



Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
19 November 2018

Original: English

Commission on the Status of Women

Sixty-third session

11–22 March 2019

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 Modern Advocacy, Humanitarian, Social and Rehabilitation Association, 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

Strengthening Women and Girls' Access to Information and Opportunities for Social Protection, Public Services and Investments in Sustainable Infrastructure

The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (1995) recognizes key issues that relate to the increasing burden on Sustainable Development Goal 1 wherein the feminization of poverty is a significant problem in countries with economies in transition. This is seen as a short-term consequence in the process of political and socioeconomic transformation coupled with women's limited access to power, rigidly entrenched gender roles and other factors that may lead to insecurity for families.

Articles 3, 7, 9, 11, 12 and 13 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (1966) highlights States' responsibilities to ensure the equal right of men and women in the enjoyment of all economic, social and cultural rights with respect to opportunities on favourable conditions of work, social security, freedom from hunger, highest attainable standard of physical and mental health and education directed towards the full development of the human personality in the sense of its dignity, and respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms.

The Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Violence against Women (CEDAW), 1979, in its article 11 strongly reiterates the need for States to take appropriate measures in eliminating discrimination against women in the field of employment especially with concerns to equal right to choice of profession, promotion, job security, remuneration, treatment and social security in cases of retirement, unemployment, sickness, invalidity and old age and other incapacity to work.

Though there exist several global normative emphasis and policy frameworks to ensure women's and girls' access to social protection, public services and sustainable infrastructure, there are still multiple and intersecting inequalities that constrain their inability from benefiting from related investments especially in countries with transition economies.

The sub-Saharan African Countries' Problem Case Study

Most sub-Saharan African countries with populations living under USD 1.90 purchasing power parity per day obviously face enormous challenges in implementing huge gender insensitive structural adjustment and economic growth programs. They are usually cut-up within crossroads of newly and globally projected gender inclusive and strategic operational schemes that require huge resource consuming implementation modalities vis-à-vis their limited programme resources, including technical expertise. It therefore makes it difficult for national program dimensions to invest in effective strategies that should galvanize access and opportunities for the realization of women's and girls' economic and social rights through the availability, accessibility, affordability and quality of related services as well as the adequacy of social protection benefits, such as pensions, family allowances or unemployment benefits. This therefore implies that if they are inadequacies in enhancing the aforementioned women and girl's economic and social rights, there is obviously very poor, none or very limited measures in place to assess the factual implementation of such rights.

While several sub-Saharan African countries have instituted varying national policies and structures aimed and ensuring gender equality, instances for effective women and girl's sustainable social protection schemes remain scarce. Examples include cases such as that of Cameroon which has a ministry of women empowerment

and the family governed by decrees No. 2000/001/PM of 4 January 2000, 2005/088 of 29 March 2005 and 26/0241/PM of 6 February 2010, and though reflecting huge and ambiguous provisions on the ministerial organization and functioning, these laws do not indicate how vulnerable community women and girls can access and be constantly updated on information with respect to their rights-based social protection measures and other investments for sustainable infrastructure. Governed by article 27 (3) of the Kenyan constitution, Kenya's ministry of public service, youth and gender affairs duly institutes the functions of the State department on gender affairs that seems more practical than the former but implementation measures that should provide recurrent and accessible information to vulnerable community women remain weak. With the cases of some southern African countries such as Botswana through the department of gender affairs at the ministry of labour and home affairs, Zambia via the ministry of women affairs, gender and community development, and South Africa through their department of women and women in the presidency, there seems to be a better implementation coverage for inclusive social protection and public service access for women and girls, but there are still some pertinent issues on gender-responsiveness in the quality of public services that promote access barriers for women and that lead to their rights being side-lined. For example, in area of health services, discriminatory practices and violations of the sexual and reproductive health and rights of women and girls regarding their physical integrity, privacy, confidentiality and informed consent, from denial of services to coerced medical procedures, such as forced sterilizations, and obstetric violence making reference to bullying and coercion of pregnant women during child birth. This comes with the implication that 'without proper training, clear screening protocols and referral mechanisms, health personnel are often unable to identify and adequately support victims of domestic violence; and where social norms condone violence against women, they may fail to respond or blame victims even in the face of obvious signs' (cited in the concept note of the expert group meeting on 'Social protection systems, public services and sustainable infrastructure for gender equality', 2018)

More Issues to Tackle with Respect to Women's Access to information and Opportunity Remedies

In some sub-Saharan African communities, considering the exemplary case of Cameroon wherein a whole national ministry is dedicated to women empowerment and the family and governed by over 3 legally instituted decrees for its organisation and functioning, it is alarming to assess that the operational budget for such a ministry is not only very limited with respect to an effective national coverage but that women and girls are still suffering countless instances of violation on their social protection rights. The economic hardship and the on-going crisis within the English-speaking zones of the country is further degrading the situation where women and girls face health hazards including poor feeding habits or complete starvation, usage of un-sterilized or infected items or bush leaves for their hygiene and reproductive health control issues. They also faced with brutality in the form of sexual abuses, battering from hostile men and infectious bites from insects and animals. Some are forced into underage marriages leading to intimate partner relationship violence and improper or unprepared motherhood conditions, yet in all, the concerned public ministry and public services have stayed silent with no data, no statistics and no plan of action to effectively address the situation of the vulnerable women and girls whose social protection rights are continuously violated.

A Way Forward for Ascertaining Women's Social Protection, Public Services and Investments in Sustainable Infrastructure

If it is understood that ignorance is the major cause of unsuccessful projections, then granting women full access to knowledge and available public resources and

recourses will be the major challenge to overcome towards ascertaining the social protection rights of women. Some of the information access challenges which governments should consider include:

- Using modern technological applications including official websites and mobile apps to constantly update women and girls on recent rights based social protection issues and the nearest available resource and recourse opportunities to help them attain and maintain such rights.
- Educate ignorant and vulnerable community women and girls on the values and use of sustainable development ideologies and always seek their counsel and inputs with respect to their intimate concerns on investments in sustainable infrastructures for their benefit.
- Provide for special measures for women in conflict situations with acute attention on the abuses they face vis-à-vis that of men and put in place adequate gender-sensitive responses to address the social protection rights all victims.

Conclusion

Enhancing women and girls' social protection systems, access to public services and sustainable infrastructure for gender equality and women empowerment through a gender-sensitive approach of data collection and analyses will not only catalyse the process of achieving the 2030 sustainable development agenda but will as well identify persistent gaps and emerging challenges through which governments and civil society actors can develop, communicate and galvanize working solutions along with the informed positions and contributions of concerned populations of women and girls as well as men and boys.
