



## **Economic and Social Council**

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### **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 International Federation of Business and Professional Women, 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**

The Organization is founded on the vision of the empowerment and economic advancement of women, inter alia, through achieving workplace equality and equal pay.

In that context, we welcome this opportunity to contribute to the discussion on achievements and gaps in reaching the Millennium Development Goals and the modalities for the post-2015 framework.

### **General comments**

The Millennium Declaration has given focus, including to women, for commitment to equality and gender justice. Regrettably, however, implementation through and of the Millennium Development Goals has fallen short. Progress reports have revealed significant gaps and omissions, especially in the realization of Goal 7 — the sanitation target — and Goal 3, to “Promote gender equality and empower women”. The economic empowerment of women is not specifically mentioned, and discussion of enablers like technical assistance, property rights or legal frameworks that ensure a household and societal voice for women is largely absent. Women are seen as recipients of aid and advice (victims) rather than as actors and agents of change. Results are measured in “averages”, obscuring true disparities.

In the analysis and discussion below, we will consider gaps and challenges particularly in Goals 1, 2, 5 and 7; Goal 3, “gender equality and empowering women”, is subsumed throughout.

### **Agreed conclusions from the fifty-fifth session of the Commission on the Status of Women**

Target 1.B of the Millennium Development Goals is to achieve full and productive employment for all, including women and young people. However, we see everywhere the tremendous vulnerability of women in precarious jobs, the gap in employment rates between women and men and the unmeasured gaps in and caused by the informal economy. These gaps cost companies profits and nations economic growth.

Women must be part of the formal economy and formal labour force; their work in family companies and farms must be formally acknowledged and remunerated accordingly, and the unpaid roles for which women are considered responsible must be recognized as important economic drivers. Women need access to information, resources, education, training, markets, technical assistance and labour organizations. They need equal, secure access to capital and credit and decision-making.

We urge Governments and companies to adopt the Women’s Empowerment Principles — Equality Means Business, developed by the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women) and the Global Compact:

1. Establish high-level corporate leadership for gender equality;
2. Treat all women and men fairly at work — respect and support human rights and non-discrimination;

3. Ensure the health, safety, and well-being of all women and men workers;
4. Promote education, training and professional development for women;
5. Implement enterprise development, supply chain and marketing practices that empower women;
6. Promote equality through community initiatives and advocacy;
7. Measure and publicly report on progress to achieve gender equality.

### **Recommendations**

The organization recommends the following:

- (a) Adopt and implement the Women's Empowerment Principles to include equal employment, equal pay, pension, accessible and affordable care, social and health services, maternity leave benefits and childcare;
- (b) Publicize these issues through broad media coverage and social networks;
- (c) Establish women entrepreneur networks to provide continuous and independent learning programmes and access to materials with technical information about production, processing, procurement, management and marketing.

Our organization has given wide publicity to the gender pay gap by establishing an equal pay day. Our "Equal pay for equal work" campaign, an ongoing initiative in 50 countries, aims to close the income gap between men and women doing equal work. Without equality in pay, it is impossible to achieve Goal 3 or eradicate poverty; women will not gain their full potential as agents of change and actors in their own right.

### **Recommendations**

The organization recommends the following:

- (a) Raise awareness of the gap with employers and women and develop strategies to mitigate it;
- (b) Recognize and compensate (previous) experience and competences acquired in unpaid and volunteer jobs by "scaling" women into the pay scales;
- (c) Empower women through training to advocate for themselves;
- (d) Reward women fairly for taking care of the family and the home.

### **Millennium Development Goal 2**

Education is a human right. It contributes to the elimination of all forms of discrimination and violence against women and girls and the eradication of poverty. It empowers women and girls in the context of global economic and technological changes and promotes development. Our organization emphasizes that education and training are essential to employment and access to the labour market in general.

In the report on its seventeenth session ([E/2009/29](#)), the Commission on Sustainable Development concluded that "vocational and entrepreneurship training including proactive and market-related elements to build capacities within rural communities, in particular for youth, young girls, women and indigenous people"

are necessary in order to enhance human capacity. Educated, well-trained women can advocate for themselves, develop and use their leadership abilities to enhance their domestic, economic, social and professional position and overcome the stereotyping and discrimination that keep them frequently in poverty, unequal to men and subject to violence.

### **Recommendations**

The organization recommends the following:

- (a) Vocational secondary level education (at a minimum), especially for women and girls, should become part of the sustainable development goals;
- (b) Women should be encouraged and facilitated to follow vocational and in-service training programmes to increase their employment opportunities;
- (c) The recommendations of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, in its Global Education Digest 2011, should be accepted and implemented.

### **Millennium Development Goal 5: improve maternal health**

We emphasize that good health, including mental and reproductive health, is essential for women and girls to gain employment, maintain their economic independence and contribute to development.

Action should be taken, including at all public and private working places, to secure the health of women workers under the framework of Women's Empowerment Principle 2. Lack of support for adequate maternal care and maternity leave and lack of childcare in the workplace create additional stress on women and lead to health problems, both physical and mental; they place additional burdens on individuals, communities and nations; and contribute to low employment rates and low-level positions among mothers.

