



# **Economic and Social Council**

Distr.: General  
13 January 2021

English only

---

## **Commission on Population and Development**

**Fifty-fourth session**

19–23 April 2021

**Population, food security, nutrition and  
sustainable development**

### **Statement submitted by Asian-Pacific Resource and Research Centre for Women, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status with the Economic and Social Council<sup>1</sup>**

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.

---

<sup>1</sup> The present statement is issued without formal editing.



## Statement

We welcome the theme of the fifty-fourth session of the Commission on Population and Development focused on population, food security, nutrition and sustainable development.

The Asia-Pacific region is home to the most diverse population and includes countries that are populous and situated further down the list in the Global Food Security Index (UNFPA). This region is also prone to suffering the most from changes related to climate, environment, natural disasters and the onset of pandemics such as the ongoing COVID-19 crisis which exacerbates poverty and unemployment levels further marginalising vulnerable groups among whom women's, girls' and young people's affordability, availability and access to food security, nutrition and food sovereignty is the most affected.

In Asia, most countries already score poorly in dietary diversification and gaps leading to nutritional deficiencies. Despite government led initiatives including food safety nets and adoption of laws ensuring right to food, food security and nutrition, none of these solutions account for the diverse needs of the population which is influenced by variations caused by urban/rural population distribution, migration, unequal development and discrimination on the basis of sex, gender, age and disability. The region, though making progress, will not achieve the SDG target on zero hunger unless drastic measures are taken. An estimated 381 million people or more than half of the total undernourished people in the world live in this region in 2019 (In Brief to The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World 2020).

Women have a central role in addressing hunger and malnutrition and making food systems sustainable. Girls, adolescents and women of reproductive age are a special vulnerable group given the striking interlinkages between nutrition, food security and reproductive health (UNFPA). Lack of universal access to optimal nutrition among girls, pregnant women and infants has long lasting and intergenerational consequences for sexual and reproductive health and development (The Lancet:2008).

As primary caregivers, women play a crucial role in child feeding, yet they face gender-based violence and harmful practices, intrahousehold discrimination, restrictions to their education and employment opportunities, and gender-biased laws that limit their access to land and financing. Women are disproportionately overrepresented among landless populations that face food insecurity and are unable to meet basic needs, being often pushed into wage farm labour and endangering their livelihoods (Food and Agriculture Organisation:2011).

Prevalence of traditional harmful practices such as child marriage leads to malnutrition among the young brides and their children and this affects their health, particularly their sexual and reproductive health, and impedes their overall development and the right to live fulfilling lives. The same is also true for other marginalised women including persons with disabilities, especially women and girls with disabilities, who face food insecurity in the most serious form. In low- and middle-income households, persons with disabilities face neglect and discrimination affecting their food security and access to nutrition (International Disability Alliance). Rural women have always been the unsung heroes of food and agricultural production. Least prioritised by decision makers, rural women toil night and day to feed their families, communities, and people globally but they have less access to adequate food and nutrition leading to malnutrition and anemia.

Gender discrimination is a critical element in access to adequate nutrition and food. A clear illustration of this discrimination is seen in the way food is distributed

and consumed at the household level where girls and women eat last and eat the very little food left. For this reason, hunger and malnutrition is higher among girls and women than boys and men in South Asia. Also, there is an increasing lack of support for local food systems and markets that benefit small-scale food producers. This is due to the promotion of unsustainable food systems based on agro-industrial food production; unjust international trade and investment rules; eco-destruction and climate-change and we have examples of widespread impunity for corporate human rights abuses and inadequate regulatory frameworks to prevent corporate practices that interfere with public health goals.

Women lack access to and control over natural resources, including land, water and seeds; There is generalised sexual division of labour that is a result of a patriarchal system both in terms of food production and consumption, which materializes in the invisibility and lack of value attributed to women's work, both in their role as food producers and their (unequal) role as caregivers.

The gender dimensions in agriculture highlight the interlinkages between agriculture and the health and wellbeing of women and girls, including their sexual and reproductive health and rights, and therefore the co-benefits and synergies in addressing sexual and reproductive health and rights and improving agriculture and food production.

The right to adequate food and nutrition is a basic human right. When people are deprived of their most basic rights, their sexual and reproductive health and rights remain unattainable. These inequalities are further exacerbated at the intersectionalities of poverty, and lack of food sovereignty, including food (in)security and nutrition (in)security.

The realisation of the right to adequate food and nutrition for all is intrinsically linked to the recognition of women's and girls' human dignity and the full realisation of all other rights, especially of self-determination, autonomy and bodily integrity. The battle for the right to food should not leave out our rights to control over our bodies, personal consumption, ownership and control over resources (ARROW for Change:2014)

### **Recommendations:**

We call upon the states to recognise that all women's and girl's right to adequate food and nutrition is a basic human right and to respect, protect and fulfil this right:

- Uphold political and financial commitments to fully implement the sustainable development goals, underscoring the need for full realisation of Goals 2, 3 and 5. The principles and objectives of the International Conference on Population and Development, the Beijing Platform for Action and Agenda 2030 in addition to other human rights treaties are critical to attaining the sustainable development goals and ensuring accountability.
- Recognise food, food sovereignty, food security and nutrition as a right as stated under human rights conventions such as under the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and recognise its interlinkages with other rights including health rights, in particular sexual and reproductive health and rights, disability rights and environmental rights to name a few.
- Ensure holistic understanding of food systems based on human rights. Food systems both its production should be firmly grounded in the universal realisation of human rights, including the human rights to food and nutrition, to health, to water, to self-determination, decent work, control over natural resources, and education. Focus must be on advancing the rights of disadvantaged and marginalised groups.

- Ensure small-scale food producers (in their majority women), providing most of the food for consumption, particularly for marginalised groups, are placed at the centre of efforts to tackle issues related to food systems and malnutrition. Urgently address widespread violations of their rights, including those relating to access and control over natural resources as well as those related to the rights of agricultural workers.
- Ensure the agenda on food security and food sovereignty is framed using women's practical and strategic gender needs. The full realisation of women's human rights including their access to economic resources, adequate nutrition information and appropriate sexual and reproductive health and rights must be promoted and guaranteed.
- Prioritise food sovereignty, including food and nutrition security along with sexual and reproductive health and rights as fundamental development issues, by increasing allocation of resources to widen government-led initiatives so as to benefit refugees and internally displaced populations, and cover uneven distribution of urban and rural populations. (ARROW for Change: Food Security, Gender and Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights).
- Promote participation of women, girls and young people, including those from minority groups and persons with disabilities, in all levels of decision-making processes related to food, food sovereignty and security and nutrition.
- Ensure universal access to quality, affordable sexual and reproductive health information, education and services including for safe abortion, with priority attention to women, adolescents and youth, and communities living in poverty and the development of enabling environments for the exercise of human rights, without discrimination, coercion or violence on any grounds; and the fulfilment of women's and girls' economic rights, including land and property rights, right to decent work and social protection, and their right to quality education across the life course.
- Take evidence-based approaches supported and informed by the data and statistics generated by civil society, academics, research institutes and think tanks to understand the challenges faced by vulnerable groups so that necessary steps can be taken to meet their needs considering their lived-in realities.

---