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New report shows women worldwide live longer, healthier lives with better education

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UNITED NATIONS, Oct. 20 (Xinhua) -- The lives of women and girls around the world have improved in several areas over the last 20 years but they continue to be victims of gender based discrimination and violence, said a new report launched by the United Nations here Tuesday.

Coming on the heels of the recently adopted Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the report, entitled The World's Women 2015, brings into sharp perspective the need for gender equality outlined in Goal 5, which aims to empower all women and girls by 2030.

"We cannot achieve our 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, without full and equal rights for half of the world's population, in law and in practice," said UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon at a recent event on gender equality organized on the margins of the Sustainable Development Summit.

The Sustainable Development Goals, also known as the post-2015 development agenda, was adopted here by world leaders in late September as a blueprint for the global development efforts for the next 15 years.

According to the report, prepared by the Statistics Division of the UN Department for Economic and Social Affairs, women live longer lives, benefit from a better access to education and are more independent.

Life expectancy has continued to rise, reportedly reaching 72 years for women and 68 for men, globally. Worldwide, the number of maternal deaths declined by 45 percent between 1990 and 2013. Although they continue to marry a few years earlier than men, women's age at marriage has also increased, reflecting higher education levels, later entry into the labor force, as well as increased economic independence.

Meanwhile, enrolment of children in primary education is nearly universal today. The gender gap has narrowed and once they have enrolled in schools, girls perform better than boys through primary education in two thirds of countries, according to the report.

In some developing nations, however, the disparities against girls are stark. Some 58 million children of primary school age are out of school worldwide.

More than half of them are girls and nearly three quarters live in sub-Saharan Africa and Southern Asia. Although the vast majority of the world's youth is currently literate, nearly two thirds of the world's illiterate adults are women, a proportion unchanged for the last 20 years.

"Far too many women and girls continue to be discriminated against, subjected to violence, denied equal opportunities in education and employment, and excluded from positions of leadership and decision-making," the secretary-general said.

More than one third of women worldwide have been a victim of physical and/or sexual violence at some point in their lives. Attitudes toward violence are reportedly beginning to change as both men and women see violence against women less acceptable -- but 60 percent of all women victims of violence still do not report it or seek any help.

Turning to the issue of child marriage, despite remaining a critical issue in Southern Asia and sub-Saharan Africa, the occurrence has declined from 31 percent in 1995 to 26 percent in 2010.

Estimates reveal that only 50 percent of women of working age are in the labor force, compared to 77 percent for men. Women are found to remain concentrated in low paid jobs and earn on average between 70 and 90 percent of what men earn.

Furthermore, women spend on average three hours more per day than men on household chores and caring for family members in developing countries and two hours more per day than men in developed countries. As a result of the gender division of paid and unpaid work, in many countries, women continue to be economically dependent on their spouses.

Meanwhile, women's economic vulnerability becomes even more visible among lone mothers with children. One-parent household are increasingly common globally, both in developing and developed countries as a result of increased extramarital fertility and divorce.

Lone mothers with children constitute about 75 percent of all one-parent households and suffer higher poverty rates than lone father or two parent households, the report said.

The report also studied gender representation in leadership positions and found that in most societies around the world, women continue to have unequal voice in public and private spheres.

The number of females among heads of state or government is still an exception, although the world currently counts 19 female, a slight improvement compared to the 12 counted in 1995.

Similarly, only 22 percent of parliamentarians and 18 percent of appointed ministers are women. Women's representation among corporate managers, legislators and senior officials also remains low, with no country reaching or surpassing parity and only about half of countries having shares of 30 percent or more.

The launch of the report coincided with the World Statistics Day, which was marked annually on Oct. 20 to highlight the importance of statistics in helping policy makers develop informed policies that impact millions of people worldwide.

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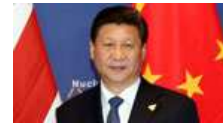


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