



Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
7 December 2021

Original: English

Commission on the Status of Women

Sixty-sixth session

14–25 March 2022

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 All India Women’s Education Fund Association, 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 All India Women's Education Fund Association (AIWEFA) was established in 1929 for the empowerment of women and girls through education. Accordingly, in 1932, the organization founded the Lady Irwin College, Asia's first Home Science College, to inculcate a scientific temper in women's education, as it was recognized as the catalyst for change.

This year the organization marks 93 years in the service of women and communities; twenty-six years of engagement with the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women and international agencies; and six years of commitment towards accelerating growth in the last decade of the 2030 Agenda for Development.

During these nine decades, organizational programmes have kept pace with the changing needs of a developing nation. Following the years of India's independence, through the college, the organization sought to guide and implement national policy decisions on women's health, nutrition and sanitation, and the flagship Community and Extension programmes were set up in the villages around Delhi. Soon after, the college was affiliated to the University of Delhi, offering graduate and post graduate courses with doctorates in various specializations. From the 1990's the organization shifted focus to gender issues and urgent social action required for the mainstreaming of women in the development process.

In 1999, the organization was conferred with the special consultative status with the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations (ECOSOC); in 2003 the organization accepted the role of Regional Coordinator for the United Nations Non-Government Organization (NGO) Informal Regional Network (UN NGO IRENE); and in 2017 the Observer Status was accorded with United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC).

These recognitions provided the organization with an opportunity to integrate national and international concerns through consultation, cooperation and coalition in the larger international arena of the United Nations.

The impact of the COVID-19 combined with the accelerated rate of climate change adversities have forced the world into a Stop and Reset mode. The experiences gained from grassroots projects have guided this organization's pandemic response and recovery programmes towards ensuring gender-equality while safe-guarding the Sustainable Development Goal.

Recent pre-pandemic grassroots programmes by the organization have included localization of the Sustainable Development Goals in line with rural activities; creating awareness for an off-farm, home-based, additional livelihood opportunity of spinning and weaving of cotton, wool and silk yarn and cloth; capacity building of 5000 youth from 50 educational institutions in cyber security, prevention of substance abuse and promotion of intergenerational bonding; 400 underprivileged women were trained to become safe car drivers; 900 women and artisans were guided to develop a new range of local handicrafts using indigenous material with intellectual property protection and registration, skilling in the techniques of food preservation and conservation of culture; 400 senior citizens participated in healthy ageing programmes and learning activities.

COVID-19 and climate change have impacted women's lives, livelihoods and learning; their voices, choices, capacity as change-makers and citizens have been compromised; persons, especially children with disability have been affected; elders are overwhelmed; community health, nutrition, work and trade are in shock; medical equipment has been scarce and vaccine poverty is rampant.

While adhering to the coronavirus precautions, the organization used digital technology to discuss, deliberate, disseminate best practices; form partnerships both nationally and at the United Nations to reach each vulnerable section; propagate and link people to Government schemes; and share strategy papers with policy makers.

During the pandemic, the organization recorded interviews with women functioning on the ground - researchers, self-help groups working on several issues, rural workers, students and teachers - on the impact of the COVID-19. This film, “A World We Women Want: Gender-Just and Violence-Free” supported by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and co-hosted with the Permanent Mission of India to the United Nations, was screened at a Side Event at the sixty-fifth session of the Commission on the Status of Women. The Executive Director of United Nations Children's Fund was the Chief Guest and participants included the Deputy Executive Director of United Nations Women, Secretary of India's Ministry of Women and Child Development, and the Ambassadors to the United Nations from India, Ireland and Mexico. The leitmotif was - if gender violence and gender justice are an area of investment requiring attention, knowledge and funding, then who invests funds and resources, and the national and UN roles on partnership initiation in a people-centred welfare and development.

The film featured an elected woman head of the village-level constitutional body of local self- governance; an Anganwadi ‘courtyard shelter’ worker under the Integrated Child Development Scheme (ICDS) engaged in organizing supplementary nutrition programmes; and an Accredited Social Health Activist (ASHA) to mobilise the community and facilitate their access to health and health facilities. They conducted door to door surveys to create awareness about the pandemic and referred people with cough and fever to doctors for COVID-19 tests at the health camps; they distributed free rations as per the Government policy; delivered dry rations of the school mid-day meals to homes; and as per the National Jan Dhan or financial inclusion scheme collected bank account numbers of women for Direct Benefit Transfers of Rs. 500 each month during the lockdown period. As of August 2021, the total number of Jan Dhan Yojana accounts stands at 43.04 crore with Indian Rupees 1.46 lakh crore, out which 55.4 per cent account holders are women and 66.6 per cent holders from rural and semi urban areas.

Further, nationwide, 80 crore people received pandemic lockdown rations. 100 crores (1 billion) vaccinations are expected to be completed in a day or so.

To ensure access to quality health care for people with disabilities, the organization has, since 2003, awarded financially confined institutions working in disabilities with a one-time grant of Indian Rupees 8 lakhs. Webinars on “Sustainable solutions for people with disabilities” included action-oriented dialogues on the organizational impact of the COVID-19 on research and education; educational and rehabilitation outreach; visual impairment; and mental health. With 600 participants and inputs from 18 past awardees, best practices were highlighted. Organizations facilitated door-step delivery of social protection benefits; capacity building of teachers and homecare training to one parent; enabled one caregiver with every COVID-19 positive hospitalized patient; prepared online modules but emphasized their being paired with physical interaction; and highlighted the need to resume early detection of disabilities that could reduce children's disabilities by 90 per cent. They lobbied for a nodal officer in each district and successfully included the provision of 5 per cent reservation for people with disabilities in state-run economic recovery programmes.

Based on these inputs, the organization submitted a strategy paper “The impact of COVID-19 on children with disabilities” containing issues, recommendations and the way forward to the Government and policy makers.

To empower and promote the social and economic rights of elders, the ‘COVID-19 Community Connects’ stakeholder webinars reached 850 national and international participants to focus on the central role of families in tackling ageism; intergenerational bonding to cater to their social, physical and emotional needs; and vocational training, especially digital, for their improved integration into society.

With the weakening of the second wave, the organization is undertaking people-centred welfare and development programmes to meet the pandemic and climate change induced poverty and inequality.

The organization will continue its annual programmes to support and award institutions managing and educating specially abled and disadvantaged children using innovative methods.

With support from the National Disaster Response Force, the organisation will hold a pilot programme with batches of 60-70 women for short duration training modules to promote specific good practices for the prevention of disasters; to build resilience amongst women and girls to face these challenges; to enhance their capacities for timely response and to mitigate the effect of such disasters.

Under the national policy for the training and capacity building programme in old age care, the organization will be holding a 3 month Certificate Course Geriatric Care Giver course for 100 underprivileged women. This course will include theory classes, communication and soft skills; internships; and placements.

Interactions with civil society during this period of the coronavirus and climate change have underlined the need for investments in funds and resources in projects and programmes; an adherence to international funding obligations; a commitment by member states to classify and communicate short and long term commitments with accountability and quality data; an expansion of civil society partnerships; the dismantling of silos created by the Goals; and people-centred welfare and development.
