



## Economic and Social Council

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### Commission on the Status of Women

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**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”: implementation of strategic objectives and action in critical areas of concern and further actions and initiatives: the equal sharing of responsibilities between women and men, including caregiving in the context of HIV/AIDS**

**Statement submitted by Federation of American Women’s Clubs Overseas, Femmes Afrique Solidarité, Institute for Planetary Synthesis, Inter-African Committee on Traditional Practices Affecting the Health of Women and Children, International Association of Gerontology and Geriatrics, International Council of Jewish Women, International Council of Women, International Federation of Business and Professional Women, International Federation of University Women, International Network for the Prevention of Elder Abuse, Pan Pacific and South-East Asia Women’s Association, Solar Cookers International Tandem Project, Women’s Federation for World Peace International, Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom, World Movement of Mothers, Worldwide Organization for Women and Zonta International, non-governmental organizations 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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\* E/CN.6/2009/1.



**Statement\*****I**

Because the caring role in the household in almost all societies is placed on the shoulder of women and considered to be their personal responsibility and not of society, balancing work and family life has been the biggest challenge women face in terms of inequalities and discrimination. Despite the existence of International Labour Organization Convention 156 on Sharing of Work and Family Responsibilities, which sets standards to promote gender equality in employment policies and practices, women continue to be perceived as incapable of achieving adequate and equal performance with men without examining its root causes, e.g., the absence of child-care facilities and support. This stereotype concept is unfounded and obsolete, for women are increasingly participating in economic activities and represent 50% (and even more in some countries) of the global labour force. Women continue to work, even after childbearing age, contributing to family income or as sole breadwinners in single-headed households or simply exercising their right to personal development. They are also setting up many micro enterprises, thus creating jobs for themselves and others. It is however a fact that, while there has been progress in labour market participation, much of women's work is in unpaid or in the informal sector.

**II**

Women are combating poverty through both income earning and unpaid work at home, in the community and at the workplace. Valuation of unpaid work of women and men in household satellite accounts (HHSA) is, however, resource intensive, which has inhibited developing countries and even some developed countries from setting up such accounts. Considering that there are a huge number of children who are neither in school nor in paid work, a child labour law that would grant child labour protection for doing unpaid household work could be widely accepted. Such efforts to introduce legislation on the oversight and protection of child labour, including in the field of education, could lead to the inclusion of unpaid household work done by adults in the body of labour law. Such legislation would require statistical measurement, as is carried out under HHSA.

Measuring unpaid work is an important indicator of gender economics and social disparities and a significant element in financing for gender equality and improving the status of women in society. Valuing unpaid work is a first step in modifying and widening the concept of labour. As International Labour Organization Director General Juan Somavia indicated, what we call economic productivity is in fact indirectly subsidized by the social productivity of unpaid work. Consequently, the statistical invisibility of unpaid work and the informal economy has caused women's major activities to be absent from macroeconomic policy and planning at national levels. It has also hampered the Decent Work Agenda of the International Labour Organization on gender equality and the enjoyment of equal human rights of women, including their right to development.

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\* Issued without formal editing.

As an illustration, one factor of production output and efficiency, which NGOs raised at the session of UNCTAD in 2008 on Creative Industries, are the intangibles in the households and the informal sector, where values and measurements are largely invisible. Many of these unremunerated activities are in creative industries, such as the arts, handicrafts and entrepreneurship. Other unremunerated work that is unrecognised but has a significant contribution to economic growth and development are those that parents, notably mothers, provide to the education of their children in encouraging and guiding the future generation in creative work. Countries in Asia such as India, Bangladesh, Philippines and Viet Nam, have developed their creative industries in technological innovations, flower-growing and other food production, home service industries, etc. Most of these activities are either in households or micro-enterprises, or fall under the definition of decent work. These creative trades and services have not been given priority in research and development on the economics of gender. They are ignored when analysing the causes of energy and food crises and natural disasters. Macro economic policies are not focussing on the importance of strengthening women's capacity through education, training and technical assistance nor in empowering women's entrepreneurship through micro and venture capital credits. Consequently, hardly any safety nets or social security schemes exist, which guard against the exploitation of unskilled labour and informal employment. Furthermore, property rights and lack of land rights by women in law and practice are not being addressed.

