
INTERSECTIONALITY IN WOMEN’S RIGHTS: ADDRESSING THE CHALLENGES FACED BY RURAL WOMEN THROUGH INTERNATIONAL FRAMEWORKS

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ABSTRACT

Intersectionality in women’s rights refers to understanding the different forms of inequality or discrimination women face worldwide. It helps identify the oppression individuals may experience throughout their lives based on gender, color, sexuality, immigration status, minority status, age, and ability. Additionally, it enables us to advocate against atrocities caused by those who recognize themselves as superior in these areas. The oppression experienced by women often leads to the violation of their basic human rights. These women’s rights are protected by both national laws and international treaties and conventions.

Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Declaration on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, Conventions on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women, Vienna World Conference of Human Rights are some of the initiatives taken by the United Nations to tackle the intersectional oppressions faced by women around the globe. However, the atrocities created against women in all walks of life for whatever reason are still at their pinnacle even after the passage of time of the United Nations and other deterrent, non-deterrent, and less deterrent state legislations.

This article argues on the intersectional challenges faced by rural women through international frameworks. It explores social and cultural barriers, gender-based inequalities, limited or no access to education, economic imbalances, the national and international legal provisions, their implementation, and Judicial compliance in relation to rural women’s rights.

It also makes suggestions and preventive measures to fill in the somewhat left gaps to crush out all wrong practices affecting women’s rights.

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I. INTRODUCTION

The literal meaning of Intersectionality is a kind of check sheet to apprehend the consequences of the distinctive union of discrimination and Privileges caused by different social and political groups or Individuals. The term became prominent in the year 1989, when Kimberle` Crenshaw², a lawyer and academician, coined this term for the detailed inspection of all forms of discrimination or oppression caused to women all around the world.

She mentioned how different kinds of inequalities based on class, sex, gender, color, immigrant status, etc., most of the time get colluded and compounded to harass women in their personal and professional lives. Though the understanding of multiple kinds of discrimination faced by women is not privileged with this term, Intersectionality, any different forms of discrimination faced by any individual can be understood and identified by this term; however, the “Intersectionality in Women” is quite common and more feminine in nature in comparison to discrimination against men and other individuals.

II. Is Intersectionality in Women a National or International Issue?

Here, no discussion is required about whether the term Intersectionality is masculine or feminine in nature. The real question is whether women are prone to multiple forms of discrimination or not. Secondly, is this the issue of any particular region, religion, community, caste, creed, or Country only? Or an international issue unresolved for multiple decades?

It is quite common to understand that women are vulnerable and must be prioritized when it comes to their protection. However, it would be an irresponsible approach when she could not be safeguarded from all walks of discrimination at whatever corner of the globe she is residing or surviving. Discrimination and Women are always correlated.

Yes, Intersectionality in Women’s rights is an international issue, and is evident through various initiatives taken by the United Nations, its organs, and other women’s rights specialized agencies. CSW, or UNCSW, or Commission on the Status of Women, is one such specialized and functional commission of UN ECOSOC, or United Nations Economic and Social Council (one of the 6 Principal Organs of the United Nations).

² U.N. Women, *A Short History of the Commission on the Status of Women* (2015), <https://www.unwomen.org/...>(last visited April, 4,2026)

This Commission or CSW was formed on 21 June 1946³ to promote and develop gender equality and women's empowerment. It is an Intergovernmental organization, a regulatory body, and an advisory body in identifying the intersectionality in women's rights and their resolution in a standard manner.

In its first session in Lake Success, New York, CSW declared its steering principles while raising the multidimensional status of women, comparing them to men and other entities, regardless of any caste, creed, language, religion, color, status, nationality, etc. Apart from that, CSW was made responsible for eliminating all sorts of discrimination against all women in any of the national and international provisions, rules, and regulations.

In the juxtaposition of various women's rights movements, CSW works for the collection of data for different sorts of discrimination against women to present it in the international arena. Since its inception in 1946, it has been publishing a complete status of women in a documented form as CSW official documentation for every annual session held with all 45 member states. It is a report titled as Report of the 'Under Secretary General' or 'Executive Director' of the UN Entity formed for 'Gender Equality' or the 'Empowerment of Women.'"

While living a legacy of the "Women's rights Movements of the years 1848 to 1998 first observed by Margaret Mead, CSW came out with its first major work as DEDAW, 1967 (Declaration on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women). It basically was a point of view of the United Nations on women's rights. Then, in the year 1981, a binding force of the norms of women's rights came into enforcement as CEDAW or the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women.

