



Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
26 November 2014

Original: English

Commission on the Status of Women

Fifty-ninth session

9-20 March 2015

**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”**

Statement submitted by Centre for Social Research, 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.

* The present statement is issued without formal editing.



Statement

Status of women in India: The past, present and the future

“Without her, man could not be. If nonviolence is the law of our being, the future is with woman. Who can make a more effective appeal to the heart than woman?” said Mahatma Gandhi.

The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, designed during the 1995 Beijing conference, set a framework for organizations to work on critical areas of concern for women. And twenty years later, it is still referred to as the prime source of inspiration for all the organizations working for the empowerment of women.

Centre for Social Research, an institution working in India since 1983 to empower women and youth and create a humane, equitable and gender-just society, would like to put forth the picture of status of women in our nation through this statement. While we are happy to emphasize that progress has been made in terms of framing policies for the empowerment of women, schemes to provide better education to girl child etc., crime against women has not declined. Our organization has been constantly supporting and pushing for the Women’s Reservation Bill for a stronger hold of women in the decision making bodies. Along with this we are working on initiatives like Meri Shakti Meri Beti that address the issue of sex selective abortions and also counsel and support the cases of violence against women through our Crisis Intervention Centres.

The past decades have witnessed great women reformers in India who have acted as torch bearers for gender equality, justice, women’s empowerment, and addressed issues related to youth and children. Having said this, India is also home to a number of women who have constantly been the victims of violence and the nation remains dominated by the norms of patriarchy.

Rape, domestic violence, dowry deaths, sexual harassment, eve teasing and murder are the challenges that women in India are facing extensively and these issues are acting as the major roadblocks for their development and empowerment. The social and economic well-being of women is one factor that could dictate and boost the development of a nation. Especially, in nations like India, which is home to 614.4 million females out of a population of 1.27 billion. To reinstate the belief in a gender just society, it is very important for the women’s movement to focus on the twelve critical areas defined by the Beijing+20 platform. Covering the socio economic aspect of women in India, initiatives that address these areas have the potential to drive a positive change in society. The crime rate against women in India is increasing at an alarming rate with 309,546 reported crimes in 2013. Incidents of rape, dowry deaths, abduction and molestation also reflected an increase of 26.7 per cent in 2013 from the previous year.

As far as women and poverty is concerned, the National Sample Survey Organisation reports that during 2009 — 10, female headed households in rural areas were 118 per 1,000 males whereas in urban area the number was 116 per 1,000 males. Female share agriculture is dominant in India; however, more than 20 million women were displaced from agriculture workforce between 2004-05 and 2009-10 as compared to the addition of 5 million men to the agriculture workforce in the same period.

As per population census of India 2011 the literacy rate of Indian females has gone up to 65.5 per cent from 39.3 per cent in 1991, an increase of 26.2 per cent in the last 20 years.

The life expectancy at birth of females in 2001 was 63.3 per cent where in 2011 it increased to 65.4 per cent. There has been a steady decline in the country's Maternal Mortality Ratio over the last few years from 398 per 100,000 in 1997-98 to 178 per 100,000 in 2011-12. National Family Health Survey data reveals that the total fertility rate in the year 1992-93 was 3.4 per cent and for the year 2005-06 2.7 per cent.

In regards to women's economic participation, there is a marginal increase in the proportion of women employed in the service sector, although it is still only one in six. A major downfall is in the proportion of regular salaried female workers; however, we see a ray of hope with the increase of those self-employed.

According to National Family Health Survey-III (2005-06) in the rural sector, married women currently make only 26 per cent of decisions with respect to obtaining health care for themselves. In the case of urban areas, these figures stand at 29.7 per cent, 10.4 per cent and 12.2 per cent respectively. In the decision making bodies, women occupied only 8 out of 74 Ministerial positions in the Central Council of Ministers in 2012.

With respect to human rights issues there have been two recent legislative interventions incorporated in the Committee on Elimination of Discrimination Against Women.

The adoption of a general recommendation in October 2013 is indeed a landmark victory in the struggle for women's human rights in situations of conflicts and indicative of the Committee's deep commitment to protecting women's human rights at all times.

To address the institutional mechanisms for the advancement of women, the Government of India has formulated several regulations, policies and schemes in addressing the concerns of women. The 73rd amendment of the constitution brought about 1.3 million elected women representatives into local governance.

Women have been the principal conservers of bio-diversity. One of the first environmentalist movements that was inspired by women was the Chipko movement. Another movement, which is one of the biggest in women's and environmental history, is the Green Belt movement.

Violence against women is increasing constantly as the numbers of crimes against women have increased from 74,093 in 1991 to 244,270 in 2012. These figures clearly show that crimes against women are treated with less importance than other crimes in our country.

According to National Family Health Survey-III 47 per cent of currently married women aged 20-24 were married on or before 18 years of age. Despite child marriage being illegal in India the social acceptance of this practice is obvious from the fact that only 766 cases of such marriages were registered with the police during 2005-2012.

Information and technology has been successful in creating a platform for women to raise their voices and issues at a global level. In a report by the

Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry, it was stated that until 2011, only 10 per cent of the top managers from registered companies in India were women. The figure shows that the glass ceiling still exists and that more women should be appointed to top positions.

The Nirbhaya rape case that sent shockwaves across India and abroad happened in December 2012 when a medical student was brutally gang raped by six men inside a moving bus in Delhi. As Nirbhaya's lifestyle and daily activities resonated with a large group of people, a number of street protests, rallies, and vigils were held.

A new revolution that the past decade has marked is the involvement of men and boys in the women's movement and is being led primarily by the youth of the nation. Though this surely is a breather amidst all the roadblocks for the empowerment of women there is a lot left to be addressed and resolved.

The patriarchal system in India, which is very deep rooted, has created stringent sociocultural boundaries in terms of women moving out of homes and becoming self-reliant. And unfortunately, as women push back the patriarchal norms to exercise their rights, they are suppressed in many ways. Primarily, this is where the idea of democracy fails.

Though safety, security and the rights of women was the paramount agenda for every political party, the participation of women in governing bodies was never addressed. Inclusion of women's safety and security was definitely considered while allocating the budget but it lacked sustainable mechanisms for ensuring women's safety in India. Though schemes like Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao Yojana have been renewed, the core issue of sex selective abortions was left unaddressed.

For India to have meaningful development, it is important that the patriarchal norms take a backstage and the present needs and issues are addressed with a sustainable and fresh approach. And the most effective reform to bring about change could be the implementation of laws and policies in real time rather than in speeches or on papers.
