



Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
1 December 2016

Original: English

Commission for Social Development

Fifty-fifth session

1-10 February 2017

**Follow-up to the World Summit for Social Development and
the twenty-fourth special session of the General Assembly:
priority theme: strategies for the eradication of poverty to
achieve sustainable development for all**

Statement submitted by FEMM Foundation, 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

The FEMM Foundation is a knowledge-based health program for women inspired by women's right to be informed participants in their own healthcare and to make voluntary decisions based on options, information, and understanding. The Foundation is dedicated to health education, medical research, and improving reproductive health care to advance women's health.

In adopting the Sustainable Development Goals, Member States pledged to "ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages" (Goal 3), noting in particular reproductive health (Target 3.7). International law recognizes a right to the "highest attainable standard of health." This is important not only as a right, but as an enabler of participation in the social and economic life of one's community. Ensuring that all have the healthcare that they need will help everyone to reach their potential and participate in their communities.

Women and girls comprise approximately half the population of the world, but remain more vulnerable to health problems due to both biological and social reasons. Women also often accept as normal symptoms such as irregular bleeding, pain, depression, mood swings, and weight gain, nor realizing that these are often signs of underlying hormonal imbalances and abnormalities. Even when women do seek medical care, most health care providers and programs struggle to diagnose them and often can only treat the symptoms.

These underlying conditions can affect women and girls' long-term overall health, sometimes irreversibly. They can also affect women and girls' ability to complete their education, engage in work, and plan their families. These can interfere with women and girls' ability to participate in all areas of their lives. Women's poor health often affects their families and communities as well. It is essential that strategies for poverty eradication and sustainable development address previously under-served reproductive health needs for women and girls in order to ensure that the efforts help everyone.

FEMM is ready to assist in implementing these strategies. We have developed the tools needed to help women achieve the highest attainable standard of health. FEMM's work includes health education for women, medical training for doctors, and reproductive health research which undergirds all of our work.

FEMM's researchers have rethought women's health. They have found that a woman's hormonal health is intrinsically linked with her overall health. They have developed better diagnostic criteria to identify conditions that are currently treated mainly at the symptomatic level and treat them at the roots. They are even discovering links with conditions not typically considered related to reproductive health. FEMM is rethinking the health of contemporary women in ways that will help them to take charge of their health and thrive in their communities.

A woman who understands how her body works can monitor her health and seek help when needed. FEMM knows that hormones are essential to reproductive and overall women's health. Ovulation is the sign of health in women because it is the proof of sufficient hormone levels in the 9 essential hormones that influence women's health. FEMM teaches women to understand this information and the signs that this presents in their body. In this way, FEMM women are able to identify abnormalities as they arise, seek health treatment when necessary, and ensure that their symptoms or complaints are not dismissed.

FEMM also enables women to make informed choices about family planning. There is a right to adequate family planning and information about reproductive and sexual health that is accurate and respects cultural, religious, and ethical beliefs. Programs focused on providing commodities often fail to ensure that women have the education needed to understand their bodies and what they are using, and may not always respect values.

Information-based health education and medical care is uniquely well suited to meet these needs while respecting individual choices and values. FEMM offers reproductive and hormonal education and helps women to understand the way various family planning methods work and their potential side effects. It educates women about the science of their bodies, how to identify when they are fertile, and how to achieve or avoid pregnancy.

FEMM's Medical Management program trains doctors to diagnose and treat reproductive health problems, with a holistic view of a woman's body that incorporates recent research on the complex hormonal interactions between different body systems. This interaction, and the delicacy of the hormonal activity in a woman's body, is essential to the experience of health in the entire female body. FEMM has developed innovative protocols that allow doctors to identify underlying problems with precision and treat them effectively. This medical support provides treatments that help women to live healthy lives.

FEMM has developed an app to help women take control of their health. The FEMM App is available free of charge. Women who use the FEMM App can track their observations and symptoms to better understand their bodies and health. Just as each woman is different, so are her observations and experiences, which is why the App is completely customizable. Women can track as much or as little as they like, and add symptoms and observations. It also provides insights into what a woman is experiencing in her cycle, and can flag potential health concerns and connect women with medical professionals for treatment.

FEMM is low-cost and meets the underlying needs of women. Comprehensive health care for women can now be provided through basic health delivery systems, making this approach to women's health more effective, cheaper to deliver, and providing stronger health outcomes for women. Even women who have not completed schooling can learn to monitor their signs of health. Understanding women's bodies will also combat stigma and myths associated with normal biological processes such as menstruation.

Women's full participation in society requires the investment in women's health and health education. Women's healthcare has often failed to meet women's needs. We know that informed decisions lead to healthier decisions, and that women play a key role in family and community health outcomes. Through FEMM's innovative programs, women will be empowered to take charge of their healthcare, and health systems will be able to meet their needs.

FEMM's programs are ready to be incorporated into strategies for poverty eradication sustainable development. The knowledge gained through FEMM can allow women to identify underlying health concerns and to achieve or avoid pregnancy. When people attain the highest level of health they can, they are able to thrive and partake in their communities, lowering poverty and becoming contributors to development. FEMM is prepared to assist the Commission and Member States to meet this goal.