



Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
6 December 2020

Original: English

Commission on the Status of Women

Sixty-fifth session

15–26 March 2021

**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 Association for Progressive Communications, 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

Reaffirming the Universal Declaration on Human Rights (UDHR), the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development ([A/RES/70/1](#)) as guiding documents for women's full and effective participation and decision-making in public life,

Recalling the United Nations Human Rights Council resolution on the promotion, protection and enjoyment of human rights on the internet ([A/HRC/32/L.20](#)),

Welcoming the Agreed Conclusions of CSW41 (1997/2) and CSW50 (2006) (B), UN General Assembly Resolution [66/130](#), UN General Assembly Resolution on Intensification of efforts to prevent and eliminate all forms of violence against women and girls: sexual harassment ([A/RES/73/148](#)), Secretary-General's report on women and political participation ([A/68/184](#)), the report of the Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences on violence against women in politics ([A/73/301](#)),

Building on the priority themes of the preceding sessions of the Commission on the Status of Women and taking note of the 50th session,

Acknowledging that women participate in and influence public life and decision-making in ways that have evolved over time,

Recognizing the multiple and intersecting identities held by women in public life – including age, racial or ethnic identities, sexual orientation and gender identities, those living with disabilities – as well as the inequalities they face in various aspects of public life,

Globally, women are still under-represented in all forms of decision-making including in political office, constitutional bodies, public administration, the judiciary, the private sector and in local, regional and global fora. Although many governments around the world have invested in infrastructure and access to public services, the current social, political and economic environment is still not conducive to women's full and effective participation in public life. If anything, women's power and access to leadership positions is still heavily concentrated in segments of lower quality, irregular and informal economy. On average, 79 per cent of all employment in low income-countries is informal, primarily in rural areas where women have restricted mobility, and cannot afford private services, such as child care, or telecommunications infrastructure. Overall, gender equality progress and the empowerment of all women and girls is uneven, slow and subject to backsliding. Discriminatory laws and practices still hold back women from accessing the formal economy and its transformative benefits, stereotypes and social norms limit women's choices of work, as do unequal responsibilities for unpaid care and domestic work. Disadvantages in terms of lesser skills, education and work experience as well as access to and control of assets including property, financial services, social capital, networks, mobility and aspirations widen the now-called "economic violence" that puts women at greater risks of poverty, sexual exploitation and vulnerability. As gender digital divides persist, worrying gendered patterns of informality – deregulation of the gig economy, globalisation of value chains – reveal themselves and strain on women's ownership of digitally-enabled public assets (banking, voter registration, property claiming).

Technological innovation should intentionally accelerate the achievement of gender equality and improve the lives of all women and girls. Investments geared

towards innovation in all its forms should be gender-responsive and informed by local realities – readiness of the infrastructure, openness of the market, sustainability. Association for Progressive Communication's LOCNET community networks experience provides strong evidence on how community-based, locally-driven and bottom-up policy responses contribute to an enabling ecosystem that leverages women's participation and decision-making responsibilities (i.e., managing the flow of connectivity, trouble-shooting, peer learning, capacity building and training among others). Large-scale investments and expenditures must be transparent and take women's and women's indigenous rights into account. Dismantling all forms of violence against women and girls is crucial to establishing a meaningful environment for women to access power, leadership and decision-making. Women should not be subject to discrimination, violence or threat should they try to protect, control the disposition of their land, property and the goods that derive from it. Donors should also consult women and young women in the process to ensure that funds are intended to serve the people in need without extralegal influence. While the aid field has shown bolder willingness to subsidise gender equality programmes, women's led organisations and feminist movements remain under-funded. Advocacy work provides a positive engine of social and political visibility for women, especially for women and young women who run for elections, or hold political aspirations, and yet an alarming number of women's led networks and organisations resort to social media activities due to the lack of funding. Online, the trends are even more rife in gender-based violence. State's crackdown on women's human rights, shrinking of women's civic spaces, anti-rights groups and anti-feminist propaganda campaigns poses multifaceted threats to women's participation in public life and decision-making, and consequently discourages women and those identifying as such from taking on leadership positions. Political, civil liberties and freedoms constitute the backbone of development, and cannot be compromised. States should abide by due diligence principles and restrict influence to the extent necessary and proportionate as enshrined in relevant human rights treaties and other guiding documents. Women's exert of influence stems from their agency and ability to freely mobilise, form associations and organise themselves through all means of communications and interactions. As such, policies and strategies to enable increased participation of diverse women's voices in all spheres of decision-making should be adjusted, and technology should be regarded as a tool to support safe, open and accountable online spaces.

Governments and relevant stakeholders alike need to act on the growing evidence that women have been routinely singled out of the data on which decisions are made. Questions of discrimination and violence extend to data and the politics of algorithms disproportionately impacting those on the intersections between race, gender and sexuality and thus violating their right to freedom from discrimination, and threatening the enjoyment and protection of all their human rights. Different instances of data bias and algorithmic discriminations swayed the outcomes of elections and/or other decision-making processes whereby women' and minorities' voices have been left out or excluded. The problem is increasingly framed in terms of the underrepresentation of women in public life and the systemic, intersecting barriers women face in different degrees to access higher positions. More concerted efforts should be deployed to harness the potential of data and responsible data collection for sustainable development and the realisation of women's rights and gender equality. Data is not a panacea in itself but it touches on productive and emerging spheres for the empowerment of women, such as business growth, digital economy, and internalises fundamental women's issues, such as education, sexual rights, right to work etc.

Recommendations:

Strengthening normative, legal and policy framework:

Enacting legislation and undertaking reforms to realize the equal rights of women and girls to access economic and productive resources, including access to, ownership of, and control over land, property and inheritance rights, natural resources, appropriate new technology and financial services, including microfinance, and equal opportunities for women for full and productive employment and decent work.

Promoting women's economic rights and independence, women's right to work and rights at work through gender-responsive policies and programmes that promote decent work for all, ensuring equal pay for equal work or work of equal value, including by tailoring a range of approaches and instruments which facilitate access to universal public services, finance, training, technology, markets, sustainable and affordable energy and transport and trade

Supporting holistic feminist protection to create more enabling environments to advocate for the rights of women.

Strengthening women's led movements and organisations to support collective agenda-setting and collaborative efforts.

Government/Private sector:

Prioritising reforms that reduce the costs of doing business and improve working environments in sectors and localities where women are engaged.

Conducting gendered and inclusive analysis of sustainable value chains and market systems to inform the design of interventions.

Prioritise investments in infrastructure that improves the productivity, health and safety of those in informal work; as well as reduces unpaid domestic work including safe transport, low cost energy, multiple use housing.

Consider innovative funding modalities such as seed capital funding and infrastructure subsidies for women.

Regulating emerging online platforms in the gig economy and ensure that they are respecting non-discrimination and applying existing laws.
