

UN Human Rights Council's
Universal Periodic Review 4th
Cycle
Review of New Zealand at the
46th Session

Submissions and
Recommendations from
Rural Women New Zealand
Ngā Wāhine Taiwhenua o
Aotearoa



Ngā Wāhine Taiwhenua o Aotearoa

Consider & include rural women



In national policy-making:

RWNZ encourages and supports policy development by central and local government that includes both a rural impact analysis and a gender impact analysis to identify and mitigate potential adverse impacts of proposed policies on rural communities.

In implementing international commitments:

RWNZ champions the use of the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in developing policies that better the lives of rural women, their families, and communities.

Recommendations to the New Zealand government:

1. Include both a rural impact analysis and a gender impact analysis in all relevant areas of government policy-making, to identify and mitigate potential adverse impacts of proposed policies on rural communities.
2. Incorporate the SDGs in all policy development including giving effect to these goals.
3. Adopt and implement international recommendations that empower women, in particular rural women and communities, such as those issued by UN Treaty Bodies such as the Committee on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and those contained in the UN Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and Other People Working in Rural Communities.

Issue 1: Health

Previous recommendations: No mention of people living and working in rural areas.

Current situation:

We are concerned for physical and mental health across rural communities with a special interest in the lifespan of women from maternal and child health through to older and elderly persons. We wish to acknowledge the establishment of the Rural Health Strategy and Women's Health Strategy and look forward to their implementation, however concerns remain. Key concerns relate to access to affordable and reliable healthcare for rural women and their families:

- Continued and further roll-outs of mobile health care units, which are currently limited by location and other eligibility;
- Online health services are limited by a lack of reliable digital connectivity; and
- The limited availability of a well-resourced and professionally supported health service including midwives, nurses, care workers, aged care and community health services.

Recommendations:

1. Invest in and maintain access to equitable healthcare for rural communities including:
 - a. Increasing the availability of mobile and local health services, and rural health practitioners particularly midwives, nurses and care workers;
 - b. Improved accessibility to localised treatment options including initial screening and diagnostics in rural New Zealand.
2. Establish and maintain network connectivity in rural areas to provide stable and affordable digital access to health and wellbeing services.
3. Provide increased resources to improve access by rural New Zealanders to education, treatment and support for mental health; disability support workers; drug and alcohol abuse, aged-care and wellbeing services.
4. Ensure allocation of resources to provide safe, timely and effective maternity care to all mothers regardless of their location.

Issue 2: Rural Connectivity



Previous recommendations: None

Current situation:

For RWNZ, rural connectivity is about improving digital connection, connectivity and capability to advance rural economies and improve day-to-day life in rural communities. We wish to acknowledge the connectivity gains in recent years, however there is still a long way to go for rural areas to achieve equity of service with urban areas in the field of digital connectivity. The importance of digital connectivity for all cannot be underestimated in the transaction of our daily lives. The lack of high speed reliable, quality and affordable (“equitable” in line with urban internet costs) telecommunication services in rural New Zealand:

- Hinders rural businesses by leaving them unable to undertake basic tasks online with delayed access to resources and information, making them less productive, efficient and competitive;
- Creates critical safety issues in emergency situations such as accidents, crime or adverse weather events. Large areas of rural New Zealand still do not have mobile phone service and are especially vulnerable in a crisis;
- Impedes educational opportunities for rural students relying on internet connectivity; and
- Exacerbates inequity for rural New Zealand in relation to health outcomes and social inclusion.

Recommendations:

1. Require telecommunication services to provide nationwide access to high-speed quality, reliable, affordable internet connectivity & mobile service.
2. Provide satellite communication coverage for remote rural areas where physical structures to provide internet and mobile services are not viable.
3. Increase rural connectivity and maintain focus on differing needs of rural and remote areas, and support research into new and innovative ways to provide quality, affordable connectivity to rural and remote areas.

Issue 3: Environment

Previous recommendations:

Some, not fully implemented, no mention of impacts on people living and working in rural areas.

