

Newsbrief

Slow Progress in Gender Equality, Report Reveals

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UNITED NATIONS, Oct 20 2015 (IPS) - Although the status of women has improved in many areas over the last 20 years, progress continues to be slow, according to the UN's Department for Economic and Social Affairs (DESA) which launched the World's Women Report.

The sixth edition of the report, which examines the status of women and men globally, marks the 20th anniversary of the landmark Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action.

In particular, it reported progress in life expectancy, maternal mortality, and education.

On average, life expectancy has risen by 5 years with women living up to 72 years and men up to 68 years. This is, in part, due to maternal death rates which, between 1990 and 2013, decreased by 45 percent.

The gender gap in education has also narrowed, as participation in education has increased for boys and girls at all levels.

However, stark gender disparities still persevere around the world, the report found.

For instance, young women and adolescent girls are disproportionately vulnerable and at risk of HIV/AIDS. According to UNAIDS, 15 percent of all women living with HIV above the age of 15 are young women between 15 to 24 years old. Of this group, 80 percent live in Sub-Saharan Africa.

"This is due not only to underdeveloped health systems that are unable to address women's needs, but also to gender issues," the World's Women report stated.

Such gender issues include poor access to education, early marriage, lack of decision-making power, and violence against women.

Despite gains in education enrollment, 58 million children of primary school age are not in school. More than half of them are girls. The report also noted the high prevalence of child marriages.

In 2010, approximately 26 percent of women between 20 to 24 years old worldwide were married before age 18, only five percent lower than in 1995. These rates are highest in Southern Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa.

In Southern Asia, 44 percent of women aged 20 to 24 were married before age 18 while the rate was at 40 percent in Sub-Saharan Africa.

The report noted that child marriage is not only a violation of human rights, but it also further exposes women and girls to the risk of domestic violence.

DESA stated that violence against women continues to be a "real global concern," as one in three women in the world have experienced physical and/or sexual violence and 60 percent of all women victims of violence do not report their cases or seek any help.

They also found that women who have experienced intimate partner violence are 50 percent more likely to be living with HIV than those who have not.

In light of such bleak statistics, the report did note the growing availability of gender data, essential to understanding trends in gender quality globally.

"Before the first report, there was no such a thing as gender statistics around the world," said DESA's Assistant Secretary-General for Economic Development Lenni Montiel, at a press briefing during the launch of the sixth edition of the report.

The timely launch of the World's Women Report 2015 also coincides with World Statistics Day, whose theme is "Better Data, Better Lives."

Marking the day, UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon stated: "Good data and statistics are indispensable for informed decision-making by all actors in society."

"We need to ensure that everyone is counted, especially the most poor and vulnerable," he continued.

However, countries continue to falter in data collection.

Chief of the Social and Housing Statistics Section at DESA Francesca Grum revealed there was no data available from the Middle Eastern region on the magnitude of violence against women.

"Measuring violence against women is relatively new...we are only now working with countries to make sure they adopt the [measurement] standards," remarked Grum.

Since 1990, the World's Women Reports has been focusing on eight critical areas of concern: population and families, health, education, work, power and decision-making, violence against women, environment, and poverty.

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