These initiatives by the United Nations and its specialized bodies, such as ECOSOC or CSW, give the true representation of the intersectionality of Women's rights through international frameworks.

III. CHALLENGES FACED BY RURAL WOMEN THROUGH INTERNATIONAL FRAMEWORKS

Rural Women are always left aside when it comes to their rights as human beings. Urban Women are somehow in a better condition as they have at least a basic to advanced level

³ *ibid*

education and other facilities. As per the report of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO 2024),⁴ rural women make up a critical proportion of the Poorest Population in the International domain. They face significant and consistent compounded difficulties in their daily life attributable to gender discrimination.

It specifies that the situation is worse in Asia and Africa, where rural women face excessive food insecurity and have very limited access to services, opportunities, and resources. As per the Statement of UN Women for the celebration of the “International Day of Rural Women.”⁵ On 15 Oct 2025, after so many years or generations, women living in rural communities have been few powerful agents of change, like carrying people with each other, running social activities, and advocating for causes like climate justice and environmental sustainability.

Their endeavour continues to fasten community-based movements with wider global progress. Despite that, rural women populations still face severe challenges, poverty, and food insecurity, affecting women, Indigenous Peoples, and Youth the most. If these kinds of patterns persist, it is predicted that by the year **2030**, almost **351 million women and girls** will be in the trap of extreme poverty, demanding the emergent requirement for unbiased, long-lasting solutions.

As per **Verene Ntakirutimana** of Rwanda, investment in women’s empowerment programs in rural areas can help in an absolute, lasting transformation. With the assistance of the **Joint Programme on “Rural Women’s Economic Empowerment”**, Verene was able to move out of the range of subsistence farming to build a small, fortunate enterprise. Furthermore, her masterpiece not only modernized her own life but also helped transform community perception by breaking down all gender stereotypes for reassuring joint decision-making and encouraging other women to follow similar paths for independence and prosperity.

This year’s theme, “Rural Women Rising,” is both a celebration and a complete rallying call. The Beijing+30 Action Plan is and will remain crucial to achieving the gender equality SDG Goals. International or regional initiatives like the “International Year of Women Farmers 2026,” The “Inter-American Decade for the Rights of All Women,” “Adolescents,” “Girls in Rural Areas (2024–2034),” with grassroots actions such as Women to Kilimanjaro, assist vital

⁴ Food & Agric. Org. of the U.N. (FAO), *Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment in Agricultural Food Security and Nutrition*, Project Code FMM/GLO/138/MUL (2024).

⁵ U.N. Women, *Statement for the International Day of Rural Women* (Oct. 15, 2025), <https://africa.unwomen.org/en/stories/statement/2025/10/un-women-statement-for-the-international-day-of-rural-women-15-october-2025>.

platforms to streamline rural women's contributions to amplify their voices to secure their human rights.

Types of Challenges Faced by Rural Women⁶

1. Economic Discrepancy

Economic Freedom for rural women is quite limited. Many of them rely on subsistence farming and informal work, leading to lower offers and much less secure incomes compared to formal employment.

2. Gender- Based Inequality

Gender-based violence or GBV is a widespread issue for many rural communities' women. They usually experience several kinds of domestic abuse, social isolation, and sexual harassment, which are compounded in the absence of sufficient protection mechanisms.

3. Environmental and climate-related challenges

Women of rural communities are affected by environmental challenges and other natural disasters. Essential resources, like water, food, or firewood, are on the peak lines for environmental degradation.

4. Cultural Obstacles

Cultural beliefs, systems, and other practices play a major role in women's life experiences. Socio-cultural hindrances influence almost all aspects of the rural and urban women's lives, like access to education, economic opportunities, healthcare, and political participation.

5. Access to Health Services

Access to Health Services is another concern for rural women. Underserved Medical facilities lead to damaging maternal Health during pregnancy. Cultural Stigmas and old

⁶ Vinitha Charles J.M., Problems Faced by Women in Rural Areas, 15, 2 Crossian Resonance: A Multidisciplinary Research Journal 212, (213-216) (2024),<https://research.holycrossngl.edu.in/>

traditional practices are also a cause of concern for women. 6.

6. Restricted Access to Financial Resources

Restricted Access to Financial resources is also a major difficulty for all the rural women entrepreneurs. According to the World Bank, about **79 percent of women-owned enterprises are self-standing in rural India.**

7. Digital Exclusion⁷

Digital exclusion is also an obstacle to rural women in limiting their presence in the modern world economy. Many of them always lack access to smartphones, reliable internet, and computers, restricting their ability to get information, know online markets, and use other digital financial services.

