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Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and to the special session of the General Assembly entitled “Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century”: implementation of strategic objectives and action in critical areas of concern and further actions and initiatives

Statement submitted by Forum for Women and Development, 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.



Statement

Promotion of women's equal access to full employment and decent work

The Forum for Women and Development welcomes the priority theme for the fifty-eighth session of the Commission on the Status of Women, "Challenges and achievements in the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals for women and girls" and the review theme "Access and participation of women and girls in education, training and science and technology, including for the promotion of women's equal access to full employment and decent work".

The Forum consists of 68 women's organizations and women's committees in political parties, trade unions and solidarity and aid organizations. For almost 20 years, we have worked together with our partner organizations in the South to contribute to the improvement of women's social, economic, and political situations internationally. Since 2000, the Millennium Development Goals have been an important platform for our work.

Millennium Development Goal 3 is very clear: promote gender equality and empower women. In most countries, and especially in developing countries, women have fewer choices in essential areas of daily life, including their own movements, health decisions and whether and when to go to school or get married. A huge number of women lack freedom from violence: the World Health Organization estimates that more than 35 per cent of women have experienced gender-based violence. One essential way to empowerment, and to achieve Goal 3, is for women to have an income that they can live on, whether it comes from employment in the formal sector, or their own farm or business.

Women work as unpaid family labourers or in the informal sector

Women's share in paid jobs outside of the agricultural sector has increased over the last 20 years. But things are moving slowly. According to the United Nations, there has been an increase from 35 per cent in 1990 to 40 per cent more than 20 years later. And there are significant differences among the regions. In Western Asia, Northern Africa and Southern Asia, only 20 per cent or less of the non-agricultural workforces were women in 2010. And in Northern Africa women did not gain any ground in paid employment from 1990-2010.

The percentage of women that hold informal jobs are very high in most developing countries and women are far more likely than men to be engaged in vulnerable employment. Under these conditions, women typically lack social protection and entitlement to employment benefits, such as paid maternity or sick leave and many suffer from very low pay.

Many women do not have time for a paid job outside their home. Currently, women bear a disproportionate share of household and domestic labour, performing 80 per cent of unpaid caring roles globally. Women in the paid workforce are statistically far more likely than men to be undertaking significant domestic labour on top of paid employment.

Women farmers tend to farm smaller plots and less profitable crops than men and have less opportunity to mitigate the effects of climate change.

Women represent 43 per cent of the world's agricultural labour force and in many countries they are the majority. But female farmers tend to have lower productivity, farm smaller plots and grow less profitable crops.

Rural women are mostly smallholders cultivating cereal crops on rain-fed land and raising livestock. Use of inputs is limited and productivity generally low. Although women in most countries have the right to own and inherit land, official laws are often in conflict with customary laws and therefore not implemented. Women who do not own the land that they are cultivating experience difficulties when it comes to accessing loans and capital and therefore are not able to fully utilize their land resources. Without a bank guarantee, female farmers are not able to invest in their plots and access new technology.

Women's economic and social opportunities are often limited and decision-making regarding allocating labour and choosing what to grow, sell and consume is left to their husbands and other men. But the men often work outside the farm and therefore sometimes have limited knowledge about farming and agriculture, a factor that hinders effective productivity.

The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), in its report *The State of Food and Agriculture 2010-2011: Women in Agriculture — Closing the Gender Gap for Development*, shows that, by giving women equal access to productive agricultural resources (e.g. land, inputs, training and credit) women's farm productivity would increase by 20 to 30 per cent. This would increase total agricultural output by 2.5 to 4 per cent and would reduce the number of people worldwide suffering from hunger by 100-150 million.

The fact that rural women are denied their rights to own and inherit land also makes them vulnerable to other types of discrimination and abuse, and creates a general feeling of uncertainty about the future. Those women know that they are often dispossessed of land when widowed or divorced, forcing them to remain in abusive marriages.

A new challenge facing rural women is climate change. The effect of climate change is much worse in poor and destitute households, as it affects not only their productivity but all their access to natural resources, including forest and water resources. Women with no land ownership or sustainable means of income are disadvantaged as they are in no position to implement any adaptive initiatives to climate change.

Climate change creates new challenges and women must be part of the solutions. Women are affected in different ways than men and have different ideas of innovative technology. Improved cooking stoves that save energy and firewood are good news for both the women and the forest, but women must also be given the opportunity to be climate-smart entrepreneurs within agricultural production technology.

Women entrepreneurs operate in smaller firms and less profitable sectors

Just as women farmers work in small farms, women entrepreneurs run small firms. Access to productive inputs, such as credit and new technology, are limited. Microcredit schemes in different forms have been the most common way of addressing these challenges. Microloans have been the starting point for many women entrepreneurs, but now it is time to step things up.

Goal 3 is the key to development

There are strong ethical, legal and business imperatives for delivering better and faster on gender equality and women's economic empowerment. According to Ernst and Young, some 860 million women are "not prepared" and/or "not enabled" to take part in the world economy. The International Labour Organization estimates that almost half of women's productive potential globally is not utilized, compared to 22 per cent of men's.

Closing these gender gaps could yield enormous dividends for development. A new study by the International Monetary Fund estimates that having as many women in the labour force as men could boost economic growth by 34 per cent in Egypt. A Goldman Sachs study finds that narrowing the gender gap in employment could push per capita income in emerging markets up to 14 per cent higher by 2020.

Furthermore, women spend their income in a "development-friendly" way. According to the World Bank, women invest 60 per cent more of their earnings than men in "social capital", such as food, education and health care for their families. Unfortunately, women everywhere tend to earn less than men.

We therefore strongly urge Member States to:

(a) Promote decent jobs for women by adopting and implementing non-discriminatory labour laws; fighting social norms that hold back women's economic participation; promoting and implementing the "Women's Empowerment Principles: Equality means Business"; and focusing on gender equality and women's economic empowerment in development policies and financial aid;

(b) Lift the constraints on women's time by providing increased access to childcare; improving parental leave policies for both women and men; freeing up women's time through infrastructure investments; and easing women's access to markets through technology and transport;

(c) Give women farmers and entrepreneurs the ability to grow by implementing women's rights to own and inherit land and property; providing access to credit and technology; and involving women farmers and entrepreneurs in developing climate smart technology.
