



Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
17 November 2015

Original: English

Commission on the Status of Women

Sixtieth session

14-24 March 2016

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”

Statement submitted by Stichting Rutgers WPF, 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

Stichting Rutgers WPF, in consultative status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council, together with all other members of the MenEngage Alliance, welcome the priority theme of the 60th session of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women on “Women’s empowerment and its link to sustainable development” and the review theme on “The elimination and prevention of all forms of violence against women and girls”.

The reality today is that predominantly women all over the world continue to suffer from gender-based violence. This is a blatant violation of women’s human rights and should have long belonged to the past. It is therefore an important achievement that gender equality and women’s empowerment stand at the core of the new Agenda 2030 for sustainable development, with a stand-alone goal and crosscutting the whole agenda, and that the elimination of violence against women has been recognized explicitly in target 5.2.

The MenEngage Alliance uses the term gender-based violence to refer mostly to violence by men against women, but also to a broader range of violence, including violence against men, boys, sexual minorities or those with gender-nonconforming identities. The term gender-based violence recognizes the gendered nature of men’s violence against women and emphasizes the need for gender-transformative approaches that seek to transform masculinities by working with men and boys. A growing base of evidence shows that gender-transformative approaches effectively including engaging men for gender equality can have significant benefits for women, children, men themselves and the society as a whole.

Rigid gender norms and harmful perceptions of what it means to be a man or a woman often encourage men’s use of violence against women, granting them for instance the power to dictate the terms of sex and relationships, as well as control over resources. As a result, women are still too often (forced) in a submissive position, lacking sexual, political and economic power, development opportunities and suffering the effects of violence on their health and well-being. Achieving gender equality and ending gender-based violence entails a shift in underlying destructive values and norms.

Gender-transformative programmes — that transform gender roles and promote more gender-equitable relationships between men and women — have found to be more likely to be effective in eliminating violence against women. Gender relations are shaped to be more equitable, largely through approaches that “free women and men from the impact of destructive gender and sexual norms”. A 2007 World Health Organization review of interventions with men in the areas of sexual and reproductive health, maternal and child health, gender-based violence, fatherhood and HIV/AIDS identifies that such programmes have brought about important changes in men’s attitudes and behaviours.

Multiple studies have suggested that boys who experience sexual violence in childhood are themselves more likely to perpetrate sexual violence later in life, as are boys who experience other forms of violence. In addition, a significant proportion of men who use sexual violence do so for the first time as adolescents. It is therefore key to reach boys from an early age.

While (economically) empowering women is essential to eliminate violence against women, research shows that when programmes only empower women, they can actually lead to harm or backlash by men. Several studies affirm positive changes in couple conflicts as a result of efforts to engage men to support women's economic empowerment. Few efforts, however, have been made to engage men as allies in women's economic and social empowerment, or to explore and promote co-operation between couples.

The MenEngage Alliance therefore sees the role of men and boys as indispensable for the prevention and elimination of violence against women in particular. This importance is also recognized in paragraph 20 of the Declaration of the "Agenda 2030" and other commitments.

Existing commitments

Through the agreed conclusions of the 57th session of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women, member states acknowledged the fundamental role that men and boys play to prevent violence against women. Moreover, section IV/C of the International Conference on Population and Development Programme of Action, and Resolution 2004/11 of the 48th Session of the Commission on the Status of Women focus on the importance of engaging men and boys. Many United Nations agencies have and continue to do so.

Building on all these commitments, the MenEngage Alliance urges governments, United Nations agencies, civil society, and private sector to move forward in joint efforts that contribute to gender just societies, free of violence against women, by transforming harmful social norms driving gender-based violence and ensure that these changes are firmly rooted in supportive legal and policy frameworks.

Recommendations

The MenEngage Alliance has the following recommendations for a gender-transformative framework towards achieving sustainable development:

- Scale-up evidence-based gender-transformative interventions while working in strategic partnerships with key public sectors (i.e. health, education, social welfare, justice) and civil society (women's rights groups, women economic empowerment organisations, etc.) in order to prevent violence against women. While engaging boys and men to prevent and end violence against women, programmes should also ensure: (1) women's safety; (2) that gender-transformative programmes are developed and implemented in collaboration and consultation with women's rights groups; and (3) that programmes are accountable to women's organisations.
- Scale-up programmes and policies to reduce and redistribute unpaid care-work while encouraging men's greater contribution to caregiving, and improving parental (maternity and paternity) leave globally and other state supports for the care of children. Engage men as fathers and caregivers. In addition, there is also a need for ongoing public awareness campaigns and education to transform perceptions of gender roles among men. Similarly, publicly supported fatherhood preparation courses/campaigns focusing on the roles of men in the lives of children can address fathers' reported feelings of being

unprepared for caregiving, and help men understand the benefits from greater participation in family life.

- Integrate attention to engaging men as supportive partners in the promotion of sexual and reproductive health and rights, particularly in prenatal and antenatal maternal health, in the prevention of mother-to-child transmission of HIV, promotion of contraceptive use, safe abortion, implementation of youth-friendly services, and in the roll-out of HIV and Sexually Transmitted Infection prevention programmes.
- Improve the attention to men's health within national policies and guidelines, as well as United Nations and international agreements. Efforts to better address men's health and health-seeking behaviour should include the transformation of gender norms that equate risk-taking with manhood and illness with weakness. Health systems must play an active role in promoting improved health-seeking behaviour by men. This transformation can have broader benefits for the lives of women, children and communities at large, provided that this is part of integrated efforts to improve the health and well-being of societies with also the specific attention to women and girls that is needed.
- Ensure implementation of Sustainable Development Goal target 4.7, which states that all learners need to acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, including, among others through education for sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality. This includes challenging harmful stereotypes about men and women, by adapting school curricula to promote healthy notions of masculinity and femininity in order to advance gender equality. Education programmes should incorporate basic principles of a gender-equitable teaching and learning experience. All teacher-training curricula should contain gender training and an emphasis on the importance of the engagement of parents, including fathers, in school governing bodies and through community outreach.
- Implement, as part of Sustainable Development Goal targets 3.7 and 4.7, comprehensive sexuality education with specific reference to gender and engagement of boys and young men. Comprehensive sexuality education increases awareness about safe sex, sexuality and human rights with boys and adolescent men, and educates them about the needs and rights of others. This education should also provide complete information on the range of modern contraceptive methods available, and also provide sex, sexuality, sexual diversity and skills building for negotiating sexual behaviour.
- Ensure positive roles for men in changing attitudes towards male and female survivors of gender-based violence in interventions in conflict and post-conflict settings. Perpetrators need to be held accountable, and efforts should be put in transforming their societies by changing gender norms and the behavior of men based on non-violence, care and equality. Given the high exposure to multiple forms of violence during conflict, MenEngage also calls for a largescale roll-out of psychosocial support that enables men, women, boys and girls to overcome their traumas.