

GCAP Statement on International Women's Day 2021

Build Forward Better: Leave No Woman Behind during COVID-19 and beyond

Gender justice during the COVID-19 pandemic – this is the demand of the Global Call to Action (GCAP) for International Women's Day 2021. This demand is central to the fight of GCAP National Coalitions and Constituency Groups for gender equality and gender justice at national level to eradicate poverty and reduce inequalities.

The challenges to all humanity posed by the COVID-19 are unprecedented. But it is now clear that it is women and girls who disproportionately are bearing the brunt of the socio-economic fallout. Women, often working in the informal sector, have been the first to lose their jobs. At the same time the demand for unpaid care work has rocketed, imposing additional burdens on women. All forms of violence against women and girls, particularly domestic violence, have increased dramatically under lockdowns.

The most vulnerable women – those with disabilities, older women, women from communities who are excluded on the basis of their work or descent (DWD), women from indigenous communities, migrants, refugees and others – faced and continue to face multiple discrimination and hardship during the pandemic.

Jane Ndenga from the Action Network for the Disabled, Kenya, said: "It is my desire to encourage all women to take up their roles as girls or women in the society with pride to contribute to and foster a better world. Whether in small actions within homes, schools, churches or big achievements in the corporations, recognizing the gains women have made will have a salutary impact on women's empowerment. Raising awareness on the challenges women with disabilities face e.g. lack of access to education and sexual and reproductive health, forced/early marriages, teenage pregnancy, sexual harassment and exploitation at work place, prostitution and domestic violence etc through campaigns, using social and mainstream media and community outreach will help women fighting stigma and gender inequality. Highlighting the success of women who have overcome such challenges would go a long way in raising the standards of fighting for equality. For a better world 'Leave No Woman Behind!'"

Beena Pallical of Asia Dalit Rights Forum (ADRF) said, "Discrimination against women belonging to DWD communities is very much prevalent in the day-to-day lives. Respect for equality and non-discrimination, irrespective of gender, is the basis of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and all other international human rights treaties. At the outset of International Women's Day, let us all reiterate our commitment to this cause. The need of the hour is to ensure security and protection, and fulfilment of human rights of these

women by taking immediate and stringent measures to address the injustice they face due to their social status from all walks of lives."

On the occasion of the International Women's Day 2021, GCAP published the Leave No Woman Behind Africa Report, bringing together voices and perspectives of women and girls with disabilities across Africa.

In response to COVID-19, GCAP calls for global solidarity and demands that governments, the international community and Civil Society must ensure that :

1. Women and their organisations are part of all political processes formulating and implementing policies - including women with disabilities and other marginalised women
2. There is swift and effective action to end Violence against Women and Girls and all forms of discrimination against them
3. Vaccinations must be made available to the most vulnerable groups of women
4. Social Protection Floors including universal health care are established and expanded to cover all – prioritising the inclusion of marginalised women
5. Action is taken to restore the livelihoods of women working in the informal sector
6. The pandemic is not followed by austerity and debt crisis, which will hit women the hardest. We demand debt cancelation until 2024 and Special Drawing Rights of 3 trillion USD for the poorest and also middle income countries.
7. All human rights defenders, especially women, must be protected from arbitrary arrest.

The pandemic has given us the opportunity to take steps to address the root causes of misogyny and achieve equal opportunity and economic and political rights of women, paying special attention to women facing multiple discrimination. COVID-19 has placed us at crossroads, forcing us to look hard at issues of inequalities, development and climate. Now is the right time to reassess and re-strategise the implementation of the Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development in the Decade of Action and the Paris Climate Agreement.