



Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
9 November 2016

Original: English

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 Stichting Rutgers WPF, 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

Stichting Rutgers WPF, in consultative status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council, together with the MenEngage Alliance, a network of 700+ civil society organisations, welcome the priority theme of the 61st session of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women on “Women’s economic empowerment in the changing world of work” and the review theme on “Challenges and achievements in the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals for women and girls”.

Women’s economic empowerment has to be about women and girl-led initiatives to transform the systemic factors underlying their disempowerment, and to advance women and girl’s leadership and autonomy. Today, although more women than ever have entered the workforce, around the world women are often in precarious, informal jobs, receive less pay than men for equal work, and are not well represented in leadership positions. Women face a wide number of systemic barriers to their full economic empowerment, including resistance based on rigid gender norms around men and women’s roles in society. Furthermore, women continue to spend two to ten times more of their time than men and boys on unpaid care work, including child care, elderly care and other domestic activities, which limits women’s time for other pursuits such as paid work, education or political participation.

Rigid gender norms and harmful perceptions of what it means to be a man or a woman often encourage men’s use of violence and discrimination against women, granting them the power to dictate the terms of sex and relationships, as well as control over resources. As a result, women and girls are still too often in a submissive position, lacking sexual, reproductive, political and economic power. Achieving gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls, including access to sexual and reproductive health and rights, requires a shift in underlying rigid norms and the transformation of patriarchal power structures.

We call on governments to utilize gender-transformative approaches, including those that seek to transform masculinities by working with men and boys, alongside women and girls, and people of all sexual orientations and gender identities. A growing base of evidence shows that gender-transformative approaches — that transform gender roles and promote more gender-equitable relationships between men and women — effectively engage men for gender equality and have significant benefits for women, young people, children, men themselves and society as a whole.

The MenEngage Alliance sees the roles of men and boys as crucial to achieve full gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls. We note this importance is also recognized in paragraph 20 of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the agreed conclusions of the 60th session of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women (2016), and section IV/C of the International Conference on Population and Development Programme of Action.

Engaging men and boys is an essential contribution in order to eliminate gender stereotypes around the division of care-work, to prevent gender-based violence, including violence based on sexual orientation, gender identity and/or

expression and ensure access to sexual and reproductive health and rights, so that all can access decent work and participate on an equal footing in economic life.

Research shows that men who are more active in caring roles are less likely to use violence. Work with individual men must also be accompanied by efforts to address systematic barriers to more equitable divisions of caregiving and policies that recognize, reduce and redistribute unpaid care work.

Empowering women is essential to eliminate violence against women. Research shows that when programmes only empower women, there is risk of backlash towards the empowerment of women. Several studies affirm positive changes in couple conflicts as a result of efforts to engage men to support women's economic empowerment. Few efforts, however, have been made to engage men as allies in women's economic and social empowerment, or to explore and promote cooperation between couples.

Finally, to achieve economic empowerment of women, it is a prerequisite to ensure that women's and girls' sexual and reproductive health and rights are respected, protected and fulfilled. This includes increasing access to sexual and reproductive health services, information and education, including comprehensive sexuality education in line with Sustainable Development Goal 3.7 and 5.6. Men and (adolescent) boys need to be as much part of such programs as women and (adolescent) girls, in order to effectively and sustainably realise universal access to sexual and reproductive health and rights.

Building on existing international commitments, the MenEngage Alliance urges governments, United Nations agencies, civil society, and private sector to move forward in joint efforts that contribute to the economic empowerment of women and girls, including gender transformative initiatives that target transforming rigid social norms, redistribute unpaid care-work, fulfil women's sexual and reproductive health and rights, and ensure that these changes are firmly rooted in supportive legal and policy frameworks.

Recommendations

The MenEngage Alliance has the following recommendations to include in a gender-transformative framework on women's economic empowerment, gender equality and sustainable development:

1. Scale-up and institutionalize evidence-based gender-transformative interventions with men and boys. Such interventions can challenge the social and cultural norms that define the division of labour between men and women and act as a barrier to women's economic empowerment. Interventions should examine ideas of masculinities and encourage men to take on more caregiving roles. Governments should provide training to health, education and social assistance professionals on the importance of engaging men and boys in care work at home so as to support economic participation of women outside the home. (Sustainable Development Goal 5.c and 8.5)
2. Develop and implement policies to recognize, reduce and redistribute unpaid care work. Parental leave should be enshrined and enforced in national law. It should be equal for men and women, non-transferable and paid according to each parent's salary. It should be offered to all caregivers, including same-sex, opposite-sex, adoptive and single partners. Parental leave should be combined with other

policies, on the part of both government and employers, to ensure equity in caregiving such as subsidized high quality childcare, flexible working arrangements, adequate sick leave and social protection policies. (Sustainable Development Goal 5.4)

3. Engage men and boys in women's economic empowerment programs. When men are involved as allies, partners and secondary beneficiaries in women's economic empowerment programs, positive impact of these initiatives in women's lives increases. They can better understand and support women's economic activity, and can see the benefits for themselves and the household as a whole as they are relieved of the pressure to be the sole breadwinner. (Sustainable Development Goal 5.4 and 5.a)

4. Scaling up gender transformative initiatives to engage men and boys in prevention of gender-based violence. Such initiatives challenge the underlying social norms around harmful masculinity that are at the root of gender-based violence and promote positive, non-violent forms of masculinities. Strategies for the prevention of gender-based violence should include national level public education and awareness raising efforts, bystander intervention approaches, universal education on gender equality, mass media campaigns, secondary prevention approaches targeting men who have experienced violence and programs that target gender-based violence perpetrators. (Sustainable Development Goal 5.2)

5. Engage men as supportive partners, allies and targets in respecting, protecting and fulfilling sexual and reproductive health and rights for all, particularly in improving access to sexual and reproductive health services, information and education. Comprehensive sexuality education is fundamental in addressing root causes in gender inequality, by addressing gender norms and stereotypes, and by providing complete and human rights-based information about sexuality and sexual diversity. A meta-evaluation by the World Health Organization (2007) shows that sexual and reproductive health programs that engage men and boys have a positive effect on the wellbeing of girls, women, boys and men. (Sustainable Development Goal 3.7 and 5.6)

6. Ensure that all learners acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, including, among others through education for sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality. This includes challenging harmful stereotypes about men and women's role in society, by adapting school curricula to promote healthy notions of masculinity and femininity, the economic participation on women and girls, and the participation of men and boys in caregiving and domestic work. (Sustainable Development Goal 4.7)

7. Develop public information campaigns on the need to redistribute unpaid care work. Such campaigns can help challenge gender stereotypes around caregiving by raising awareness of the benefits of redistributing care-work and providing positive male role models. (Sustainable Development Goal 5.b)
