Eighth Meeting of the Open Working Group on SDGs (3-7 February 2014)
Co-Chair’s meetings with the Major Groups and other Stakeholders

Promoting equality, including social equity, gender equality and women's empowerment

Speech from the floor
Corina Rodriguez Enriquez (GEMLAC – DAWN)
February 5th, 2014

I would like to call your attention to the importance of care work for development and for equity. Care work refers to the broad range of activities necessary for every day reproduction of human life, the environment and the economic system. It includes, for example, collecting water and fuel for domestic consumption, cooking, cleaning the house, keeping safe living environments, and also the direct work of caring for people: children, elders, persons with disabilities, and adults of all ages. Without everyday care work, life could not be reproduced. Without everyday care work, the labor force could not work and produce economic value, essential for development. The problem is that the burden of care work is unequally shared between women and men, and that most of care work performed is unpaid. Data reveal that women all around the world perform the majority of unpaid care work. Women living in poverty faced an even heavier burden of unpaid care work, due to poor public services and infrastructure, and the inability of purchasing care services in the market. People living with HIV faced specific care needs and have, in some regions, become careers themselves in the context of inaccessible and inadequate health systems. Migrant women are also key actors in global care chains, taking care of other children, while leaving their own behind. Care for the elderly is crucial in the context of aging societies. The unequal burden of unpaid care work is one of the main barriers for women’s access to education, political participation and economic opportunities. This explains not only women’s lower participation in the labor market, but also their larger presence in informal, low-waged and precarious employment. Later, this constitutes an obstacle to advance in poverty eradication. It also explains why older women, who have dedicated their entire lives to care for other, have no protection and live their last years with unmet basic needs.

In order to be meaningful for equality, SDGs should recognize the economic value of unpaid care work and the urgent need of its redistribution. Specific targets on co-responsibility of care between the State, the households and the private sector should be considered.

The role of the State and public policies are a key to transforming the current unequal share of care responsibilities, by:

- Developing statistics that measure care work (time use surveys) in order to recognize, count and value it, as well in order to inform policy making.
• Investing in social services that would expand access to quality housing, water, transport and energy, as well as guaranteeing accessible care services.

• Fostering work-life balance policies, including maternity, paternity and parental leave benefits, regulation of the length and shape of paid work hours, adapting care services to diverse needs of different types of families.

• Promoting cultural transformation of gender stereotypes, making it possible for women and men to equally share the whole burden of productive and reproductive work.