



# Economic and Social Council

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## Commission on the Status of Women

Sixty-eighth session

11–22 March 2024

Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and to the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly entitled “Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century”

### Statement submitted by International Women’s Development Agency Inc., a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council\*

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

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\* The present statement is issued without formal editing.



## Statement

The International Women's Development Agency is an Australia-based women's rights organisation resourcing diverse women's rights organisations primarily in Asia and the Pacific and contributing to global feminist movements to advance our vision of gender equality for all. In 2006, after the 10th anniversary of the Fourth World Conference on Women which named the "persistent and increasing burden of poverty on women" as one of 12 critical areas of concern, and still with no meaningful action on the call to improve data disaggregated by gender and age to better illustrate the long relationship between gender and poverty, the International Women's Development Agency, with multiple collaborators embarked on a program of work to address this gap.

The international community has long recognised that addressing poverty to accelerate the achievement of gender equality requires gender-sensitive data. The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action paragraph 68 (a) called for improved "gender and age-disaggregated data on poverty and all aspects of economic activity." This was deemed critical for international action. In fact, improving the circumstances of women and girls experiencing poverty has been a consistent focus and declared priority since the first United Nations World Conference on Women in 1975.

Despite this, limited progress has been made in measuring or addressing the relationships between gender and poverty globally, or reforming the social and economic systems, structures, institutions and processes that link them. The lack of individual-level poverty data is a fundamental barrier to evidence about gender and poverty and effective action to address it, as most data is collected at the household level. As UN Women noted in its 2015-16 report, "Progress of the World's Women," without individual data it is not possible to determine "if women are, across the board, more likely to live in poverty than men." This significant and persistent gap between commitment and action on gender-sensitive poverty measurement is constraining the ability to achieve the priority theme of the sixty-eighth Commission on the Status of Women: the acceleration of achievement of gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls by addressing poverty and strengthening institutions and financing with a gender perspective.

The importance of this theme has never been more apparent. COVID-19 has highlighted existing social and economic fault-lines and exacerbated inequality, poverty and marginalization. This backsliding on progress has occurred in a context where the effects of human-induced climate change and environmental degradation are highlighting present, and future risks. Together, these factors have transformed the landscape of social protection needs and demonstrated the importance of social protection for securing a minimum standard of living for the physical, economic and mental wellbeing of citizens.

Multiple and intersecting factors shape people's needs, opportunities and outcomes, including interdependent social, economic and environmental considerations. Disaggregated data that integrates these considerations is too often unavailable. Investment in such data will enable responsive, modernized social protection systems that enable the fullest potential of societies in support of sustained prosperity.

Data that captures poverty and inequality at the individual level is vital to ensure social protection systems that are responsive to people's lived experience. Household-level measurement of poverty not only makes it more difficult to see the vulnerability of particular groups in routine data, it also systematically ignores an estimated one-third of global poverty and inequality as outlined by economist Ravi Kanbur in his 2016 paper "Intra-Household Inequality and Overall Inequality." Household-level measurement therefore also over-estimates the extent to which improvements in the

GDP translate into improved outcomes for individuals. This contributes to a disconnect between improvements indicated by official poverty data and ground-level experiences, as outlined by Kanbur for the World Bank on behalf of the Commission on Growth and Development in 2010 in “Globalisation, Growth and Distribution: Framing the Questions.” Sustained distance between understandings of policy makers and lived experience can erode citizen confidence in governments, with negative implications for institutional legitimacy and social cohesion.

Addressing these issues – lack of individual-level and gender-sensitive poverty measurement and lack of data that integrates social, economic and environmental considerations from a single individual – requires both a technical solution and the political will to implement it. The provision of a technical solution has been hampered by the under-resourcing of gender data.

With strategic funding support from the Australian Government, a technical solution has been developed. Through successive, multi-stakeholder collaborations involving academia, civil society, and men and women experiencing poverty, the world’s first individual-level, gender-sensitive measure of multidimensional poverty has been created, trialled, iterated, and used in seven countries. The Australian Government’s investment in the development of this technical methodology recognises that data are not neutral. Data that does not reflect the lived realities of individuals can inadvertently serve to support policy, programs and budget allocations that reinforce the structural and normative barriers to gender equality.

The measure, known as Equality Insights, assesses poverty and inequality at an individual-level across fifteen dimensions of life: health, water, food, shelter, energy, environment, sanitation, relationships, education, family planning, safety, clothing, voice, time-use and work. It also measures assets as a proxy for financial status, providing insights across financial and non-financial aspects of poverty. It enables disaggregation while being gender-sensitive both in the dimensions of life it examines, and the indicators that assess those dimensions, to illuminate the gendered experience of poverty.

With a fit-for-purpose measure now available for use, we urge Member States to consolidate the political will to accelerate gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls by addressing gendered poverty including establishing individual-level, gender-sensitive measurement of poverty as standard.

Specifically, we call on all countries to:

Progress recognition of methodologies for individual-level, gender-sensitive data collection through their national statistics offices and in the regional and global statistics bodies in which they participate;

Integrate expectations regarding data that can support multiple level disaggregation into national data standards, to support intersectional analysis;

Act on their commitment to gender-sensitive measurement of poverty and inequality and fund regular data collection in national strategies and policies, including through Official Development Assistance.

Further, we urge the Commission to adopt a multi-year program of work alongside other entities, such as the World Bank, to provide clarity on an agreed approach to individual-level measurement of gender-sensitive poverty ahead of the creation and adoption of any post-2030 development framework. Such a pathway may include actions to:

Take stock of existing data sources that currently inform countries’ social protection systems, reviewing the extent to which they generate data that can be

disaggregated by gender, age, disability, and other relevant individual characteristics and are underpinned by gender-sensitive survey methodology and tools;

Assess, through cost-benefit analysis, a shift in measurement standards to more strongly emphasize a focus on individual-level measurement, including the benefits of improved disaggregation, visibility of vulnerability, and accuracy;

Use strategy development and renewal processes at international, regional and national levels, and in organisations and institutions with mandates to assess and address poverty, to commit to inclusion of specific actions on gender and poverty, outline a credible timeline for establishing individual-level measurement as standard practice, and; resource a consistent increase in the collection of individual-level, gender-sensitive poverty data over the life of the strategy.

With finite resource and dwindling time remaining to accelerate progress towards the realisation of the 2030 Agenda, including its promise of gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls, it is incumbent upon all actors to resource themselves with the highest quality evidence. Taking steps towards this goal involves leveraging existing gender data for change; increasing the amount and quality of available gender data; fuelling the political will and investment to fund and use gender data to drive equality, and finally; transforming our understanding of what adequate data is, and establishing individual-level and gender-sensitive practices and data as the norm, rather than the exception.

Putting individual-level, gender-sensitive measurement of multidimensional poverty at the heart of action on gendered poverty including responsive, effective social protection that connects to lived experience has the potential to springboard progress. There has been nearly fifty years of international consensus that gendered poverty is a priority challenge; the time for more concerted and sustained action has long since come. And, thanks to decades of investment and innovation by committed, feminist, collaborative and forward-thinking donors, Governments, and civil society, the tools for action are in our hands. As we near the 30th anniversary of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, and with only six years to 2030, we must begin today.

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