

International Women's Day

By Laura Sasman

International Women's Day; a reminder why women's inequality is a standing concern International Women's Day is observed worldwide on March 8.

There may be some people who would argue that women have obtained legal equality and that there, therefore is no reason for special days to observe women. While admittedly, some progress has been made to protect and promote women's rights in recent times, women's rights and opportunities are still not secured and women in many parts of the world continue to be seen as second-class when compared to men.

The Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) estimated that women in sub Saharan Africa are responsible for, between, 60 and 80 percent of the labour force in food production for household consumption as well as for the market. They also estimate that in some countries in Africa south of the Sahara, women are responsible for up to 80% of household-food production. Yet the majority of the absolute poor in the world are women. People are talking about the "feminisation" of poverty. This concept, does not only refer to women's lack of income relative to men's, it also refers to poverty of choices and opportunities, such as the chance to lead a long, healthy, creative life and to enjoy basic rights like freedom, respect, and dignity.

Mothers bear the cost of having children on a daily basis in ways not experienced by men. In Namibia it would seem that women increasingly are responsible for having to raise their children on their own. This is a burden shared by growing numbers of women world-wide and which includes single women as well as divorced women.

Because women have less income than men and because they increasingly are alone responsible for child rearing, lone mothers generally are the poorest women in any given society. They have fewer opportunities to, for instance participate in education or to seek good health care. Often girls or

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Photo: adulterated.about.com

women are not allowed to be educated, because sending a girl to school means that the household or family will be denied the opportunity cost of that woman or girls' services. These (unpaid) "services" usually consist of fetching water, collecting firewood, caring for children and/or younger siblings or for the sick and the feeble, cleaning, etc. Men as a group seldom share in the care of children, the sick and old. It is therefore clear that this creates a vicious cycle which impacts girls especially, resulting in the deepening of poverty for each subsequent generation of lone-mother families.

Because more women than men are living in poverty, poor women can also not access proper health services, therefore have poorer health than men do. Factors that have a huge impact on women's health are violence and the risk of HIV and AIDS. Violence, including the raping and killing of women remain a cause for concern to women from all walks of life and newspaper articles keep reminding us that violence against women is as rife in Namibia as elsewhere in southern Africa.

Where women have equal education, and are working in professional fields, they globally are believed to still earn between 30 and 40% less for equal work than their male counterparts. This is called the "pay gap." There will be those who might argue that women may choose to become pregnant and raise babies, rather than committing themselves 100% to their jobs. Do men not also have a vested interest in having children and seeing their children cared for? Unless our societies and duty bearers in the form of our governments can change those structural inequalities that keep women poor and poorer, we will need to observe Women's Day – if only as a constant reminder of spiralling injustice not only to women, but to the generations of children that women will end up raising on their own.



Photo: 1000 cultural encounters.com

FAST FACTS

about women

One in five women worldwide reports being sexually abused before the age of 15.

About 14 million adolescent girls become pregnant worldwide each year. That is about 27 teenage pregnancies for every minute in a year. Of these, over 90% of those girls living in developing countries.

Almost 97% of abortions carried out in Africa are unsafe. The abortion rate is higher in regions where it is illegal and therefore usually unsafe – meaning are carried out by somebody unqualified in unsuitable premises and can end in infection or haemorrhage and death.

1,600 women die per day as the result of pregnancy or childbirth complications. Nearly 99% of these deaths occur in developing nations.

80% of the 50 million people around the world who are affected by violent conflicts, civil wars, disasters, and displacement are women and children.

1 % of world's land is owned by women.

About one million female foetuses are aborted and tens of thousands of female babies go missing in China every year. The cultural preference for sons is made worse by the one-child policy leading and cultural values results in serious consequences.