



Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
3 December 2010
English
Original: Spanish

Commission on the Status of Women

Fifty-fifth session

22 February-4 March 2011

Item 3 (a) of the provisional agenda*

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

Statement submitted by Mujer para la Mujer, 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.

* E/CN.6/2011/1.



Statement*

1. In Mexico, women's participation in the country's economic activity grew by 35.4 per cent in 2008; 65 per cent of women are wage-earners, and the proportion of households headed by women has also increased (23.1 per cent). Women's incorporation into the labour market is a priority issue. Accordingly, companies and the Government should establish policies to support working families, giving priority to those headed by women.

2. Poverty in Mexico directly affects women and their families. According to María de Lourdes Flores, "*La pobreza es una condición socioeconómica y política en la cual las personas viven con muy bajos niveles de bienestar*" (poverty is a socio-economic and political situation in which people live with very low levels of well-being).¹ It arises as a result of the inaccessibility and/or lack of resources to satisfy basic physical and psychological human needs, such as food, housing, education, health care or access to drinking water, which leads to a deterioration in people's standard and quality of life. The lack of means for gaining access to such resources, such as unemployment, lack of income or low income, is also normally regarded as poverty, as are social segregation or marginalization processes.

3. Three types of poverty can be clearly defined:

(a) Food poverty. "*... Todos aquellos hogares que no tienen ingreso suficiente para adquirir la canasta alimentaria ...*" (... all those households that do not have sufficient income to afford the basic food basket ...)²

(b) Skills poverty. "*Esta segunda medida de pobreza da cuenta del hecho de que el ser humano para potenciar sus capacidades personales necesita satisfacer otras necesidades básicas además de las alimenticias, tales gastos son los referentes a cuidados de la salud y educación básica*" (This second measure of poverty takes account of the fact that in order to develop their personal skills, human beings need to meet other basic needs in addition to food; such expenditures include those related to health care and basic education)²

(c) Assets poverty. "*El tercer concepto de pobreza agrega no solo a la canasta alimentaria y a las necesidades consideradas en el concepto anterior, sino también aquellas que permiten al ser humano vivir de manera digna. Estas necesidades adicionales son: vestido y calzado; vivienda, servicio de conservación, energía eléctrica y combustible; estimación del alquiler de la vivienda; y, transporte público*" (The third definition of poverty includes not only the food basket and the needs considered in the previous definition, but also those that enable human beings to live with dignity. These additional needs are: clothing and shoes; housing, maintenance services, electricity and fuel; the rental value of the dwelling; and public transport)²

* Issued without formal editing.

¹ Flores Alonso, María de Lourdes, "La medición de la pobreza en México", Centro de Estudios Sociales y de Opinión Pública, accessed at: www.cddhcu.gob.mx/cesop/boletines/no1/3.pdf.

² Instituto Nacional de Desarrollo Social (INDESOL). SEDESOL, "Nota técnica para la medición de la pobreza con base en los resultados de la Encuesta Nacional de Ingresos y Gastos de Hogares, 2002", accessed at: http://www.indesol.gob.mx/docs/3_genero/niv_Nota_tecnica_pobreza_2002.pdf

4. According to the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), poverty and education are closely related, since a person's education determines what kind of citizen, family member and worker he/she aspires to be. Thus, a person with a higher level of education will have more opportunities to obtain a better and higher-paying job, in contrast to a person with a low level of education, who will have greater difficulty in finding employment and will be able to obtain only low-paying jobs.

5. Of course, this is accentuated further in rural areas, where people work from a young age. Women evidently play a very important role, since they have no alternatives, either because of the poverty in which their families live or because of a lack of educational opportunities in their community. This clearly has an impact on national poverty indices.³

6. Education quality is very important for poverty reduction. It is necessary not only to provide education but to take the quality of its delivery into account. Quality gives women better tools in terms of opportunities, decision-making and human relationships, among other things.

7. Individuals, or in this case women, cannot only have their basic material needs met, but also be given access to formal education and information resources, with a view to creating healthier families and future citizens with a quality education.

8. As the family is fundamental to social life, each family must be cared for and protected in order to build a healthy society. The family is the principal generator of human capital, which means that in order for a society to be healthy it must be built on a foundation of healthy families. The family contributes individuals who have been raised and educated in a manner that prepares them for the labour market, so that they can contribute to the functioning, growth and strengthening of society.

9. The more the family is protected and cared for, the better the social capital it will produce. In addition, women will be more inclined to work and will enjoy greater personal development, which will lead to social improvement. *"Pudiera afirmarse que la productividad y el desarrollo de un país se potenciarían si se diera también el desarrollo de las familias que lo constituyen. Para tener una sociedad sana, es necesario contar con familias sólidas"* (It can be affirmed that the productivity and development of a country will be enhanced if there is also development of the families of which it consists. Sound families are necessary for a healthy society).⁴

10. Human work has three important dimensions: it is (a) social, since it is always related in some way to another person; (b) personal, since it provides the opportunity to grow and to develop skills, learn techniques, acquire and use knowledge and make use of talents and skills; and (c) necessary, since if there were no work, society simply would not function, as work makes it possible to survive, produce goods, provide for one's family and contribute to one's society and country.

11. Work and the family are interdependent. Every human being has basic needs such as food, shelter and clothing, and it is within the family that these needs are

³ México, *impacto de la educación en la pobreza rural*, accessed at: http://www.cepal.org/publicaciones/xml/4/35044/Serie_105.pdf.

⁴ Ministry of Labour and Social Security, "Reconciliación de la vida familiar y la vida laboral", Mexico City, 2006, p. 15.

met, through work, which makes it possible to sustain the family. Work depends on families, since they generate the human capital needed for employment. What is more, the “quality” of that human capital depends on families, since it is within families that human values, such as how to get along with others, respect, discipline and even how to work, are taught.

12. Companies and laws should support non-discrimination against mothers in the workplace, results-oriented work, respect for working hours and provision of employee benefits (health insurance, family allowances for children and spouses). They should encourage paternity leave and support breast-feeding breaks for mothers, high-quality and nurturing childcare and parents living with their children, as well as training to deal with the challenges of personal, marital and family life. They should also support the restructuring of the country’s education system so as to provide quality education on an equal footing to boys and girls of all social classes, as well as women’s cooperatives aimed at making their members self-sustaining through the manufacture of products.

13. Work enables individuals to develop manual, intellectual and social talents and skills that will benefit them, their families and, in particular, society itself.

Conclusions

- Work-family balance entails a reorientation of the concept of work, creating a culture in which the practical questions of how, when and where to work are a function of the “why” of work.
- Education for achieving such a balance should begin in the family and be reinforced by the education system and the media, since they have the power to create social attitudes in favour of various models.
- In Mexico, the problem concerns not only the means to provide education, but also its quality, which is considered to be low. Unfortunately, rural areas are the most adversely affected in this regard, owing to the lack of opportunities or to the very poverty in which rural families live. It is therefore crucial to establish effective social programmes in those areas, since any progress made by the Government in overcoming this problem will be reflected at the national level, raising the population’s standard of living. Likewise, Government-provided education in urban and rural areas should be on a par with private education, so that the poorest groups will have the same opportunities to learn, grow and develop, regardless of their socio-economic level.