



Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
6 December 2013

Original: English

Commission on the Status of Women

Fifty-eighth session

10-21 March 2014

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 Asia Pacific Women’s Watch, 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

Asia Pacific Women's Watch is a regional network that is working to advance the human rights of women across five subregions of the Asia-Pacific region. We recognize that the priority theme of the session is grounded in the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. We assert that the realization of the core principles of human rights, equality and sustainability must be achieved by recognizing and focusing on the idea that unsustainable production and consumption patterns in mostly resource-rich nations have led to global food, fuel, financial and climate change crises. The Asia-Pacific region, with its rich cultural diversity and economic and social resources, continues to suffer also from wide-ranging poverty and deprivation, inequality and insecurity, and violence against women and girls. Women and girls continue to be subject to violations based on discriminatory practices that are structural and interpersonal, as well as those emanating from caste, disability, sexual orientation and gender identity.

The impact of the Millennium Development Goals, while raising awareness of Governments' responsibilities in the areas of gender equality and women's empowerment and leadership in the political sphere, has seriously suffered owing to the absence of a rights-based framework. As a result, strategic opportunities to create and support the socioeconomic and political interventions that would achieve the goals of women's empowerment and gender equality in a meaningful fashion have been overlooked.

Women have been engaging in income-earning activities in the agricultural, industrial and service sectors, including as migrant domestic workers. However, wide-ranging gender discriminatory practices in wages, obstacles to access to reproductive health-care services, and continuing disregard in the region for policy interventions that recognize men's responsibilities and accountability in the domestic sphere have prevented women from realizing and enjoying their rights. There is a trend towards reducing resources for social protection systems and services to support survivors of violence that increases the vulnerability of women and girls.

Women are disproportionately affected by changes in food supply and prices, and they are more vulnerable to food insecurity and malnutrition. Gender inequalities and vulnerabilities are further exacerbated by changes in the environment as women face challenges to access and control over natural resources. Countries in conflict situations need special efforts to ensure that their Millennium Development Goal targets regarding women and girls are met.

Global interventions on goal 5 (target A) have contributed to the decline in the maternal mortality ratio in the last two decades. It must be noted that South Asia and the Pacific have the largest number of maternal deaths outside sub-Saharan Africa. The original framework did not contain indicators on sexual and reproductive health, but continued advocacy led to the inclusion of target 5 B. South Asia has made the most progress over the past decade on coverage of antenatal care. High levels of anaemia in pregnant women in the region are also associated with maternal deaths and pre- and postnatal complications. "Care" varies in terms of quality, a dimension that is hard to measure and is not reflected in the data. Unsafe abortion contributes significantly to maternal deaths in the region, accounting for 14 per cent of deaths in South-East Asia and 13 per cent in South Asia. There is an urgent need

to reform abortion laws and to decriminalize abortion, in addition to strengthening health facilities to provide safe, legal and accessible abortion services. Contraceptive prevalence rates have improved across the region over the last two decades, but there is a high unmet need for contraception, with women continuing to shoulder the burden.

In the Asia-Pacific region, marginalized communities, in particular women who are poor and/or live in remote/rural areas, face greater difficulties in accessing sexual and reproductive health services and exercising autonomy over their own bodies. Persons and families of diverse sexualities and gender identities face similar marginalization and encounter stigma and discrimination, including within health systems and in accessing sexual and reproductive health services. Sexual orientation and gender identity are basic components of human rights and must be prioritized in the post-2015 development framework. Datasets in any new framework must use sex-disaggregated data to determine the access of marginalized and vulnerable groups to sexual and reproductive health. Challenges in health system governance contribute to poor sexual and reproductive health outcomes. They include gaps between policy development and policy implementation, weak monitoring and evaluation systems, and inequitable health financing.

With the region accounting for nearly half of the world's young people, the sexual and reproductive health and human rights of adolescents and youth must be prioritized.

It is to be noted that the Millennium Development Goals do not take into account violence against women as a key dimension of women's and girl's empowerment; the significant amount of unpaid work done by women; or the disparities in terms of representation of women in political or public spaces from the local to the global level.

The new development framework must be based on the principle of non-regression; embrace a holistic, rights-based approach; and ensure that the human rights principles of equality, equity, non-discrimination and inclusive participation and decision-making underpin its policies and practices. Such an approach would ensure that the most marginalized can benefit from development and growth, and become active agents of change. Thus, universal access to sexual and reproductive health and human rights is a key component of the framework.

Ensuring universal access to sexual and reproductive health and human rights requires a comprehensive, multipronged approach to the provision of an essential package of integrated sexual and reproductive health services, information and care. This is a crucial component of a sustainability-oriented approach and is interlinked with all the key items on development agendas: gender equality, human rights, poverty and inequality, migration, health, climate change, population dynamics, conflicts and disasters, food and nutrition sovereignty, and access to resources.

Based on the analysis of the gaps and challenges, Asia Pacific Women's Watch makes the following recommendations to advance the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals and to ensure that universal access to sexual and reproductive health and human rights is a core component of the post-2015 development framework:

- Development of service providers' skills through a rights-based and a client-centred approach, and recognition and enhancement of the vital role of mid-level service providers

- Development of accountability mechanisms to ensure fulfilment of everyone's right to sexual and reproductive health and ensure their implementation
- Guarantee protection of the right to health, nutrition and social security of all women and all children
- Ensure a context-specific, rights-based continuum of quality care across the whole of a woman's life cycle, in the home, the community and in health facilities
- Decriminalization of abortion and removal of barriers that prevent access to safe abortion services across the region. Laws on conscientious objection and parental and spousal consent must not restrict women's and adolescents' access to reproductive health information, education and services, particularly safe abortion services
- Inclusion of comprehensive sex education in the school curricula of all Member States. It should recognize the evolving capacities of the child, and instructors should receive training in order to ensure high-quality, comprehensive sex education
- Ensure that access to youth-friendly, non-discriminatory, non-judgemental health and social services is maintained and that confidentiality and informed consent are respected and fulfilled at all times, including the removal of legal, regulatory and social barriers that prohibit young people from accessing services

More than 50 per cent of women's livelihoods remain confined to the urban and rural informal sectors without regulated remuneration, safe working environments or access to high levels of marketable skills development. Women's remuneration in these enterprises are most often half that of men.

Cultural and religious barriers to accessing health information and services and exercising rights, particularly sexual and reproductive rights, need to be eliminated. Those barriers include, but are not limited to, the exploitation of children, early and forced marriage and sexual exploitation. The rights of young people to education, services and information should be fulfilled without restrictions based on age, marital status or parental/spousal consent.

The definition of gender discrimination must include sexual orientation and gender identity. Discrimination against persons of diverse sexual orientations and gender identities increases their vulnerability and prevents their equal access to human rights and to the full exercise of citizenship.

Accountability mechanisms must be established and/or strengthened to ensure that the rights and health of all migrants are protected. National data collection and regional cooperation must be improved in order to harmonize the collection and analysis of migration data for policy formulation and programme development. The rights and protection of migrants in the process of data collection and analysis must be ensured. We urge Member States to put in place rights-based and gender-responsive pre-departure, post-arrival and reintegration programmes in order to address the economic, psychosocial and cultural needs of all migrants, including their access to health services and information.