



Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
4 December 2023

Original: English

Commission on the Status of Women

Sixty-eighth session

11–22 March 2024

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 ACT Alliance – Action by Churches
Together, Anglican Consultative Council, Kirkon Ulkomaanavun
Säätiö, Lutheran World Federation, Mother’s Union, Soka Gakkai
International, and World Young Women’s Christian Association,
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.

* The present statement is issued without formal editing.



Statement

As diverse faith actors, serving communities in over 120 countries, we call on Member States to transform economic models, strengthen gender-transformative policy frameworks, and scale up financing for gender equality. All are critical steps to breaking the cycles of poverty, and require visionary leaders, who resource long-term commitments to advance gender justice. Gender equality is critical for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, which requires women and girls' full and effective participation and decision-making in public life, and investment in their leadership across all levels of society.

As faith-based actors, we acknowledge that religious discourses have been used to justify gender inequalities and economic violence, and to promote patriarchal systems and gender norms. We have a responsibility in our faith communities to set just standards and models, and shift narratives and norms. This is embodied in a theology and shared commitment to an economy of life, working in solidarity, which is rooted in justice, collective care, and sustainability.

Economic models, institutions and finance for gender justice

In times of crisis, whether related to war, forced migration or climate, financing for health, education, and other public services essential for gender equality is often reduced. Human rights, including sexual and reproductive health and rights, are deprioritised and under-funded. Transforming economic models, which create an inclusive, green and rights-based path towards gender equality, absolute poverty eradication, and women and girls' economic empowerment, is vital.

The focus on continual growth and putting profit before people and planet is damaging communities, livelihoods, and the environment. Prevalent economic paradigms and extractive practices have resulted in political and financial power being concentrated in the hands of a few well-connected individuals, predominantly men, corporations, and already wealthy countries. The current global economic system and its governance structures exacerbate rising inequalities, between and within countries, for example, through unfair trade practices and by imposing upon poorer countries loan conditionalities. For women and girls to claim their rights, global economic institutions, including the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, the World Trade Organisation, the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, and Regional Development Banks, require democratic reform. Global rules on debt and tax reproduce colonial-era gender and racial hierarchies which frustrate the achievement of human rights for the vast majority of the world's people.

The economy currently depends largely on the private sector, as the biggest provider of public services on behalf of governments. However, the private sector remains less accountable to human rights and gender, climate and tax justice. A binding international treaty on business and human rights has the potential to improve governance of the private sector, by reinforcing national legislation and frameworks to maximise its contributions to human rights and gender equality.

Social protection, legislation and gender norms

According to the UN Working Group on discrimination against women and girls, the failure to ensure the equality of women and girls within the family undermines attempts to ensure equality in all areas of society. Women and girls continue to conduct most unpaid care work (three times more than men). Consequently, women and girls are subsidising the productive economy. When unpaid care work is enforced by an absence of social protection it can compound cycles of poverty. Social protection must first and foremost be financed by the countries

themselves, through social security contributions and progressive taxation, but international support is still needed in many countries, and the establishment of social protection floors must be a priority.

Civil society, not least faith-based actors, are critical partners, often complementing the state by providing social services, such as education, social care, and healthcare. Education systems are a critical tool for improving youth, especially young girls in all their diversity, access to quality employment by establishing gender-transformative education systems that challenge and counteract gender stereotypes.

Investing in social protection also contributes to enabling women in all their diversity access to formal employment outside the home, and the ability to move from the margins to the mainstream economy. This improves financial autonomy, and the ability to further invest in activities that generate income, including in collective solidarity economies or community micro-credit schemes. Research shows that when financial assets are in the hands of women in all their diversity, a pathway out of poverty for their families is strengthened.

Discriminatory legislation, including religious family laws – those which address the rights of people entering marriage, divorce, custody, guardianship of children, the right of a spouse to choose their profession and occupation independent of the other – have severe economic impacts on women, girls in all their diversity and their families. Discrimination in family law status laws restricts women from being economically independent – limiting their access to inheritance and property ownership, as well as employment opportunities – thereby reinforcing gender stereotypes. Egalitarian reform of family law may be the most crucial precondition to empower women in all their diversity economically.

Ensuring money flows into the hands of women in all their diversity is not enough. Patriarchal gender norms shape powerful social relations, which restrict the agency and aspirations of women and girls. Financial support to strengthen regional, national and local programming and partnerships, including with faith-based actors, can be transformative. Religious leaders are critical agents of change, as trusted voices rooted in communities, who can transform gender norms and stereotypes and prevent gender-based violence with normative and real-life influence.

Across our networks, we are implementing context and age specific education and social awareness programmes, which transform harmful stereotypes, norms and attitudes surrounding masculinity, femininity and sexuality that deny the fulfilment of human rights. Working through our faith-based structures, we engage men and boys in all their diversity, who are critical for advancing equal rights, shifting power relations, and addressing gender-based violence in society, community, and in the home.

Collective and locally led gender equality action

For gender equality finance to be effective an intersectional and gender-transformative approach that addresses interconnected inequalities is critical for combatting structural inequalities and investing in locally led solutions. For example, recognition of socially marginalised groups is essential to ensure their access to entitlements and finance. It is imperative to differentiate between gender-responsive actions and gender-targeted actions.

A lack of data has rendered invisible the needs and priorities of women and girls in all their diversity. This results in making targeted programmes and accountability near-impossible. When financing projects, gender equality indicators and gender-disaggregated data must be reported. Better gender data can contribute to holding humanitarian, development and government actors accountable.

Grassroots and local organisations, including faith actors and networks, women's rights organisations and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex+ rights movements, experience inequalities in financing gender-transformative programmes. To further decolonise development cooperation, there is a need to invest in localisation policies and practices and financing for locally led, grassroots feminist/women rights organisations. When communities are resourced to set their own agendas, which derive from local needs, they can achieve long-term sustainable change.

Recommendations

- Diversify the funding landscape to include new emerging development partners, international NGOs, private sector, philanthropists, and faith-based actors.
- Explicitly integrate the need to address gender inequalities as an essential component of sustainable development funding.
- Extend and enhance long-term, flexible, programme-based, or core funding to local organisations, in particular women's rights organisations, youth-led movements, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex+ organisations, and faith-based actors, who are working to advance gender equality.
- When developing and financing projects, require gender equality indicators and gender-disaggregated data to be publicly available and reported.
- Adopt a feminist taxation system to generate sufficient public revenue, while ensuring that this revenue is fairly redistributed and focused on rebalancing economic and gender inequalities.
- Invest in the provision of social protection systems, and social security as a human right, including free and accessible public services.
- Harmonise national legislation with a broader range of international human rights instruments and commitments. Fast track the adoption and implementation of National Action Plans on Business and Human Rights and ensure that the policy regimes fit the fast-changing economic context.
- Simplify reporting and administrative demands, considering the capabilities and distinctive traits of local organisations. Ensure that funded organisations have the flexibility to adjust their reporting structures as needed.
- Introduce, and fund, policies and initiatives that address discriminatory norms and harmful gender stereotypes, prejudices and practices and the eradication of gender-discriminatory laws and policies.
- Promote women and girls' leadership and decision-making power related to financing for sustainable development.