

UN: Rich countries advance women, poorest don't

February 13 2014, by Edith M. Lederer

Richer countries have made advances toward equality for women and provided greater access to sexual and reproductive health care over the past 20 years—but the poorest countries have made little progress, according to a U.N. report released Wednesday.

The report by the U.N. population fund said many of the estimated one billion people living in the 50 to 60 [poorest countries](#) will stagnate as the rest of the world gets richer, and the growing inequality threatens [economic development](#) and will undo significant gains in health and longevity.

To sustain the gains, it urged governments to adopt and enforce laws to protect the poorest and most marginalized, singling out adolescent girls and women affected by violence and people in rural areas.

Since a groundbreaking U.N. population conference in Cairo in 1994, the report said fewer women are dying in pregnancy and childbirth, primary school enrollment is approaching 90 percent, nearly one billion people have moved out of extreme poverty and more women are working and participating in political activities.

But the population fund's executive director, Babatunde Osotimehin, told a news conference launching the report that "in many countries and regions, progress is limited to the wealthy, with enormous numbers of countries being excluded from the process and benefits of development."

"More than half of absolute gains in global income from 1998-2008 went to the richest 5 percent, and none went to the bottom 10 percent," he said. "In the poorest communities, women's status, maternal death, child marriage and many other concerns of Cairo have (made) so little progress over the last two decades."

At the Cairo conference, world leaders adopted a 20-year Program of Action demanding equality for women through education, access to modern birth control, and the right to choose if and when to become pregnant as well as by improving their status and economic well-being.

U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon said Cairo also "affirmed sexual and [reproductive health](#) as a fundamental human right, and it emphasized that empowering women and girls is key to ensuring the well-being of individuals, families, nations and our world."

Yet, Osotimehin said: "Today, there is no country in which women are equal to men in political and economic power."

"Too many people, particularly the poor, live without access to sexual and reproductive health services including family planning," he said. "Indeed, more than 200 million in the developing world who want contraception aren't getting it."

Although maternal mortality worldwide fell by nearly half between 1990 and 2010, the report said, every day an estimated 800 women across the world still die from pregnancy or childbirth-related complications, "and the differences between developed and developing regions remain stark."

"Discrimination against women is nearly universal, and manifests in violation and abuses of their human rights, in unequal opportunities to expand their capabilities, in unequal pay, and in many other ways," the

report added.

As one example, it said hundreds of millions of women live in countries where domestic violence is not a crime, or where laws against it are not enforced.

Underlying the 100-page Cairo action plan were studies that show educated women have fewer children, a key to curbing the world's population explosion.

According to the report, global fertility rates declined 23 percent from 1990 to 2010—a dramatic reduction since the Cairo conference.

Nonetheless, the global population surpassed 7 billion in late 2011—a doubling since 1970—and the U.N. projects it will reach 8.4 billion by 2030 and 9.6 billion by 2050 with virtually all the growth in developing countries.

Osoimehin said "the good news" is that 70 percent of the world's nations have said equality and rights are priorities for economic development.

"It's time for them to move from words to action," he said. "We cannot afford to wait another 20 years to address the inequalities plaguing our collective well-being. Development gains should not be limited to the fortunate. They should reach all populations, particularly [women](#) and [adolescent girls](#)."

© 2014 The Associated Press. All rights reserved.

Citation: UN: Rich countries advance women, poorest don't (2014, February 13) retrieved 11 May 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2014-02-rich-countries-advance-women-poorest.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.