8. Lack of market insights

The Shortage of market insight means no longer surviving in the market influenced by many competitors. No market insight means no decision-making power for product demand and supply.

IV. UN Steps to Address the Issue

UN Women takes various initiatives to strengthen the living conditions of rural women all around the world. UNGA or the United Nations General Assembly in the year 2007, by the resolution no. 62/136 established the “International Day of Rural Women.”⁸ This day is celebrated on the 15th of Oct every year. This day celebrates gender equality and helps rural sector women to empower themselves to come out of extreme poverty, malnutrition, and hunger caused by various kinds of intersectionality in rural women’s rights.

UN Women works in about 80 countries with the help of working committees and other civil societies and NGO’s and presents its report to the general assembly. It always conducts its plan following the action plan of the Beijing Declaration (1995). As per CSW 2018, the UN Women set forth several governmental and non-governmental level action plans for the empowerment

⁷ Supra note 6, at 214

⁸ Int’l Inst. for Sustainable Dev. (IISD), *International Day of Rural Women 2025*, SDG Knowledge Hub, <https://sdg.iisd.org/events/international-day-of-rural-women-2025/>.

of Rural Women and Girls.

Some of the action plans set forth by UN Women to strengthen the Rural Women and Girls are:

- 1. Escalation of Normative, Policy, and other Legal Frameworks-** It ensures the complete and active implementation of Article 18⁹ of the CEDAW or Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, 1979. Article 18 ensures the timely reporting of the state parties to the Secretary General of the United Nations for the proper and strict compliance of the CEDAW provisions in their Legislative, administrative, and all Judicial procedures.
- 2. Empowerment of Rural Women by Economic & Social Policies Implementation: -** Article 14¹⁰ of the CEDAW, 1979, makes provisions about Rural Women. **Clause 1 of Article 14** directs states parties to take into consideration the economic & social empowerment of rural Women by implementing appropriate policies and programs to ensure the smooth compliance of provisions of the UN CEDAW provisions.

Further **clause 2**¹¹ talks about the eradication of all kinds of discrimination and challenges faced by rural women to ensure absolute equality with men. 62nd session of the CSW 2018 also ensures all the sub-clauses mentioned in Article 14 of the CEDAW and a further action plan for the Beijing Declaration 1995. The 69th session of CSW 2025 has marked the 30th anniversary of the action plan for the Beijing Declaration of 1995, adopted at the “4th global conference on Women.

- 3. Heighten the Leadership Quality, Collective Voice, and Decision-making Power of the Rural Women and Girls:** - Sub-clauses (a) to (h) of clauses 2 of article 14 of the CEDAW, 1979, wish for the full participation of rural women and girls to heighten their leadership quality, collective voice, and decision-making power. This year’s 69th session of UN CSW, by reviewing the implementation of the BDPA, 1995, adopted at the 4th World Conference on Women, is to ensure the level of achievement of gender equality for

⁹ Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, arts. , 18, Dec. 18, 1979, 1249 U.N.T.S. 13.

¹⁰ Ibid, art. 14, clause 1

¹¹ Ibid, at 9, article 14 clause 2

all rural and urban women for the complete appreciation of the Agenda of the SDG, 2030.

Legislation Enacted by the Indian Government for the Gender Equality and Empowerment of Rural Women

1. Articles 14, 15, 16, 18, 19, 21, 23, 39 of the Indian Constitution make provisions for the gender equality of women with men, in **Vishaka and Ors. V/s State of Rajasthan & ors (1997)**¹², a social worker of Rajasthan was gangraped at her workplace and prompted the Women's rights group to seek the interference of the Supreme Court to do complete justice, as at that time there was no special enactment available to address the harassment caused at the workplace. In this landmark Judgement, the Supreme Court laid down various guidelines to address and prevent sexual harassment of Women at workplaces, citing the violation of Women's right to a dignified life under articles **14, 15 & 21** of the Indian Constitution. As a result, the Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition, and Redressal) Act, 2013, was enforced by the Parliament. This judgment has set safeguards for all the rural women who work to manage their finances.
2. **73rd Amendment of the year 1992** of the Indian Constitution empowers rural Women to enjoy their political rights to be elected on the one-third electoral seats reserved in the panchayat raj institution. In the Case titled **Manisha Ravindra Panpatil v/s The State of Maharashtra & ors. SLP No. 15073/2024**,¹³ The appellant was an elected gram sarpanch of Vickheda in District Jalgaon, State of Maharashtra. After her victory for this post, a dispute arose over her residence on government land with her mother-in-law. After her disqualification from Local Collector, appeal dismissal from the High Court, she approached the Supreme Court under a Special Leave Petition, seeking justice from the court with observations that these types of cases were only for the concern that the respondents were not ready for the gender parity environment and women's empowerment in their public offices.
3. Protection of Human Rights Act, 1993
4. National Commission for Women's Rights, 1990

¹² Vishaka v. State of Rajasthan, (1997) 6 S.C.C. 241 (India).

