

4th NGO-UNESCO FORUM: The Role of Women in the Fight Against Poverty 29-30 June, 2015

The 4th NGO-UNESCO Forum, “The Role of Women in Fighting Poverty” was developed as a response to rising inequalities between global regions and specific groups of people. Almost 400 people from around the world attended the Forum in Paris on 29 to 30 of June, 2015. The attendance and commitment of UNESCO is testament to the significance of this issue to the global community and the recognition of the role of women in fighting poverty.

According to United Nations reports, 70% of the world’s poor are women. The majority of the 1.5 billion people living in extreme poverty on less than a dollar a day are women. Despite the adoption of various UN recommendations in favour of women and an increasing will to combat poverty over the last 40 years, the fight against poverty continues. In some regions, such as sub-Saharan Africa and the south of India, the situation for women in poverty has worsened.

Social, ethnic, cultural, religious and geographical differences manifest into various forms of discrimination, representing many obstacles to social cohesion and development. Persistent and endemic inequalities based on gender provide an added complexity which threatens the empowerment and safety of many women across the globe. These differences and inequalities are reinforced by a mainstream media complicit in maintaining a specific commentary about the role of women and the progression in the fight against poverty.

Nevertheless, despite the challenges, women are often identified as the most active change agents. The Forum presented data from different perspectives and regions of the world highlighting how a resilient female population is finding survival strategies and collaborating to achieve a just, inclusive and sustainable society where women stand an equal footing with men. These women are from north and south countries with a solidarity which extends beyond borders, economic and social class, and religion.

The Forum showcased NGO, research, private sector and UNESCO initiatives from around the world. Concrete and innovative solutions dealing with diverse issues such as the prevention of child marriage, educational programmes for economic and social empowerment, dealing with conflict and war, provided models in the fight against poverty. Over two days, keynote speakers, thematic sessions and panel sessions showcased and debated best practices, political impediments to change, public-private partnership, economic empowerment, the role of the media and the future of a globally sustainable development model.

The Forum’s overwhelming conclusion was that equal economic, political and social participation and representation of women *and* men is necessary for progress in the fight against poverty. Over the two days, it became clear that any system preventing women from fully participating in decision making and exercising their human rights is an inadequate model for sustainable solutions in the fight against poverty. Political will and legal frameworks must be reinforced by social and cultural beliefs. Discussion about a follow up session are currently in progress.