



Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
6 December 2013

Original: English

Commission on the Status of Women

Fifty-eighth session

10-21 March 2014

**Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women
and to the special session of the General Assembly entitled
“Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace
for the twenty-first century”: implementation of strategic
objectives and action in critical areas of concern and
further actions and initiatives**

Statement submitted by Training for Women Network, 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

As the Government of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland has acknowledged in a report on its contribution to achieving the Millennium Development Goals, the goal of gender equality and the empowerment of women is a cross-cutting issue relevant to the achievement of all of the Goals.

Science, technology and innovation can be a tool with which to accelerate the achievement of the internationally agreed development goals, including the Millennium Development Goals. Technology can, for instance, facilitate efforts to eradicate poverty, achieve food security, fight diseases, improve education and respond to the challenges of climate change. The fact that women are entering paid employment in science, technology and innovation is a strong indicator of their integration into the market economy. As women benefit from more regular income, they are more likely to achieve greater autonomy, self-reliance in the household and in their personal development, and decision-making power.

It is widely acknowledged that women remain the largest underrepresented group when it comes to enterprise and innovation. Northern Ireland is far below the European Union figure for women's entrepreneurial activity. Women represent a huge pool of untapped potential and diversity and are an incubator for greater creativity and innovation. Moreover, in sufficient numbers, women will attract other women like magnets and bring cultural change. *The Economist* magazine suggested that women are the single biggest and least acknowledged force for economic growth on the planet and have contributed more to the expansion of the world economy than either new technology or the emerging markets of China and India.

A time of economic challenge presents an opportunity to the brave to take a different approach and build a different economic model. The women-led Icelandic company, Audur Capital, whose directors warned against the excessive risk taking by financial institutions, heed the facts that the growing body of research demonstrates that companies owned or managed by women yield a higher long-term return, and that businesses can turn social, ethical and environmental responsibility to their business advantage.

Childcare and employment should be explicitly linked. Childcare for employment should be the framework for any childcare strategy inside which provision for children's education and health should sit. Governments should commit to working towards the goal of universal good quality, accessible and affordable childcare for all children up to the age of fourteen.

An increase in the participation of girls in education can lead to the abolition of fees; appropriate budget allocations between primary, secondary and tertiary education; strengthened capacity at all levels of the education system to develop and deliver gender-responsive education policies; and improved quality of education.

According to the International Labour Organization, the gap between men and women in the scientific and technological fields is linked to pervasive gender roles and attitudes in different societies, which are visible in both developed and developing countries, and which encourage girls to pursue "softer" subjects. In the United Kingdom, there remains a persistence of traditional attitudes and stereotypes surrounding the educational pathways of women and girls. This is particularly prevalent in the underrepresentation of women in science, technology, engineering

and mathematics subjects, which has a direct impact not only on the gender pay gap but also in providing role models to encourage future women and girls in those subjects, as mentioned in reports from the Commission on the Status of Women at its fifty-fifth session.

According to the *Millennium Development Goals Report 2013*, the data suggest that women in developing regions are more likely than men to work as contributing family workers on farms, compared to the industries associated with science, technology and innovation, where there are better prospects and security/social benefits.

Further work is needed to tackle the continued discrimination that makes it harder for women to enter formal employment and stay employed. Despite recommendations from the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women in 1999, 2008 and 2013, there is still no unified national strategy to implement the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women in the United Kingdom, its Overseas Territories and areas of work covered by its international development work. Training for Women Network is concerned that there may not be sufficiently developed commitment and leadership, coordination of strategies and systematic monitoring of outcomes to ensure that obligations under the Convention are implemented, and these geographical inconsistencies could hamper overall progress on the realization of rights guaranteed therein, which would have a negative impact on the indicators that mark progress in achieving the Millennium Development Goals. There may be laws to address equality and human rights but they do not always include specific information prohibiting discrimination against women.

In 2008, the International Labour Organization conference on skills for improved productivity, employment growth and development concluded that training policies and programmes that aim to improve productivity and employability need to ensure equality of opportunity, be free from discrimination and take into account family and household obligations. A life cycle approach has to be adopted to overcoming the challenges that confront women in gaining access to education and training and in utilizing this training to secure better employment. This includes: improving the access of girls to basic education; overcoming logistical, economic and cultural barriers to apprenticeships and to secondary and vocational training for young women — especially in non-traditional occupations; taking into account women's home and care responsibilities when scheduling workplace-based learning and entrepreneurship training; and meeting the training needs of women re-entering the labour market and of older women who have not had equal access to opportunities for lifelong learning. These recommendations are essential in the achieving of many of the indicators associated with the Millennium Development Goals.

Women's participation in political decision-making is constrained by prejudice, caring responsibilities, lack of family support mechanisms and unfriendly hours and conditions. These wider-ranging issues will need to be addressed if the goal of empowering women is to be met.