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IPS is a communication institution with a global news agency at its core and a long-standing editorial commitment to mainstreaming gender. Fifteen years after the Beijing World Conference on Women, IPS reports on progress and challenges for women.

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[Financial Crisis Turning Back the Clock for Women](#)

Posted on 12 March 2010 by admin



In the face of widespread poverty, South Africa is increasing social grants, which will benefit about 2.4 million more South African children. Credit: Kristin Palitza/IPS

By Chryso D'Angelo

UNITED NATIONS, Mar 12 (IPS/TerraViva) Fifteen years after the landmark Beijing Declaration on women's rights, the gender gap is not narrowing in most developing countries, according to the "Gender Equity Index (GEI) 2009, Beijing and Beyond: Putting Gender Economics at the Forefront."

Presented during the 54th Session of the Commission on the Status of Women, which concludes Friday, the report revealed which countries have an improved rate of equity (Rwanda topped the charts) and which rank among the worst (Yemen and Côte D'Ivoire).

"All around the world the women's movement has expressed its disappointment with the fact that states are very quick to sign onto human rights instruments and endorse different policies at the international and regional levels, but extremely slow in delivering on their commitments and implementing legislation," according to the report, compiled by the NGO Social Watch.

A devastating highlight of the findings is that the global financial crisis has virtually wiped out the economic gains that have been made by women over the last few years.

“We’re seeing a regression in all of our indicator categories (economics, education, and empowerment),” Natalia Cardona, Social Watch’s advocacy coordinator, told TerraViva. “Every time there is a crisis, the developing world is hit very hard.”

As a result, countries are turning to loans from the IMF and the World Bank in large doses, but many are voicing concerns over the past failings of these structural adjustment policies.

“Most of them who left the IMF and the World Bank are saying that the policies are wrong, but who is being held accountable? They are washing their hands,” said speaker Emily Sikazwe, executive director of Women for Change of Zambia. “It’s left to our countries to clean up the mess - in education and so many other areas.”

According to Cardona, the loans are a double-edge sword because they stipulate that countries cut public entities in order to balance budgets. In the end, women pay a high price, and the equity gap closes further.

“Education and healthcare are women-friendly industries,” Cardona told TerraViva. “They employ teachers and nurses, whom are usually female.” With programmes cut, women are unemployed and girls are uneducated, continuing the cycle.

In addition, women are depended upon to step in where healthcare has been cut. They must take care of the children and elderly, inhibiting them from finding paid employment.

Finally, a side effect of economic turmoil is systemic violence, which Cardona fears will put women in increased jeopardy.

“For next year, we’re predicting that the economic gain women had will be completely wiped out,” Cardona told TerraViva. “We’ll see a total regression of the progress for women.”

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