



Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
28 November 2016
English
Original: Spanish

Commission on the Status of Women

Sixty-first session

13-24 March 2017

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 Misión Mujer, 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

Economic empowerment of adolescent men and women through the development of life skills: a proposal for economic and social development.

In 1999, Amartya Sen delivered a keynote address at the Inter-American Development Bank on “Breaking the Poverty Cycle: Investing in Early Childhood”. The lecture noted that childhood problems do not remain in the present, but affect the capabilities of the adults of tomorrow.

In today’s changing and complex world, where the socioeconomic climate has had a negative impact on our societies, it is essential to place a special emphasis on the most affected groups: children and adolescents. In the near future, they will be facing challenges to achieve a full life and meet their development needs.

The challenges faced by these groups include growing inequality, lack of work opportunities, family breakdown, violence and macrosocial changes resulting from industrialization and the progressive development of technology requiring individuals to have ever-greater skills.

Against this backdrop, it is vital to reconsider education as a way of promoting economic empowerment for men and women from an early age. This can be achieved through policies that recognize the value of implementing programmes focused on developing not just cognitive but also social and emotional skills.

That would strengthen individuals and social groups by generating development opportunities from the perspective put forward by Sen in his paper entitled “Human capital and human capability”, presented at a 2004 economic policy forum, in which he stated that individuals’ capabilities to live life are fundamental for analysing their motives for valuing and expanding the real options from which they can choose and thus generating conditions for their own development, and therefore for national economic and social development.

This can be achieved by implementing models that integrate psycho-educational programmes focused on developing life skills, since these provide important tools for facing the challenges of demanding daily lives at stages such as adolescence. The latter is a phase where individuals find their identity and learn to develop the skills and apply the values that will enable them to become full adults aware of their role in society.

Such programmes should reinforce the practice of values and involve significant adults who enable students to develop their capabilities and potential, as well as providing support and reassurance that they can become citizens integrated into society who believe in contributing to and changing the realities by which they are affected.

It is key to underline that the implementation of these models to empower people at an early age will mainly help individuals to:

- Break poverty cycles
- Take control of their own lives
- Motivate them to develop their capabilities

- Broaden their horizons and pave the way for them to seek increased and improved opportunities.

One example of good practice in terms of this model is the Programa Axios, which is a project that has been run for 18 years by the civil association Axios — Misión Mujer in Jalisco, Mexico. It involves using psycho-educational practices to prevent psycho-social risks — such as teenage pregnancy, addiction, suicide, school drop-out, violence and bullying — by developing life skills and providing socio-emotional support to adolescents aged eleven to sixteen in basic secondary education in public schools from socioeconomically disadvantaged areas.

Some indicators show that pregnancy rates have been halved in the schools where the project operates, as well as showing — inter alia — an absence of suicides, improved school performance and better retention rates. They have thus managed to motivate adolescents to create a life project in which they widen their perspective on where their lives are heading and how to channel their capabilities.

The final result is empowered adolescents who believe in themselves, take responsibility for themselves, become independent, are able to make sensible decisions and have a clear idea about their life project. This makes them more likely to complete their education successfully and have improved job prospects during their adult working lives.

We therefore promote the development of education programmes focused on developing life skills, so as to encourage individual capabilities at life stages such as adolescence and to develop the human potential of populations with a disadvantaged economic, social or cultural status. This is based on the view that, in the long term, if they see themselves as having capabilities it will not only have a positive impact on their own lives but also on the lives of those around or alongside them — thereby promoting social change in current and future generations.

These adolescents are being empowered to be able to respond to the challenges of the years ahead, since they will have more tools to enable them to increase their potential for economic and social development and so create the conditions to improve their life situations.
