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**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 American Psychological Association,
International Association of Applied Psychology, International
Council of Psychologists, Society for Industrial and Organizational
Psychology, Society for the Psychological Study of Social Issues
and World Council for Psychotherapy, 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.



Statement

Psychological perspectives on the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals for women and girls

Access to and participation of women and girls in education, training, science and technology, and women's equal access to full employment and decent work are necessary for implementing Millennium Development Goals 2 and 3 for women and girls. Strategies for promoting women's and girls' access and participation require sound, behavioural evidence-based programmes. Research and expertise from psychology can provide powerful tools to help policymakers and programme administrators understand the importance of these issues for women and girls and develop sound programmes. Examples of issues supported by relevant psychological research and application are provided below, followed by specific recommendations.

Psychological impact of unemployment. Unemployed women have significantly higher levels of depressive symptoms than employed women. An analysis across hundreds of psychological studies found that unemployment is associated with depression, anxiety and low self-esteem. Evidence-based interventions, such as self-efficacy training, result in decreased length of unemployment and reduced psychological issues associated with unemployment.

Psychological impact of discrimination. A significant impediment to decent work for women and girls is discrimination. Women's views are likely to be devalued; they are considered emotional, irrational and unsuited for top positions. Gender stereotypes may lead to men being perceived as more suited to the requirements of high-status positions, resulting in discrimination against women. Discrimination is psychologically damaging to physical and mental health, lowering self-efficacy and limiting access to decent work. Moreover, discrimination based on gender stereotypes results in the exclusion of women from important science, technology, engineering and mathematics education and work.

Behaviour-based interventions can address discrimination. Changing gender-role stereotypes through attitude change is one measure that is especially helpful for girls' decision-making about careers and teachers' influences on girls' choices. Antidiscrimination and non-harassment policies that are enforced, as well as supportive supervisors, have been found to help alleviate discrimination and harassment in the workplace.

Psychologists have long been concerned with gender equality and access to jobs and other work outcomes, such as pay, promotion, training and benefits. Numerous studies have been conducted to develop and test theories that explain why and under what conditions various types of gender inequalities occur. In addition to identifying the obstacles that women face, psychologists have identified strategies to successfully overcome these barriers.

Psychological benefits of access to decent work. Psychological research has shown that decent work is a major factor impacting the ability of women and girls to climb out of, and remain out of, poverty. Being engaged in decent work promotes psychosocial empowerment by developing a sense of ownership, optimism and confidence in one's ability to be effective in dealing with challenges. Women's empowerment improves their sense of self-worth, the power to control their own lives, and their ability to influence the direction of social change.

Psychology-based solutions to gender gaps in science, technology, engineering and mathematics fields. Psychological research aimed at understanding and addressing the forces that contribute to women's underrepresentation in science, technology, engineering and mathematics fields examines a variety of contributing factors, including a sense of belonging and its effects on aspirations and learning.

Psychological benefits of training and assessments. Training and assessments — two major areas of psychological expertise — have been used to enhance entrepreneurship and income-generating activities, life skills development, and access to primary, secondary and higher education as important pathways to decent work. Entrepreneurship can also be enhanced by expanding community networks through which information about entrepreneurial opportunities can be shared.

Programme evaluation. Programmes that are implemented to address these important issues for women and girls need to be evaluated to ensure their effectiveness and determine the degree to which the policies they are intended to address have been effective. Programme effectiveness measurement is a major expertise area of psychology and includes both formative evaluation, to understand effectiveness as a programme is under way, as well as summative evaluation, to assess final outcomes.

Recommendations

- Promote equality in access to primary, secondary and tertiary levels of education and training for girls and young women of diverse backgrounds, especially the most vulnerable, and provide gender-responsive, culturally responsive and life skills-based education
- Enhance the curriculum and learning processes to ensure the gender sensitivity of the curriculum and content, to prevent gender bias and segregation of marginalized experiences and needs, and to improve curricular opportunities at earlier levels
- Increase gender-responsiveness in teacher training
- Promote quality training and fair, periodic assessments as tools to enhance entrepreneurship, life skills and access to education as pathways to decent work
- Increase mentoring, instituting formal mentoring programmes and networking opportunities for women in and outside of the workplace
- Actively recruit women into science, technology, engineering and mathematics fields
- Improve institutional and legal incentives.

The effectiveness of United Nations policies and programmes can be significantly enhanced by including psychological science, research and practice in programme development, implementation and evaluation.