at 30–31, 36, 38.

350. *Cf.* Ferree, *supra* note 193, at 11 (distinguishing women's policy machinery from women's movement as "formally embedded in state or transnational structures that have institutionalized authority").