### **Millennium Development Goal 7: ensure environmental sustainability**

Water and sanitation are economic and education drivers, essential both for health and women's empowerment. The lack of adequate water, sanitation and hygiene has a significant impact on countries' economies. Not only is distance a factor, but carrying water also has a severe impact on women's health because of the load they are carrying and the violence against them when they go to remote areas. Bad water quality can also severely damage their health and that of their children and make medication worthless.

The Commission on the Status of Women has mentioned the need for the provision of drinking water and for separate adequate sanitation facilities as factors in women's participation in the labour market and education. The Commission on the Status of Women has not paid much attention to recommendations from section IV K of the Beijing Platform for Action.

Other Commissions of the United Nations, though, have made strong recommendations concerning the impact of proper water and sanitation delivery on the education of girls and the economic empowerment of women. Access to clean water helps to improve education outcomes both by reducing the time spent fetching water and by reducing water-borne diseases (in 2011, only 51 per cent of schools in

Africa had an adequate water source and only 45 per cent had adequate hygienic sanitation facilities, which also allowed for menstrual hygiene; this lack caused half of the girls to drop out). Such inadequacies in the water supply ultimately affect girls' and women's opportunities for economic prosperity and well-being and constitute a severe impediment to gender equality.

Hygiene is a crucial component of the future development agenda. Women should have an understanding of and full access to personal (particularly hand-washing), menstrual, domestic and food-handling hygiene.

Seventy per cent of the workers in agriculture are women; they control 70 per cent of our water use for agriculture and could be instrumental to sustainable and multiple use of water. However, the fact that women own only 1 per cent of the land has a direct impact on their ownership of and access to water sources, so their roles as water managers and protectors of the source are not acknowledged, leading to the loss of important traditional knowledge.

Withholding adequate training and proper access to decision-making regarding water allocation constitutes mismanagement of our water resources.

The impact of inadequate sanitation alone costs 18 African countries \$5.5 billion each year. Targeted investments can yield broad social, health and economic returns. It is estimated that each dollar invested in sanitation yields an average benefit of \$5.5 globally, or as much as \$8; for interventions in improved drinking water the yield is \$2.

Our organization strongly recommends that the Commission on the Status of Women in future pay more attention to the importance of natural resources, including ownership and access to their benefits and to the impact of climate change. We advise that the post-2015 framework encompass:

- Universal access to safe and sustainable water supply and gender-responsive sanitation and hygiene, including in schools, health facilities, companies and public installations
- Access to proper hygiene, including hand-washing and menstrual hygiene management
- Front-line service delivery by women to make public services more accessible
- The involvement of women in water management at all levels.

Our organization presented an event entitled "Driving inclusive sustainable growth" to encourage innovative collaborations to enable women to develop scalable green economy businesses to accelerate sustainable development. It is crucial to motivate and facilitate rural women to engage in entrepreneurship and green jobs which provide opportunities to advance from low-skill, entry-level positions to high-skill, higher-paying jobs and create additional income.

With only two years left to achieve the Millennium Development Goals, ending gender-based injustices that create barriers to women's and girls' opportunities must be the centrepiece of further action.

**Recommendations for the post-2015 goals**

The organization recommends the following:

(a) The Goals must go beyond numbers, and instead consider substance and quality and ensure the full integration of the different pillars of sustainable development, avoiding a “silo” approach and connecting the various targets with other goals;

(b) Our organization urges Member States to adopt dedicated goals for water and sanitation and equality and non-discrimination;

(c) The universal ratification and implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and the Beijing Platform for Action must be part of the Goals, since they underlie and connect all the different areas of concern;

(d) All goals must be considered equally important, be underpinned by a human rights framework and guarantee a full range of connected services;

(e) Governments must translate the globally agreed goals and targets into national frameworks, investing where resources are most needed;

(f) Clear language concerning women’s equality and economic empowerment must be included throughout.

Some practical approaches to putting women’s rights at the heart of the new goals include:

- Increasing the rate of access to services for women (including reproductive health)
- Continuing girls’ education for the critical secondary years and delaying marriage
- Amplifying women’s voices in decision-making, from the household up to the local and national levels
- Enhancing women’s ability to accumulate assets, including through laws
- Increasing women’s voices in society by introducing quotas
- Fostering women’s leadership and ensuring that policies reflect the realities of women’s lives
- Mobilizing communities to raise awareness of discrimination, pinpoint harmful cultural and social behaviours, and develop alternative models
- Developing the programmes to increase women’s self-confidence, competent social interaction, participation, negotiation skills, capacity for decision-making and problem-solving, and democratic citizenship awareness.

The sustainable development goals and post-2015 development agenda provide opportunities for a new commitment to equality in the economic advancement and empowerment of women. They should lead to sufficient health care, education and water-, food- and energy-security. Research shows that when women earn equally to men, enjoy full access to and management of land, water, food and all basic services, control means of production and (natural) resources and have the opportunity to engage in income generating activities, the development impact on society is socially and statistically significant.