

**INTERNATIONAL ALLIANCE OF WOMEN
ALLIANCE INTERNATIONALE DES FEMMES**

IAW website: <http://www.womenalliance.org>

**Equal Rights - Equal Responsibilities
Droits Égaux - Responsabilités Égales**

IAW ACTION SHEET - November 2011



Equal Rights

**Feminization of Poverty
and the Financial/Economic Crisis**

**Statement submitted by *INTERNATIONAL ALLIANCE OF WOMEN (IAW)*
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It is generally accepted that the majority of poor people across the world are women. Of the estimated 1.1 billion poor people in the world 60-70% is women.

Poverty means ill health and premature death, social exclusion, lack of access to basic services, having no say to basic decisions that affect them, vulnerability to violence. Poor people have no choices with what they can do with their lives. But on top of all that women have to contend with systematic discrimination against them. Discrimination against women causes vast poverty and perpetuates it.

For example in many countries women are prevented by traditional custom and law from owning land which deprives them of applying for loans using the land as collateral. This makes it harder for them to climb out of the poverty trap.

Poor women are particularly disadvantaged even in relation to poor men in their own societies. But why is this so. Inequalities in power between women and men help create and perpetuate women's poverty. If poor women's deprivation is a matter of grossly unequal power relations then the process of empowerment of women is part of the solution to the problem. How can this empowerment take place? By enabling poor women to exercise their human rights as a legal and political tool to bring about social justice.

As an example we can refer to poor black women in South Africa who marched against the poor laws and participated in the struggle against apartheid and racism. In the US black women were very active in poor black churches in urban areas and played a role and continue to do so in advocacy for social development policies.

Taking a rights perspective on women's poverty we see poor women as claimants of justice, as economic agents, agents of positive change and not helpless charity cases.

However the problem is that very often women's rights are invisible. They may exist on paper but they mean little if the behavior and attitudes that so often underlie women's human rights abuses are ignored. We have to work hard to change gender stereotypes within the family, in schools, in work, in politics, in the economy.

Unfortunately, women, particularly poor women, are experiencing further violations of their human rights as a result of the current crisis which itself combines multiple crises, that is a global economic recession, the devastating effects of climate change and an ongoing food and energy crisis. Because of ingrained discrimination and structural disadvantage women have restricted access to services and social protection which help to deal with the shocks of such crises and are thus exposed to increased risk with the result that they fall further into disadvantage, exclusion and non respect of their human rights.

Economic recession in many developed and developing countries has a disproportionate negative effect on women's right to work. In the formal sector women were already facing discrimination with greater job insecurity and lower wages than men and as a result were the first to lose their jobs when the crisis hit.

Increasing unemployment and decreasing household incomes increases unpaid work, including care-giving mostly done by women and girls, and forces women to turn to vulnerable and informal employment. The over-presentation of women in insecure forms of work undermines women's rights, perpetuates gender inequalities in societies and limits the prospects for sustainable economic progress. Moreover, economic recession is putting pressure on families and creates conditions associated with increased domestic/intimate relationship violence. Migrant women also face a heightening sense of job insecurity thus making them more vulnerable to abuse.

Women need to participate fully in the decision making processes in order to ensure attention to gender perspectives in policy responses to the financial crisis. States should take measures to ensure a gender approach in the design and implementation of recovery measures.

There is a need to support women's right to work by recognizing and making more visible unpaid work performed by women. We should reduce its burden on them by promoting equal sharing of responsibilities between men and women in care-giving.

Recovery measures should promote women's economic and social rights by prioritizing investments in education and skills development for women, enhancing women's productive activity, ensuring that microfinance goes to them, providing investments in sectors where women make up a considerable proportion of the labour force and undertaking gender budgeting to ensure that women benefit equally from public investments.

The crisis is an opportunity to rethink the economic order. We need to move towards an order that would have as its function the survival of humanity in a human way. A solidarity based and justice oriented economic order that would promote gender equality and human rights for women and men, and that would give preference to provision for all and cooperation over unlimited growth and maximizing profit.

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