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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 Centro UNESCO De Donostia-San Sebastian, 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

There is a widespread demand around the world for the use of all human resources as the only means to achieve healthy and sustainable development.

The simple fact is that reality is quite different: huge numbers of people not only are excluded from participation in development but do not even benefit from it.

Meeting basic human needs is a prerequisite for development.

Ultimately, development depends on the basic quality of life.

Women earn the lowest wages, if they are paid at all, they have the least secure jobs, if they have one at all, and they almost always do the most menial work.

Women make up half of the world's population but are not afforded a corresponding degree of recognition.

Women are also the largest active labour force but do not receive the economic benefits to which they are entitled.

Their participation in development is largely hampered by their exclusion from education and by a limited interest in promoting the development of their human capacities.

Not only are women excluded from managerial positions, or underrepresented in proportion to the importance of their role in the world, the injustice imposed on them is further compounded by the fact that many countries have laws that discriminate against women and deny them access to the most basic goods.

The Fourth World Conference on Women held in Beijing, China, from 4 to 15 September 1995 was inspired by the observation that women account for a majority of the 1 billion people living in extreme poverty and of the illiterate, and unanimously adopted the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, reflecting a new international commitment to the goals of equality, development and peace for women worldwide.

The Platform for Action, a programme for women's empowerment, is an attempt to remove barriers and circumstances with disproportionately negative effects on women.

Development

The basic goal of human development is harmonious personal growth in a context characterized by economic resources, democracy, participation, health care, education and a healthy environment.

The ability to make decisions and enjoy human, economic and political freedom requires actions and policies that take into account reality as a whole and allow for participation.

Development occurs when people are given a centre role and can develop their capacities, learn, be employed, be healthy, have a decent income and be creative and critical.

Economic growth leads to development when it is humane. This means the equitable distribution of economic resources, fair distribution, the elimination of discrimination between the sexes, nutrition, and spending on social services.

Resources should be distributed on the basis of a fair policy, namely, a policy that promotes democracy, serves common interests, strengthens the weakest and empowers the poor.

The international community develops only through cooperation since it is economically interdependent. There is only one world and one environment and risks are shared.

Debt, aid and investment should support human development. Overall human development depends on personal human development.

This also means growth in opportunities for participation, in the aspiration to improve everything, in a respect for everything, in an appreciation for everything, in intellectual curiosity, in skills, and in positive attitudes.

Activities

If activities are rooted in reality, a reality driven by development, and a reality that can be shaped through education, then the activities will lead to more humane lives.

Education

At this level, the activities cannot disregard the fact that education is a human right and an essential instrument for the achievement of equality, development and peace.

Although, in general, there has been progress in the enrolment of girls in primary and secondary schools, girls in many countries still suffer from discrimination based on traditional practices, early marriage and early pregnancy, a lack of accessible schools and teaching materials that are sexist and in short supply.

Girls continue to be denied adequate training, particularly at higher levels and in the fields of science and technology.

It has been demonstrated that investment in education and formal and non-formal training of girls and women is one of the best means of achieving sustainable development and economic growth.

The enrolment of girls in school multiplies development.

The enrolment of girls in school is an indicator of equal access to culture but in many cases it does not happen. Apart from legal barriers there are also cultural models that girls internalize and that prevent equality.

Education is called upon to instil a feeling of self-esteem in girls that will foster equality.

Interculturalism is increasingly relevant in education. Intercultural education, which is none other than a shared cultural space for the cultures of majority and minority groups, requires training on respect, tolerance, solidarity, the value of diversity and the need for cooperative exchanges.

In any event, activities and schools, with their mediating role in cultural identity, must be able to harmonize the twin processes of enriching the identity of each group and creating spaces, environments and shared facilities where different groups can interact.

Prospects and opportunities for participation

Participation and the promotion of resourcefulness can be based on the following pillars:

One is experimentation perceived as a steady but unhurried process of advancing, without skipping any stages, and taking into account the time factor.

In any case, experimentation should not be confused with continuous trial and error, otherwise the danger is that goodwill will be depleted. Experimentation means exploring in the sense of being aware of the temporary nature of everything and carefully balancing commitments and responsibilities.

Another fulcrum for participation and greater resourcefulness is training because it stands for growth, development and deeper knowledge, leading to the development of new forms of adaptation to the environment and new resources to achieve goals.

Constantly increasing training improves the scope of responsibility, enhances freedom and leads to new ideas.

Information is another fulcrum of participation.

Innovation is another characteristic of participation. When innovation is part of a more deeply rooted democracy and a strengthened civil society, human beings can express original ideas of their own and change established behaviour patterns, rigid systems and stultified attitudes.

This indicates that diversification is another form of participation. Diversification stems from participation.

At this point, the various ways of belonging to society, the different types of work people can do, the levels of responsibility they can have and their options are beginning to be recognized and valued through experience.

Of course, given all the above, participation will be part of the central mission of contributing to international understanding, cooperation and peace, or else there will be a risk of an excessive focus on introspection.

The objective of participation is not simply to feel inwardly satisfied but also to better show, clarify and demonstrate that a world in which human beings are actors in the stories of their lives is possible.