Current situation:

RWNZ is concerned about environment and land use issues pertaining to land, water, and climate particularly in relation to the impacts on rural communities. Finding a balance between urban growth and land use policies which protect our productive land is vital for food production and community resilience.

Discussions regarding threats to our environment, and the opportunities to mitigate them, must include rural communities, given:

- Financially and environmentally sustainable land-based businesses play an important part in protecting our land, water, biodiversity, and indigenous flora and fauna;
- Maintaining border security is essential to prevent incursions by exotic pests and diseases into our natural environment and avoid the associated potential economic and social impacts; and
- Climate change will affect land use in New Zealand over the coming years and the effects of increasingly volatile weather will significantly impact our rural communities. In addition, the quality, quantity, availability and equitable access of sustainable water supply must be the cornerstone of all decisions relating to water use for rural communities with responsible use of supply being encouraged.

Recommendations:

1. Ensure that economic and environmental land use decisions are made in partnership and consultation with landowners, land users and rural communities.
2. Develop strategies for effective water storage and supply systems which ensure high quality, sustainable and equitable water supplies keep pace with the impacts of climate change and population growth.
3. Invest in programmes that support rural communities to address the impacts of climate change.

Issue 4: Education



Previous recommendations:

From Kyrgyzstan: Take additional measures to increase access to free education for children from low-income families and families living in rural areas.

Current situation:

RWNZ is concerned about equity and access for all people living and working in rural communities to all components of the education system from early childhood through to tertiary studies. We acknowledge the progress made particularly in areas of digital technology in rural education. This is but one of many areas that require action in the education field. These include issues such as school transport, boarding allowances and remote learning. Rural schools continue to play a vital part in the social cohesion and economic viability of rural communities. However:

- Education for rural students is compromised by distance, isolation, telecommunication limitations and workforce recruitment and retention;
- Awareness of rural needs in decision-making and allocation of resources is limited by a lack of rural representation in decision-making; and
- The economic viability of the rural sector in New Zealand relies on families and employees being attracted to rural communities. Rural schools act as a vital and valuable community hub especially where there is no other community facility for this purpose.

Recommendations:

1. Ensure rural voices are consulted during the development of education policies, procedures, regulations and delivery for lifelong learning opportunities.
2. Develop and retain a skilled and multidisciplinary rural education workforce that ensures equitable quality of learning for students through career support.
3. Ensure rural communities have effective access to all education services (and financial aid) including special needs assistance, early childhood education, school boarding and tertiary study support as well as fit-for-purpose transport options.
4. Maintain and improve rural schools' access to amenities including reliable and speedy internet connectivity, school property (buildings and facilities), and health and wellbeing services for students, staff and families.

Issue 5: Social inclusion

Previous recommendations: No mention of people living and working in rural areas.

Current situation:

RWNZ is concerned about a wide range of social issues impacting people's lives including access to community services, community inclusion and engagement, safety and security. We consider access to services and social support are fundamental to attracting and retaining a rural workforce and sustainable communities. New Zealanders who work and live in rural communities need to feel safe and secure. Rural communities are increasingly vulnerable due to lack of resources for roading and policing. Examples include:

- The inconsistent quality and irregular maintenance of rural roads combined with unsafe driving behaviours, poor signage and a diverse range of road users leads to higher rates of serious injuries and fatalities in rural communities; and
- Issues facing rural women experiencing family violence are exacerbated by rural isolation. Rural isolation is an impediment to seeking and receiving urgent help when it is needed.

Recommendations:

1. Improve the safety of rural roads through increased funding for maintenance, driver education and effective road signage; ensure safety is a key consideration for school bus services.
2. Fully resource agencies and communities to protect women and children from violence and provide safe houses and support close to rural communities.
3. Enhance safety and security for rural communities through:
 - a. Adequate emergency services support for those who live in rural areas including recognition of volunteers;
 - b. A focus on rural workplace safety through awareness initiatives and support for employers and employees.
4. Invest in initiatives that support community inclusion including support to prevent digital exclusion as more reliance is placed on digital services.