



## Economic and Social Council

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Item 2 (c) of the provisional agenda\*

**High-level segment: annual ministerial review**

### **Statement submitted by Humanist Institute for Cooperation with Developing Countries, 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 30 and 31 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

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\* E/2012/100.



## Statement

The theme of the annual ministerial review offers a unique opportunity to emphasize the importance of decent work for women, their economic empowerment to enhance productive capacities and employment to eradicate poverty.

Sustainable and equitable economic growth can be achieved only when the importance of economic empowerment of women is fully recognized.

The globalization of our economies has drawn millions of women into employment in the South; in farms and factories, women are manufacturing products for our markets. A growing number of women worldwide are being forced into informal work.

Women are also an important part of the agricultural labour force, and agriculture (and agricultural value chains) is equally important for women as a source of employment. Commercial value chains for high-value products such as fresh fruit, vegetables and flowers are growing rapidly to supply urban supermarkets and export markets. Recent studies of the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) and the World Bank show that three quarters of all farmers are women. Women play active roles as traders, processors, labourers and entrepreneurs.

The main factors restricting women's productivity and economic empowerment are:

- (a) Weak implementation of the decent work agenda: fair income, health and safety measures, sexual harassment policy, maternity protection, participation and representation;
- (b) Limited access to education/training (owing to a double workload and reproductive roles) and limited access to financial products (male domination of financial businesses);
- (c) Lack of power; women have little or no control over household income, assets and land;
- (d) Improving the implementation of women's labour rights and strengthening their economic empowerment will benefit not only the quality of the product and productivity; it also benefits the lives of the whole family and the rest of the community, and thereby contributes to a healthy and more productive society.

Women who earn income are especially powerful catalysts for development because they tend to invest more of their income in the health, education and well-being of their families, compared to men.

In reference to the *2012 World Development Report: Gender Equality and Development*, it is "smart economics" to invest in women because:

- (a) Greater gender equality can enhance productivity;
- (b) They improve development outcomes for the next generation;
- (c) They make institutions more representative.

Governments should encourage the private sector to intensify its engagement in the economic empowerment of women in developing countries and emerging

markets because there are key links between economically empowered women and better company performance:

- (a) Economically empowered women are potential customers. The more there are, the larger the market for selling goods and services;
  - (b) Skilled women represent a broad and motivated talent pool for the company;
  - (c) Investing in making life better for women in developing countries can be an effective way to enhance the company's reputation and brand.
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