### III

It is therefore necessary to develop sex and age disaggregated statistics that would show the place of women and men in trade relations and human development, and how such asymmetric economies affect the sharing of family responsibilities and caring roles in the case of HIV/AIDS and other caring and health-giving activities. Unfortunately, when we look at different systems of economic development analysis, we see glaring gender gaps. We see a continued use of failed methods, especially in traditional measurement of, for instance, Gross Domestic Product (GDP), which fails to represent the whole economy of a region or a country, notably the work done by women in the home as contributing to achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). This oversight penalises women, not only in the home but also in the workplace, as their labour is consistently undervalued all over the world. However, since the United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995, greater efforts have been made to correct this shortcoming by including unpaid household work in the System of National Accounts (SNA) (used to calculate the GDP), especially in developed countries. One approach to addressing this issue is precisely the use of household satellite accounts (HHSA), which economists and policymakers would use in tandem with the GDP.

While HHSA will increase the perceived value of work done by women, whether in the home or in the workplace, various problems hamper its effectiveness. In light of this fact, under the aegis of the Geneva NGO Committee on the Status of Women, the Working Group on Employment and Economics of Gender has begun to study HHSA methodologies in order to identify discrepancies and deficiencies in gender sensitivity factors that could evaluate the cost of unpaid work, which is

estimated by UNDP at \$16 trillion, or 70 per cent of global GDP. It is important to understand that more than two-thirds of such work is being done by women.

#### IV

Indeed, HHSA is an essential measurement in promoting both sustainable economic development and gender equality. The challenges today are to shift the role of men towards advancing women's economic, social and cultural rights and promoting gender equality through a better understanding and assessment of gender roles and related structural inequalities. This entails commitment, vigilance and action in the following:

1. men's parenting role and their active involvement in harmonizing and reconciling work and family responsibilities on a shared basis, with a view to relieving the disproportionate burden affecting women's ability to access and retain work, and girls being forced to drop out of school;
2. the role of men in preventing violence against women and HIV/AIDS infection among women and girls, focussing on the asymmetric power relations and women's subordination and vulnerability to discrimination;
3. stereotypes, which adhere to ideas of inferiority or superiority between sexes, brought about by peer pressures, socialization processes, media influence and belief systems;
4. stop perpetuation or exacerbation of inequalities by dismantling the traditional division of labour, and providing women equal access to information and communication technologies, which, because of language, educational and skills deficits and lack of economic power, have generally excluded them.

#### V

We therefore call on the Commission on the Status of Women to pass a resolution recalling Beijing Commitments under Strategic Objectives A1, A2, A4, F6, H3 and I2, requiring Governments to respect and implement their commitments. One way is to introduce the measurement of unpaid work in national satellite accounts, disaggregated by sex and age, as a vital tool in valuing the unpaid work of women and men. This would provide the promotion and protection of equal economic, social and cultural rights of women, including their sustainable human development.

Discrimination is a delayed time bomb to the fulfilment of the Millennium Development Goal Number 1, by the worsening of the feminisation of poverty: and of Goal Number 3 on gender equality and women's empowerment, if unremunerated work remains unrecognised as an economic and social value that requires the right to compensation and legal protection. We should expect that sooner rather than later, such an anomalous situation will explode into an untenable disproportion as extreme poverty becomes increasingly feminised, and with an ageing population. We may not see them in stock market indices but we would feel the effects

in our plates, in our household relations, in children's education, in maternal and infant mortality, in general health and well-being of children and the elderly, in deteriorating family unity and in increasing violence in the community, and in society as a whole. We cannot afford to wait and be complacent. We are therefore forwarding this written proposal as our contribution to an early warning system and to ensuring the fulfilment of the United Nations Millennium Development Goals.

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