



## Economic and Social Council

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### Commission on the Status of Women

#### Sixtieth session

14-24 March 2016

**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 Women’s Intercultural Network, 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

Women's Intercultural Network's mission is to ensure that all women and girls have a voice in their government and economy. It is also critical that their voices be heard during the 60th annual session of the Commission on the Status of Women, especially in regard to women's empowerment and its link to sustainable development. There are many elements of consideration in regard to sustainable development, including important policy initiatives.

According to UN-Women, sustainable development requires action on three fronts: social, economic and environmental. Women are central to progress in each area, as reaffirmed by the 2012 Rio+20 agreement, which makes commitments to ensuring women's equal rights and opportunities. This requires empowering women and dropping discriminatory barriers in diverse areas, among them agriculture, energy, health, education, employment and disaster risk reduction.

Introduced by the World Commission on Environment and Development in its 1987 report *Our Common Future*, the concept of sustainable development can be viewed as a response to increasing awareness of the potential impact of economic and social inequalities, climate change and other environmental issues, including population growth. The United Nations Secretary General's Panel on Global Sustainability launched by Secretary General Ban Ki-moon in August 2010 emphasized economic growth as the main imperative for sustainable development and women's empowerment — above other key factors. The panel discussed the cost of excluding women from the economy and the need for continued education and vocational training to develop skills that are economically viable and emphasized the need to support women as leaders in the public and private sectors.

Ideas on participation and gender equality were further developed at the Rio+20 United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development in June 2012. The conference report, *The Future We Want* stated the potential of women to engage in, contribute to and benefit from sustainable development as leaders, participants and agents of change. The conference report identified the pressing need to address the monumental challenges that rural women face in their roles of developing sustainable agriculture, including sexual violence and harsh working conditions within the informal sector. The environmental dimension of sustainable development was discussed in terms not only of the hard skills and technology needed for a 'green economy' but also of the soft skills required to develop cooperatives, promote indigenous knowledge and ensure sustained, inclusive and equitable growth.

The 20-year review of the Beijing Platform for Action provided a unique opportunity to reassess the presence of women in sustainable development and renewed commitments for action. There are multiple policy tools to advocate and enforce protections and support for building the role of women in such development that are highlighted in the most recent 2014 World Survey on the Role of Women in Development — Gender Equality and Sustainable Development compiled by UN-Women. One of the main policy advocacy tools is the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, which outlines and defines what constitutes discrimination against women and sets up an agenda for national action to end such discrimination. All official reports from the United Nations note that discrimination and a lack of inclusion of women in economic and

political processes is a primary detriment to sustainable development. Women's participation can only be effective and meaningful when underlying gender power relations are transformed and when attention and support are given to women's specific knowledge and capacities.

Among one of the most prevalent issues being discussed at current and previous sessions of the Commission on the Status of women particularly concerns unpaid care work among women. Unpaid care work includes a wide spectrum of domestic tasks as well as care for people at home and in the community. The United Nations has recognized if policies and programs that are intended to enhance environmental sustainability inadvertently increase women's unpaid care work, then they are not on a sustainable development pathway. Unpaid care work is unsustainable to women and their families. In her report to the 68th session of the United Nations General Assembly on 23 October 2013, the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Extreme Poverty and Human Rights, Magdalena Sepúlveda Carmona, analysed the relationship between poverty and unpaid care work, and argues that heavy and unequal care responsibilities are a major barrier to gender equality and to women's equal enjoyment of human rights. The report says that while this form of work is generally not recognized in national accounts and is often undervalued and overlooked by policymakers and legislators, estimates reveal that unpaid care work would constitute between 10 and 50 per cent of GDP if it was assigned a monetary value. The report also cites research showing that women and girls spend the most time on such work, which can restrict their education and employment. The Special Rapporteur argued that the failure of States to adequately provide, fund, support and regulate care contradicts their human rights obligations by creating and exacerbating inequalities.

Sustainable development cannot be achieved without recognizing women's contribution to the economy and society at large. Women's Intercultural Network supports UN-Women's call for countries to step up their efforts and implement effective solutions and strategies and close the global gender gap — by 2025 is our number. These solutions and strategies must fully acknowledge the structural discrimination of women whose economic productivity is being undervalued on the global market.

Due to the lack of data on women in the informal sector, women's economic productivity is underestimated and unrecognized in local and national policy decision-making. As reported in the Women's Economic Empowerment Strategy study 2015 done by The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, better gender disaggregated data is needed on how women and men participate in the informal sector, where overwhelmingly women are represented. This could globally improve women's economic well-being. The lack of gender-based research undermines women's roles in global and local economies.

When considering the lack of gender-based knowledge, in 2007 Environment Advisory Council of Sweden in its report *A Study on Gender Equality as a Prerequisite for Sustainable Development* highlighted the need to scrutinize gender differences in sustainability analyses. The report sees the cause of women's economic disadvantage in the dominant economic discourse that focuses on free market solutions and male dominated sectors, such as technology, while undertaking disinvestment of public sector programs that are vital to women. The report called attention to political rhetoric and policies that often put women into a "special need

category” instead of mainstreaming gender differences into policy decision-making. The research conducted by the Environment Advisory Council of Sweden and The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation asks us to consider gender differences in research, policy papers and economic strategies as well as to examine institutional mechanisms in regard to gender.

In order to meet the states’ obligations as named in the sustainable development agenda, social constructs need to be challenged and re-envisioned. We recommend that the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women address this current pattern of political practice and push the states to invest into the public sector for greater women’s representation. We recommend investing in women and their families with programs and services that recognize their undeniable contribution to the economy and society as a whole.

To achieve sustainable development on all three fronts as mentioned earlier, all United Nations member states must recognize the rights of all women by ratifying the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women and adopting the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. While the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action serves as a policy roadmap to gender equality, the implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women affirms women’s equality to men. United Nations member states should remain accountable for protecting women’s rights through programs and policies that ensure women and girls’ access to education, employment and economic development. Accessible gender-disaggregated data and mainstreaming gender equality into policies across all sectors can create new opportunities for women’s advancement. The global transformation toward sustainable development cannot start without greater attention and allocation of financial resources to programs that will elevate women from poverty.

Implementing and upholding the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women as a pillar document on which the United Nations member states can build sustainable communities means taking the opportunity to step up now on the gender equality promise. There is a mechanism for implementation at [citiesforcedaw.org](http://citiesforcedaw.org).

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