



Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
11 December 2023

Original: English

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 Passionists International, 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.

* The present statement is issued without formal editing.



Statement

Today, 1 in every 10 women is living in extreme poverty, according to UN Women's Gender Snapshots 2023. Though defined as living on less than \$2.15 a day, we know that poverty is much more than lack of money. Poverty is multidimensional, and is experienced by women through a wide range of cultural and systemic disadvantages which often overlap and keep them from meeting their own basic needs and exercising their full human rights. Women are not poor due to some innate incapacity. They are poor because of the multiple ways they have been excluded from developing their full potential due to a critical lack of access to resources and opportunities their male counterparts enjoy. This unequal distribution of power and opportunities begins at birth and accumulates throughout the life cycle to the detriment of women and girls.

Among the root causes of disproportionate poverty among women and girls is an underlying attitude that they are less deserving of equal status and participation in society and remuneration for their work. Women and girls are expected to provide unpaid care work for their families and support food needs of households, frequently at the expense of their own education or opportunities for formal employment. They have limited access to secondary and tertiary educational opportunities and specialized training, including financial and digital literacy skills that might help secure them decent work and equal wages.

Poverty is not gender-neutral. It is this feminization of poverty that has a tremendous impact on women and girls across the globe, and requires coordinated and integrated action to address the systemic inequalities and exclusions they face. Unfortunately, active resistance to gender equality and chronic underinvestment in it seems to be on the rise. Both are key factors in the slow progress or reversals of gains previously made.

UN Women's Gender Snapshots 2023 also notes that a major constraint for progressive policymakers and gender equality advocates is the dearth of sex-disaggregated data, and that even among countries with recent official statistics on monetary poverty, only 42 per cent have poverty data disaggregated by sex. How can this be? For nearly thirty years Beijing Platform for Action advocates have been calling for gender-disaggregated data to measure the multiple ways in which poverty affects women. And where data are disaggregated, large gender gaps prevail. We know that what/who is not measured is not addressed. If poverty is ever to be eradicated, multidimensional poverty measures must be more uniformly employed to provide a comprehensive picture of how women and girls experience poverty. To measure income alone, or solely by household, is not enough.

One of the primary faces of poverty is hunger. We know that without significant progress to reduce it, close to one in four women and girls will face moderate to severe food insecurity by 2030, and that women and girls in sub-Saharan Africa and Oceania (excluding Australia and New Zealand), will face extremely high rates of food insecurity: 48.6 per cent and 32.5 per cent, respectively. In impoverished countries and where harmful gender norms exist, we know that women and girls are expected to eat last and least. This is harmful to their overall health and all aspects of their development.

We know that in places of conflict, such as Haiti, women and children are experiencing high rates of hunger and malnutrition. Additionally, food and clean water access is nearly impossible due to armed gang violence controlling passage to and from neighborhoods, and placing people's lives at risk. We know that in all areas of conflict, humanitarian aid is frequently blocked.

Women's unequal status in food systems, also makes them more vulnerable to hunger. Nearly half of women and girls in agriculture work are seen as contributing family members, receiving little or no pay. Women are less likely than men to own or have secure tenure rights over agricultural land, and are often excluded from inheritance. Women need access to skills training and financial resources to engage in agriculture in order to feed their families and create sustainable livelihoods. The cooperatives movement has been successful in engaging women in income-producing activity and providing live-able wages, keeping them from poverty. These kinds of movements are committed to a social and solidarity economy that can reduce poverty.

Women's health concerns also need focused attention. We know that progress in reducing maternal mortality has come to a halt, and that inequalities among regions play a major role. Statistics show that women in sub-Saharan Africa were 130 times more likely to die from complications during pregnancy and childbirth than women in Europe and Northern America. Globally, women from the poorest groups are much less likely to be assisted by a skilled provider during delivery than those from the richest levels of society. Yet we know that delivery-related complications and maternal deaths fall significantly when a skilled health professional provides quality care. And within countries, socioeconomic inequalities remain pervasive. Women of color in the United States experience much higher rates of maternal mortality and poorer health outcomes overall than their white counterparts, even those of similar income.

Prioritizing health care spending matters. It is placing equal value on women's lives. United Nations statistics show that Nepal reduced maternal mortality by 65.5 per cent by doubling health-care spending and pursuing a combination of strategies to improve women's care. Patient-centered quality health care is a matter of human rights.

We know that all forms of gender-based violence are on the rise. Domestic, intimate-partner, and other forms of sexual, emotional, and even digital violence can keep women in poverty as they may be unable to escape their situation or may end up homeless, without child care supports, and unable to obtain or keep employment during such crises. Likewise, women in political leadership, activists, climate and human rights defenders are facing extreme forms of harassment, threats and violent attacks, both in-person and online. And in places of conflict we know that extreme and brutal sexual violence against women and girls is used as a weapon of war, to control and terrorize its victims and whole communities. 614 million women and girls lived in conflict-affected areas in 2022 – this is fifty per cent higher than in 2017.

Prevention of all these forms of violence is essential. Perpetrators of all forms of violence against women and girls must be held accountable, and full access to justice and trauma-informed care and supports must be made available to all victims.

Passionists International strives to amplify the voices of those affected by all forms of poverty, inequality, discrimination, exploitation and violence. We urge all Member States to make firm commitments to follow through – once and for all – on gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls, and to dismantle the structures and attitudes that keep them from enjoying their full human rights, agency and dignity. We urge Member States to:

Address the root causes of poverty among women and girls: gender inequality; societal attitudes that view women and girls as lesser, secondary to men, objects of exploitation; gender discrimination and exclusions in all spheres of life; lack of access to educational, health, employment and financial resources; social norms that attempt to limit their full participation and decision-making; sexual and other forms of gender-based violence that aim to diminish, control and dominate them. Adopt robust laws

and mechanisms that ensure access to justice and trauma-informed care and supports for victims, and full accountability of perpetrators.

Establish strong, universal, sustainable social protection systems to mitigate the effects of poverty on women and girls, and prevent them from falling into poverty. Fifty-five percent of the world's population remain entirely unprotected.

Take action to invest in enhanced economic opportunities, improve access to quality education, including lifelong education, for all women and girls, including financial and digital literacy and access to technology.

Remove ongoing gender barriers and biases that limit women's roles in science, technology and innovation, and expand participation in STEM as essential to transforming information and technology in gender-inclusive and gender-responsive ways.

Close the gap in labor-force participation of women. Just 51.6% of prime-working-age women are engaged in the labor force compared with 94.6% of their male counterparts, and the pandemic has exacerbated this gap.

Ensure access to financial resources to women to enable them to initiate income-producing projects that support sustainable livelihoods in various sectors, including agriculture to enhance women's food and economic security.

Be an ally for gender equality and empowerment of all women and girls.