¹³ *Manisha Ravindra Panpatil v. State of Maharashtra*, 2024 INSC 762 (India)

5. Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989.
6. Indecent Representation of Women (Prohibition Act), 1989.
7. Maternity Benefit Act, 1861, 1961 & Maternity Benefit (Amendment) Act, 2019
8. Industrial Disputes Act, 1947
9. Equal Remuneration Act, 1976. As per **Mackinnan Mackenzie and Co. V/s Audrey D'costa (1987) 2 SCC 469¹⁴**, The Supreme Court held that no employer can claim exemption from payment to its employee, whether male or female, on the grounds of any financial incapacity. Not getting Equal pay for equal work is one of the various forms of discrimination faced by rural and urban women. This Judgement has helped the rural women also to raise their voice against the economic discrimination of their employer.
10. Immoral Traffic (Prevention) Act, 1956
11. Bonded Labour System (Abolition) Act, 1976
12. Medical Termination of Pregnancy Act, 1971
13. Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition, and Redressal) Act, 2013
14. Special Marriage Act, 1954
15. Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, 2006. Child marriage is quite common in rural areas. To tackle this issue, the Supreme Court of India has given various Judgements to save the life of the girl child. One such case is **Society for Enlightenment and Voluntary Action, et al. v/s Union of India & ors. (2024)¹⁵**. The Supreme held that while giving an interpretation of sections 16 and 28 of the Protection of Child Marriage Act, 2006, the Protection of Children from sexual offences act, 2012, and the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) act, 2015 addressed all the social and economic, cultural detriments to uphold the International and constitutional obligation to stop violence against minors.

¹⁴ *Mackinnon Mackenzie & Co. v. Audrey D'Costa*, (1987) 2 S.C.C. 469 (India).

¹⁵ *Society for Enlightenment & Voluntary Action v. Union of India* (India Oct. 18, 2024).

16. Indian Divorce Act, 1969

17. Dowry Prohibition Act, 1961. In the **State of Maharashtra v/s Chandrabhan Tale (2023)**¹⁶ decided that a dowry death can be established based on the circumstances, evidence alone, as all previous dowry demands made to the deceased by using threats and physical assault can result in the events which lead to the death of the victim. This judgment is a favor to rural women's empowerment in the case of Dowry demands from their parents.

Suggestions

- Poverty is always degrading in nature, no matter what one has in their personal life. Rural Women have been shouldered with both poverty and other forms of discrimination. The Job of member states should be to act on the actual skill development for their economic advancement instead of the distribution of freebies for taking political benefits from them all.
- Legal Frameworks should not be paperwork only. It should be executable against those who are the actual culprits of committing all kinds of discrimination against women.
- Sexual offences against rural women and girls are mostly unreportable because of insensitive police personnel. A long duration must be minimized for conducting the checks and balances for the implementation of safety norms set forth for women and girls.
- A call to action must be practiced every minute from local to international human rights watch mechanisms.

Conclusion

Intersectionality and Rural Women are two joint critical aspects to be considered by the UN Women, member and non-member states. Though the United Nations is very much active in ensuring the equal participation of men and women in all aspects of life. However, the Rural Women Gender Equality is still a slow process even after the meeting of the 69th session of the Commission on the Status of Women 2025, about 45 years of CEDAW, review and appraisal

¹⁶*State of Maharashtra v. Chandrabhan Tale*, (1983) 3 S.C.C. 387 (India).

program of the 30th anniversary of the Beijing Declaration of Action Plan, and so many other bulky Indian legislations and policy frameworks. Thus, it is quite justifiable to say that the human rights of rural women are a global crisis, as it is intersectional in nature and needs much more multi-dimensional strategies instead of suspending programs initiated to combat violence against women and girls because of the shortage of funds.¹⁷

¹⁷ U.N. News, *Aid Cuts Shutdown or Suspend One in Three Women's Anti-Violence Programmes* (Oct. 27, 2025), <https://news.un.org/en/story/2025/10/1166186>.