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**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 Ladli Foundation Trust, 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

This statement is a crux of practical on-field learnings about the plight of women in the marginalized section of society. This is an accumulation of the ground realities witnessed by the founder of the Ladli Foundation Trust, who was born in extreme poverty and abandoned by his parents at the age of two, along with his infant sister. His struggle to save his sister from atrocities and social evils has made him a crusader to save lacs of girls and women by protecting them from sexual exploitation, trafficking and providing primary healthcare, education, and social upliftment in slums of India.

When discussing women's empowerment or achieving gender equality, we need to categorize the targeted interventions and areas between developed and developing nations. The challenges for women in developing countries are highly different from developed countries. Thus, policies need to be made differently for developing and developed nations.

In developed nations, the illiteracy rate and poor health condition of women or female feticide is not a major concern, which are the most significant pillars of her development. But when we think about developing countries like India, Nepal, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Africa, and all, the first concern is to save her before birth. Since then, her struggle starts for coming into this world than for equal access to food, education, healthcare, etc. Hence without concern or prioritizing her healthcare, we cannot give her equal job opportunities, positions in Political leadership, etc.

As per India's National family health survey, more than 60 per cent of women are anemic in rural and urban areas while only Approx. 25 per cent of the male population are anemic. Is it because of malnutrition? No! It is because of Gender-Based Violence. We see that women are the principal victims of Anaemia, malnutrition, Sexual and reproductive health issues compared to males. A significantly lesser male population is anemic/malnourished than women, even though 38 per cent of males are alcoholics and more involved in substance abuse. It clearly indicates that the patriarchal mindset and male dominating society have given them more rights and privileges.

When a girl is born, there are a series of other 'problems' that weigh down the Indian parent. UNICEF says that about 1 in 10 girls under the age of 20 have been forced to engage in sex or perform other sexual acts. This pushes parents to keep their girl children at home and compromise on their education.

- Once they start menstruating, other health concerns set in. One in three schools worldwide does not have basic sanitation, putting millions of children's health at risk (WaterAid Report, 2018), girls facing the brunt of it. In addition, almost 23 million girls in India drop out of school annually because of a lack of menstrual hygiene management facilities (Dasra, 'Spot On,' 2014).
- The COVID-19 pandemic has not only increased poverty but also put about 247 million children out of schools (UNICEF 2020). The result of that is losing a safe space in school and seeing an increase in child labor. In fact, over 100 million girls are at risk of child marriage due to COVID-19 (UNICEF 2020).
- Among these crimes, one of the crucial ones that are yet to be eliminated despite being illegal is dowry. In fact, about 7000 dowry deaths were reported in the year 2020 (Statista).
- 355 million women and girls in India lack access to a toilet (WaterAid India Report). Poor sanitation is one of the reasons that may lead to multiple health

issues in women. Many researchers across the world have already provided data to prove this. One of the most apparent pieces of evidence to date suggesting that poor local sanitation may cause anemia is presented in Bleakley (2007), which studied the effects of a hookworm eradication campaign in the U.S. South at the turn of the twentieth century.

- A WaterAid analysis of Institute of Health Metrics figures, released on International Women's Day, identified that illnesses related to a lack of water, basic sanitation, and hygiene were responsible for the deaths of almost 800,000 women around the world in a single year – making it the fifth biggest killer of women behind heart disease, stroke, lower respiratory infections, and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease.
- In India, 95 million toilets have been built all over the country, but a big concern has arisen how people will maintain them? We all know that public toilets in schools, colleges, & public places are alarming and highly dangerous for women's health. Dirty and unhygienic toilets spread infections and cross-contamination that led to keeping women's lives in danger with the risk of pathological leukorrhea, Uterus infection, cervical cancer, etc.

Recommendations

For all Civil Society Organizations:

- Civil societies' role in achieving gender equality is not the work concerning one or two thematic areas or by a few selected organizations. It can only be achieved through public movements even more than all the UNSDGs combined.
- We all need to come together and work in different directions such as Women Healthcare, Education, Female Feticide, Child Marriages, Trafficking, and Forced Prostitution, Eliminating GBV, Race, Caste, and class-based Violence, Legal Rights, Financial & Digital Literacy, Economic Empowerment, Equal Opportunities in all the sectors.

For National Governments:

Especially for countries like India and other developing nations, we need to prioritize women's healthcare and education through a separate mechanism such as the formation of the exclusive Ministries such as:

- Ministry of Women Health
- Ministry of Women Education
- Ministry of Women Entrepreneurship & Social Security.

In India

Because the existing ministries and departments for all these subjects are not sufficient to cater to the issues and challenges related to women.

The UN and its agencies to:

We all know the situation of women and girl children today where they are denied fundamental human rights and their basic needs. They are more vulnerable to social stigmas and evils that vary depending on their cultural and social aspects.

All UN Agencies need to be aligned with Governments, and civil societies' have to decide new parameters for developed and developing nations and work on them firmly.

We need to form separate sub-goals under the SDG-5 to work more effectively and intensively for achieving UNSDGs.

Designing interventions for promoting Sustainable Living among women to involve them in natural and scientifically proven wellness practices such as YOGA and Meditation.

Different types of atrocities, exploitation, inequality and GBV manifest through mental, emotional, economic, and structural violence against women and girls. Thus, Primary Healthcare, Education, Skill Training, Economic Empowerment, Sensitization, Sustainable living practices may play a vital role in addressing the issue at its core.

It creates a holistic and positive environment to disseminate awareness and knowledge amongst children and young adults who have not yet been victims of or perpetrated GBV. Building awareness and a more well-rounded, respectful approach towards one another help in creating more positive individuals.

The two sectors that policymakers across the globe should emphasize while making policies related to women, especially leaders of the developing countries, to reduce GBV. We cannot achieve gender equality on one pillar; we will need many pillars to ensure that these pillars stay strong. We need to end gender-based violence and the root cause; together with global changemakers, this can become a reality.

Any developing Nation can multiply its GDP by reducing GBV.
