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Follow-up to the World Summit for Social Development and the twenty-fourth special session of the General Assembly: priority theme: promoting empowerment of people in achieving poverty eradication, social integration and full employment and decent work for all

Statement submitted by International Federation of University Women, 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.



Statement

Secondary, tertiary and human rights education, through both formal and informal education, are the most effective way to empower girls and women with the skills to participate in and contribute to society. In addition to school and university teaching, informal literacy and human rights training courses can have profound effects, particularly for the empowerment of girls and women. Education prepares girls and women for future employment and enhances their quality of life, raises their self-esteem and their status, and gives them more influence in decisions affecting their lives. Lifelong education empowers girls and women economically, as well as in leadership and decision-making roles.

Promoting empowerment for girls and women necessitates an investment in girls' human capital. Secondary and tertiary education protect girls and women from three highly gendered conditions which derail their futures and disempower them:

- Adolescent pregnancy and child marriage
- Gender-based violence
- Low-paid and unpaid care work

Adolescent pregnancy and child marriage

Adolescent pregnancy and child marriage usually mean the end of formal education for girls and a lost opportunity to realize their full potential. When a girl cannot attend school, her chances of a lifetime of poverty, exclusion and powerlessness increase dramatically. Teenage pregnancy is often a result of inadequate or unenforced laws against child marriage, an institution which represents a series of human rights infringements for girls and women.

The impact of disempowerment, poverty, social exclusion and underemployment on a young mother is inherited by her children and perpetuates an intergenerational cycle of social exclusion and poverty. The consequences of child marriage and child pregnancy for girls and women are also costly to the economy, and to the economic growth and social development of a nation.

Secondary education for girls reduces the likelihood of adolescent pregnancy and child marriage and mitigates the resulting poverty and disempowerment.

Gender-based violence

Gender-based violence remains one of the key barriers to the achievement of gender equality globally, and that is particularly true in the realm of access to education. Violence is a major contributing factor to the lack of success and empowerment for girls and women and is detrimental to achieving poverty eradication, social integration and decent work for women.

The consequences of violence against women are so far-reaching in their disempowerment of girls and women, and so costly to society that the World Health Organization declared it "a global health problem of epidemic proportions". Disenfranchised groups of girls and women requiring specific attention and protection from violence include migrants, women living with disabilities, indigenous women, ageing women and homosexuals.

The International Federation of University Women advocates that girls have the right to safe access to education. The International Federation of University Women calls on States to provide adequate protection for girls from sexual abuse, violence in school, violence while travelling to and from school, and to provide a culturally sensitive school environment.

Low-paid and unpaid care work

Low-paid and unpaid care work compromise the right of girls and women to an education, restricting their future opportunities. Care work is valuable, necessary work, essential to maintaining societies, and it is primarily carried out by women and girls. However, low-paid and unpaid care work are a barrier to achieving poverty eradication and decent work, particularly for girls and women from poorer households. Girls are taken out of school to undertake unpaid care work, such as housework and care of younger children. Girls' equal chances to excel in education are hampered as a result of the uneven distribution of care work which allows less time for schoolwork. The lifetime earnings loss for women who are unpaid carers is very substantial.

For women living in poverty, lack of access to infrastructure and technology (e.g. sustainable access to water and sanitation, grain mills and fuel-efficient stoves) disproportionately increases the time burden for unpaid labour.

The right to paid work fosters dignity, and enables personal development and social and economic inclusion. Unpaid care workers find themselves in precarious informal employment that is underpaid and involves long hours in difficult conditions. As a result, for many women living in poverty with unpaid care responsibilities, work is not empowering but rather a necessity for survival and an additional burden.

The lack of formal and quantitative recognition of care work by Governments hampers efforts to reduce poverty in all countries. Placing low-paid and unpaid care work at the core of poverty reduction efforts will make a substantial difference to human welfare.

To properly frame unpaid care work, Governments must change how they measure their economies. The Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights estimates that the monetary value of domestic work and caring for people amounts to between 10 and 50 per cent of gross domestic product.

Conclusion

Wealth in the hands of women leads to much more equitable outcomes in terms of the quality of life of families and communities. Women are key drivers of economic growth and make important economic contributions to a country's prosperity through their paid and unpaid work. To eradicate poverty and to empower women economically, their right to education, health, freedom from violence, and to paid employment must be upheld.

The International Federation of University Women advocates for secondary, tertiary and continuing education for girls and women, as well as human rights education in schools, in teacher training colleges, and for all civil servants, particularly police, judiciary, municipal workers and health workers. There is a need

for informal human rights education to be part of, or work in tandem with, training in basic literacy, financial literacy, health literacy and legal literacy.

The International Federation of University Women belief in the power of education to cause positive change is at the forefront of all that it does. Government, community and family investment in the human capital of girls through secondary, tertiary, continuing and informal education is fundamental to achieving poverty eradication, social integration, and full employment and decent work for all.
