



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 International Planned Parenthood Federation, 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

About the International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF): A leading advocate of sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) and a global service provider, the International Planned Parenthood Federation is a locally owned, globally connected federation that works through Member Associations and collaborative partners in over 145 countries to empower people in the most vulnerable situations to access life-saving services and programmes, and live with dignity. We have had general consultative status with the Economic and Social Council since 1973.

The 68th session on the Commission on the Status of Women will consider as its priority theme ‘Accelerating the achievement of gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls by addressing poverty and strengthening institutions and financing with a gender perspective’. This will be an opportunity to addressing root causes of poverty of women and girls, including structural inequalities and access to fundamental rights of all women and girls, including the right to decide over their own bodies.

Background

Women and girls, 49.7 per cent of the global population in 2022, are disproportionately represented among the world’s poor. Global projections show that approx. 388 million women and girls were living in extreme poverty in 2022 (compared with 372 million men and boys). 83.7 per cent of these women and girls were located in two regions: sub-Saharan Africa (62.8 per cent) and Central and South Asia (20.9 per cent). Estimations also show that 340 million women and girls will live in extreme poverty by 2030 if current trends continue. Structural inequalities, unpaid care-work, and childbearing responsibilities are among some of the constraints that curtail women’s economic opportunities.

Globally, labor force participation rates among people aged 25-54 are 1.8 times lower for women than for men. Just 51.6 per cent of prime-working-age women are engaged in the labor force compared with 94.6 per cent of their male counterparts. Unequal and inadequate remuneration for care work, precarious employment, and violence and harassment in the workplace are factors that increase gender-based inequalities and entrench poverty for women and girls. Progress towards addressing biased social norms that relegated unpaid care work to women and girls has been slow. At the current rate of progress, the next generation of women will spend 2.3 more hours per day on unpaid domestic work than men, with limited global governance solutions to address this gap.

Access to sexual and reproductive health and rights and reducing intergenerational cycles of poverty

Poverty and inequalities are structural phenomena that negatively affect the sustainable development of people, communities and nations and that impede effective responses to the ongoing global challenges, such as the climate crises, forced displacement and health crises. Poverty is a gendered phenomenon that is deeply intertwined with other forms of inequality and discrimination.

Globally, 164 million women still have an unmet need for family planning; most of these women and girls live in sub-Saharan Africa. Global data on maternal mortality rates show dramatic regional inequalities, with poor women and girls from low-income countries being 70 per cent more likely than women in high-income countries to die as a result of preventable complications arising from pregnancy, childbirth, and unsafe abortion. More than 121 million unintended pregnancies occur every year. Adolescents aged 15–19 years in low- and middle-income countries have

an estimated 21 million pregnancies each year, of which approximately 50 per cent were unintended. Over 55 per cent of these unintended pregnancies end in abortions, with severe risks for health and life. Each year, 4.7–13.2 per cent of maternal deaths can be attributed to unsafe abortion. Poverty of women and girls has a serious impact on their access to sexual and reproductive health services, as they often delay seeking essential health services to prioritize the health needs of family members who they are caring for; and paying for family healthcare at the expense of being able to afford their own. In turn, when women and girls cannot access sexual and reproductive health education and services, it deprives women living in poverty of fundamental rights and impedes their right to equal participation in public life, education, employment and income-earning activities. Gender-based inequalities and poverty therefore affect women and girls across every area of life and deepens inequalities and perpetuates intergenerational poverty.

Likewise, sexual and gender-based violence has a severe impact on women's health, bodily autonomy and economic opportunities, including their access to the labor market. Worldwide, an estimated one in three women will experience physical or sexual abuse in her lifetime. Women and girls facing sexual harassment at work, violence at home or violence on the streets are unable to participate on an equal basis in the labour market, and this in turn means that they are also discriminated against in connection with contributory social security benefits and are more likely to experience poverty, violence and homelessness in old age.

Investing in sexual and reproductive health services is not only a basic human right, but also one of the most powerful opportunities for long-term socio-economic development and for bringing women and girls, in all their diversity, out of poverty. Data clearly shows that global poverty predictions and trends can be reversed for the better. Analysis shows that an integrated policy approach— including more spending on social protection and investments in access to family planning and quality education—would lift close to 150 million women and girls out of poverty by 2030. Data also shows for each dollar invested in ending preventable maternal deaths and meeting the unmet need of family planning by 2030 will bring economic benefits of USD 8.4 by 2050. These returns are even greater for investments in ending harmful practices such as female genital mutilation and child marriage. An estimated 9 USD per capita annually, only, would cover the total cost of fully meeting women's needs for modern contraception and providing health services recommended by the World Health Organization to all pregnant women and newborns.

