

**Alternative written report submitted on behalf of rural women in Gnita, Togo
and Togo-based NGOs, FLORAISON, GRADSE and RAPDA-Togo,
with the support of FIAN International,
to the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women
53rd Session, October 2012**

This report was prepared by organisations¹ that have worked on behalf of local communities of women in Togo for over 15 years, with the support of FIAN International. The information contained in this report is based on focus group discussions, interviews and surveys conducted by FLORAISON and GRADSE with rural women from the village of Gnita, many of whom were severely affected by threats to or violations of their right to adequate food and, as a direct result, had to migrate to Lomé in search of a better life. This information was also validated in community meetings held in Gnita and Lomé.

Hunger and Malnutrition in Togo

In Togo, 4.8 percent of people suffer from acute malnutrition and in some areas of the country, as many as 11.4 percent are severely food insecure.² For those interviewed in Gnita, the normal ratio of three meals per day is only assured during the brief harvest periods of July to August and December to January, and in fact, some report being used to only one meal per day. Most of those interviewed said they had experienced serious food deficits at some point in their lives, only a small percentage of participants have the ability to alternate their meals between beans and rice, and the majority said they consume beans “very often”. Almost all interviewed said that serious food deficits are primarily due to low crop yields and the inability of the land to produce. Most participants, particularly the women, noted that meat consumption is reserved only for ceremonies and festivities.

Phosphate Mining, Land Grabbing, and the Right to Adequate Food of Women in Togo

The majority of men in Togo rely on agriculture as their main productive activity. Over the last several years, this reliance on land has been severely threatened by Togo’s phosphate mining industry. In Gnita, due to land grabbing by the phosphate industry and soil degradation resulting from mining activities, agricultural land has been reduced from 3000 hectares in 1980 to less than 1200 hectares in 2007.³ While the men of Gnita are usually the ones who own and obtain an income from the land, women are the ones who are responsible for feeding their families and who must continue to provide for their survival once the men lose their ability to earn a living from the land.

As a result of prevailing traditional gender roles, lack of access to education for women, lack of access to healthcare and gender disparities with regard to access to land, property and other

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² The World Food Programme, SMART Survey, December 2010.

³ Due to the difficulty in accessing public sources of information, the only information FIAN International is able to contribute is that which is obtained by country-based NGOs. GRADSE mentions la Direction Générale de l’Agriculture, de l’Elevage et de la Pêche (DGAEP) as the source of this particular information.

means of production, rural women are the main victims of food insecurity and land grabbing in Gnita. This threat to women's right to adequate food in Gnita often results in women's desperate migration to nearby cities, such as Lomé, in search of a better life for their families. Once in the city, women's right to adequate food continues to be threatened by their reliance on exploitative labour for a living, the disruption of their household structure and the illnesses to which they are exposed as a result of the dire conditions in which they live and work.

In the specific case of the rural women of Gnita, we have identified the following obstacles to the realization of their human rights and we ask the CEDAW Committee to consider these when reviewing Togo during its 53rd Session:

1. Rural women and girls should have equal access to education and income-generating activities (Articles 1, 5, 6, 10, 11, 12, 14, and 16)

Lack of access to education of rural girls and women has a significant impact on their ability to feed themselves and their families. Illiteracy is a severe problem in Gnita, particularly among women. Due to dire financial difficulties, rural families often have to choose which children to educate. Investments on girls' futures are traditionally considered a waste since girls sooner or later are expected to marry and leave their families. Boys, on the other hand, are expected to perpetuate the lineage. As a result, boys are often the ones who end up receiving an education at the expense of the girls in the family. The result is high illiteracy among rural women in Gnita. This lack of education, combined with women's responsibility for the survival of their children once their husbands, who often have multiple families due to polygamy, lose their agricultural lands to the mining industry, results in women having to endure the most exploitative of labour conditions in order to continue feeding their families. Without the ability to read or write, the women of Gnita must primarily rely on manual agricultural activities, such as ploughing, sowing, and weeding, and domestic work, such as fetching water from distant wells for other families, food preparation and cleaning, for financial support. When these jobs are not available in Gnita, which is often the case, women are forced to migrate to nearby cities and endure even more exploitative labour conditions in the informal sector. In the cities, women work as domestic workers, "portefaix" or person who carries large items for others, and even as prostitutes, which expose them to sexual violence, HIV and other sexually-transmitted diseases. Women's lack of education not only has a direct impact on their ability to find a job, earn a decent wage and thus, feed themselves and their children, but it also affects their knowledge of their rights, in particular with regard to land-ownership, labour conditions and access to basic services, which further perpetuates their condition. Furthermore, the lack of access to education of women in Gnita also has serious and potentially long-lasting effects on the children of Gnita who are abandoned while their mothers migrate to the city and simultaneously lose the resources to continue going to school.

We ask the CEDAW Committee to recommend to the Togo State to adopt all necessary measures to correct discriminatory practices that impede rural girls from obtaining an education on equal terms with boys. We also ask the CEDAW Committee to recommend to the Togo State to adopt all necessary measures to establish literacy programs for adult women to allow them to enter the formal labour sector and seek adequate income-generating activities on equal terms with men and enable them to feed themselves and their families.

2. Rural women should have equal access to means of production, in particular land-ownership (Articles 1, 5, 12, 13, 14, 15, and 16)

Access to means of agricultural production is essential for rural women to guarantee their right to adequate food. Most Togolese traditional practices discriminate against women by excluding them from agricultural land-ownership resulting in extremely limited access to lands by the women of Gnita. This lack of access to means of production by rural women is further exacerbated by the shortage of agricultural land due to mining and land grabbing because the little land that remains in the region is for men to own or inherit. As a result, while men rely on inheritance and ownership, women's ability to earn a living from the land and thus feed themselves and their family is dependent upon their ability to perform menial agricultural tasks on other people's lands or rent or borrow the means of production.

We ask the CEDAW Committee to recommend to the Togo State to adopt all necessary measures to correct discriminatory practices that affect the human dignity of rural women with the goal of achieving equality in the households and communities, especially concerning access to natural and productive resources and food. In particular, we ask that the CEDAW Committee recommend to the Togo State to adopt all necessary measures to guarantee equal access to land-ownership and inheritance by women, as well as to bank loans, mortgages and financial credit.

3. Rural women should have adequate access to healthcare, in particular family planning services (Articles 1, 12, 14, and 16)

An adequate health condition is essential for women to be able to work and feed themselves and their family. Women's lack of access to family planning services to prevent unwanted pregnancies and early and frequent pregnancies interfere with women's ability to pursue an education, seek and find work, and adequately support themselves and their children. The interviews carried out in Gnita showed that access to family planning services is practically non-existent. High birth rates are obvious among women in Gnita, with some bearing more than ten children. Furthermore, lack of access to adequate prenatal, perinatal and general reproductive healthcare and information results in high rates of infant and maternal mortality and morbidity and a high risk of exposure to HIV and other sexually-transmitted diseases, particularly among women who migrate to the cities and engage in exploitative labour, such as prostitution.

We ask the CEDAW Committee to recommend to the Togo State to adopt all necessary measures to improve women's access to healthcare, in particular family planning and prenatal services, and reproductive health information, pregnancy and delivery quality services, assistance in case of diseases or handicap linked to maternity in order to better enable women to be healthy, pursue an education, seek employment and feed themselves and their family.