



CSW 57 - 2013

The effects of the economic crisis on gender-based violence

Gender-based violence is a phenomenon of epidemic proportions prevalent in many families, communities, societies and cultures across the globe.

Ending violence against women is not a luxury for times of growth. It is even more crucial in times of crisis when women are hit very hard.

The ongoing financial crisis which has engulfed almost the entire world in an economic recession poses threats to gains in gender equality, poverty, in fact to all the Millennium goals.

There is evidence that women and girls are exposed to a greater risk of violence during economic crisis which increases gender inequalities in the economy, since economic equality is a key factor in preventing gender-based violence, in particular domestic violence.

The current crisis has a higher differentiated impact on women because their economic position at the start of the crisis was not equal to that of men. Women are more likely than men to be in vulnerable jobs, to be underemployed or without a job, to lack social protection and to have limited access to and control over economic and financial resources.

There is strong evidence that there are clear links between violence and unemployment, violence and homelessness, and violence and inadequate housing.

There is also strong evidence that as resources become scarcer due to greater demand, relations among household members and also within neighbourhoods become strained, and the social fabric is often torn by increased crimes, family abandonment by households heads and rising domestic and community violence.

Economic crises increase particularly harmful forms of violence against women namely trafficking and prostitution. They increase existing pressures on poor women to enter the sex trade in order to support their families.

If the crisis increases school dropout, children/their families may resort to prostitution as a livelihood strategy.

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In addition to increased levels of violence, austerity measures which encompass public budget cuts affect support services leaving women victims of violence even more vulnerable than usual. Such cuts have led to reduced police, legal, health and other essential services for victims.

There is therefore urgent need to analyse the deep-rooted causes of the crisis and work for advancing an alternative vision of development grounded on human rights and gender equality.

The current financial crisis is a consequence of the failure of the governance of finance. Finance has been allowed to grow too big compared to the real economy. Money and returns on money and not the provision of goods and services has become the ultimate purpose of the economy. This governance is gendered because there is a large under-representation of women in financial decision making.

Recovery plans and structural adjustment programmes have not integrated a gender perspective.

In light of the above considerations, we call upon UN, national governments and regional governing bodies to evaluate the global financial architecture and its actors, on the basis of the human rights framework, taking into account all relevant human rights conventions.

We further call upon UN, national governments and regional governing bodies to take immediate action and implement the following measures in order to rectify the gender impact of the crisis:

- Systematic gender sensitive analysis of the causes, and impact of the financial crisis on women and the responses thereof.
- Gender budgeting as a standard methodology of all public budget processes.
- Implement measures to combat the ongoing process of feminization of poverty which is exacerbated by the recession.
- Create jobs especially in the public sector by investing in social infrastructure (education, health, child and dependent persons care), which would also ease the disproportionate burden on women to enable them to participate in the labour market.
- Take measures concerning the equal participation of women at all levels of decision making in the political, economic and financial sectors as well as in private companies.
- Take strong measures to combat all forms of violence against women including the financing of support services for women victims of violence.
- Implement CEDAW and the landmark Security Council Resolutions 1325 and 1828 and more recently 1888 and 1889 on women, peace and security. Ratify the Council of Europe Convention on the prevention and combating of violence against women and domestic violence.

Women of the World should become more vocal on the need to move towards a justice-oriented economic order that would promote gender equality and human rights, and put an end to the

constant search for unlimited growth and maximising profits to the detriment of the survival of humanity in a human way.

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