Addressing poverty can therefore not be discussed without integrating sexual and reproductive health and rights as a key part of the response.

Intersectionality

Women's and girls' experiences of poverty intersect with their race, ethnicity, migratory status, age, disability, religion, geographical location, sexual orientation and gender identity to produce distinct forms of discrimination and inequality that vary over time and from place to place. Many of the core elements of the right to health are also routinely violated for women and girls living in poverty— in particular those with disabilities and those who are migrants or from ethnic minorities – who are often less likely to access routine cancer-screening services for breast and cervical cancer, and they frequently cannot afford essential medications. These forms of direct and indirect discrimination within health-care systems constitute gender- and poverty-based violations of the right to health.

Policies addressing poverty must therefore recognize the multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination that women experience, throughout all phases of their lives, and consider the different systemic forms of discrimination in their

response. This requires innovative research and a gender-lens to collecting and using multi sectoral data to inform targeted governance interventions that address their actual needs.

Poverty and education

The COVID-19 pandemic raised the number of women living in extreme poverty and severely restricted access to education for adolescents and young people, exacerbating the risk factors and drivers of sexual and gender-based violence. Since 2021, 45 per cent of women reported that they or a woman they know has experienced a form of gender-based violence. Seven in ten women said they think that verbal or physical abuse by a partner has become more common. And six in ten felt that sexual harassment in public spaces has worsened. Comprehensive sexuality education enables adolescents and young people to protect and advocate for their health, well-being and dignity by providing them with a necessary toolkit of knowledge, attitudes and skills. It is a precondition for exercising full bodily autonomy, which requires not only the right to make choices about one's body but also the information to make these choices in a meaningful way. Comprehensive sexual education is based on human rights principles, they advance gender equality and the rights and empowerment of young people. A review of 87 studies of comprehensive sexuality education programmes around the world showed that it increased knowledge, and two-thirds of programmes led to a positive impact including increased contraceptive use and reduced sexual risk-taking. Each additional year of schooling for girls improves their employment prospects, increases future earnings by about 10 per cent, and reduces infant mortality by up to 10 per cent. Education, including comprehensive sexual education, is therefore crucial for addressing biased social norms that deny women and girls bodily autonomy, and for enabling them to make their own, informed decisions, with long-term impact for their health and economic opportunities.

Gender-responsive institutions and financing

Gender responsive action, including investment in gender-responsive institutions, policy and financing, are ways of ensuring that policy and financing meets the needs of women, girls and marginalized groups. It is also a mechanism that can help ensure that a government's budget prioritizes reducing the gender pay gap and closing gender gaps in the labor market. Only 26 per cent of countries worldwide have systems to track budget allocations for gender equality. Gender and human rights impact assessments must therefore be fully integrated into national budgets and economic policies with a view to eliminating poverty and inequality. It is estimated that gender gaps cost the economy 15 per cent of GDP. Without explicit gender equality objectives and a requisite budget, programmes and policies may exacerbate existing gender inequality. Gender-responsive institutions and financing that address the linkages between sexual and reproductive health and rights and poverty are crucial. Implementing gender-responsive resource redistribution through recognizing the value of the informal care economy, fair fiscal and taxation policies is also key to addressing the poverty of women and girls. This can only be done by strengthening legislation, accountability frameworks and ensuring transparency, including through gender-disaggregated data.

Key recommendations

Integrated approaches are necessary to accelerate the achievement of gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls by addressing poverty and strengthening institutions and sustained financing with a gender perspective. They include but are not limited to prioritizing women's economic inclusion and empowerment which brings gains at the individual and societal level. It is key for any

response to consider the root causes of gender inequalities and poverty, such as lack of access to sexual and reproductive health and rights and the multiple, intersecting and systemic forms of discrimination faced by women and girls. In order for women and girls, in all their diversity, to access their right to live free from poverty, IPPF calls on governments and corporations to expand the social protections for women and girls. More specifically,

- Recognize that access to sexual and reproductive health and rights is a necessary precondition for any response to reduce women and girl's poverty.
 - Prioritize women and girls facing multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination. This requires innovative research and a gender-lens to collecting and using multi sectoral data, in order to inform targeted governance interventions that address their actual needs.
 - Recognize that education, including comprehensive sexuality education, is vital to achieve gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls and addressing poverty.
 - Invest in gender-responsive institutions, policy and financing. Good governance and gender-responsive budgeting priorities should allocate resources and funding towards initiatives aimed at sustainable solutions to enable women's economic inclusion and equality.
-