

**Commission on the Status of Women
Fifty-fourth session
1 – 12 March 2010**

**Expert panel in preparation of the 2010 Annual Ministerial Review
of the Economic and Social Council
“Implementing the internationally agreed goals and commitments in regard to
gender equality and empowerment of women”**

Tuesday, 9 March 2010, 3.00 – 6.00 p.m.

ISSUES PAPER

I. Background

The United Nations conferences and summits held in the past two decades generated a global consensus on a shared vision of development, which includes comprehensive commitments and concrete goals for gender equality and empowerment of women. The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and the Beijing Platform for Action are the global normative and policy frameworks for gender equality, women’s human rights and the empowerment of women and girls. The outcomes of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly, the Millennium Declaration, resolutions of the General Assembly, the Security Council and the Economic and Social Council as well as the agreed conclusions of the Commission on the Status of Women supplement and strengthen these commitments in particular areas. They have addressed a range of issues such as women in development, financing for gender equality and empowerment of women, violence against women, and women, peace and security.

In July 2010, the Economic and Social Council Annual Ministerial Review (AMR) will focus on the topic of “Implementing the internationally agreed goals and commitments in regard to gender equality and empowerment of women.” The review will assess the progress of the implementation of commitments to gender equality within the context of the United Nations development agenda. It will explore key challenges to achieving gender equality and empowerment of women particularly with regard to the recent global financial and economic crisis, the food and fuel crises and the increasing effects of climate change. The outcomes and recommendations of the Commission on the Status of Women will contribute to the AMR. This panel provides an opportunity to focus on specific gender equality issues linked to the international development agenda, such as poverty eradication and peacebuilding and post-conflict processes.

II. Critical issues

The 15-year review of the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action demonstrates that despite some progress, significant implementation gaps and challenges remain across all 12 critical areas of concern of the Platform. Other processes,

including those related to the MDGs, reveal that in many areas, implementation of global commitments on gender equality has been slow and uneven.

The inadequate progress achieved to date in implementation of global commitments on gender equality is of great concern. Gender inequality and gender-based discrimination has serious costs for women and girls and continues to adversely affect socio-economic development across regions. Women continue to have insufficient access to economic resources, little participation in decision-making roles and limited access to health care. Women perform much of the unpaid work, have fewer educational and labour market opportunities, less training in new technologies and higher illiteracy rates. These basic inequalities as well as the continued existence of violence against women not only affect the lives of women and their families, but are detrimental to human development.

Country responses to the 15-year review suggest that women continue more likely than men to be living in poverty. In addition, certain groups of women are particularly vulnerable to poverty including women farmers, women working in the informal sector, migrants, women with disabilities and older women.¹

To achieve global development goals, such as those linked to poverty eradication, inequalities between women and men must be explicitly addressed, including structural constraints hindering women's economic empowerment. This requires increased attention to the interdependencies between economic and social policies, the formal and informal economy, as well as paid and unpaid work.² Women employed in the informal sector represent over half of total female employment, in conditions that typically lack health, pension and other work-related benefits.³ This type of employment is generally not covered by regulation, inspection and protection, leaving these women at a higher risk of exploitation and violation of their rights. Gender pay-gaps persist in all parts of the world.

There are lessons learned and good practices to build on from different regions. Experiences demonstrate that improving decent work through the increased enforcement of equal labour rights, for women is essential for more equitable and sustainable poverty reduction and development. Social protection policies have been shown to be vital, especially in the context of crises, for preventing and reducing vulnerability to poverty among women and mitigating risks throughout the life-cycle.⁴ In addition, human capital development through public social expenditures in education and health has been instrumental in reducing poverty and inequality and increasing growth and social integration.⁵

Across regions, various efforts have been taken to mainstream gender perspectives into national development strategies and poverty reduction policies. These efforts have included increasing women's participation in decision-making, bringing national

¹ E/CN.6/2010/2

² United Nations (2009). World Survey on the Role of Women in Development: Women's Control over Economic Resources and Access to Financial Resources, including Microfinance. New York

³ E/CN.6/2010/2

⁴ E/CN.6/2010/2

⁵ United Nations (2010). Report on the World Social Situation 2010: Rethinking Poverty. New York.

legislation and policies in line with international human rights and labour conventions and increasing women's access to land, credit, property and other productive resources.⁶ It is critical to share experiences and explore how successful practices can be scaled-up.

In this past decade, increased attention has been given to the essential role of women in peacebuilding and political, economic and social reconstruction. Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) on women, peace and security is the first international mandate covering the full and equal participation of women in all peace and security initiatives, as well as the mainstreaming of gender issues in the context of armed conflict, peacebuilding and reconstruction processes. In 2009, Security Council resolution 1889 (2009) urged Member States, United Nations bodies, donors and civil society to take into account women's empowerment during post-conflict needs assessments and planning, and factor it into subsequent funding disbursements and programme activities.

The United Nations Peacebuilding Commission emphasized in its founding resolutions the importance of integrating gender perspectives into all its work.⁷ The strategic frameworks for peacebuilding for the countries on the Commission's agenda (Burundi, Sierra Leone, Guinea-Bissau and the Central African Republic) have included key commitments on women's human rights and gender equality. They call for women's involvement in the promotion of peace, access to decision-making processes, inclusion in electoral processes (as both voters and candidates) and access to resources including land. The frameworks also include commitments to the elimination of violence against women and women's equal access to justice.⁸

These commitments and mandates recognize the need for positive changes to be made during the transformation from armed conflict to peace and development. Transition periods are opportunities for changing norms and policies, engaging new leaders and building new political, judicial, economic and social institutions. The ability to capitalize on these opportunities depends on the individuals and stakeholders, women and men, who participate in the peace negotiation, post-conflict reconstruction and peace-building processes. State and international actors must also have the capacity to incorporate gender equality norms in policies and programmes. Many lessons learned and good practices can be derived from different post-conflict settings. Examples exist in terms of establishing the rule of law and by extension, the promotion and protection of human rights. Good practices have also focused on the effective use of measures to increase the number of women in decision-making positions whether in parliament, government and law enforcement. Other areas include national mechanisms, policies for gender equality and efforts to mainstream gender perspectives into different sectoral policies, such as those for the provision of basic services and for economic revitalization. There is a need to examine ways to strengthen and better support promising practices and their more systematic application.

⁶ E/CN.6/2010/2

⁷ A/RES/60/180 and S/RES/1645 (2005)

⁸ A/64218

III. Format and outcome of the interactive expert panel

The panel will take the form of an interactive dialogue. Three expert panellists will make introductory presentations of 10-12 minutes. Member States, United Nations system entities and non-governmental organizations will be encouraged to share innovative approaches and experiences, as well as specific challenges, in implementing the internationally agreed goals and commitments in regards to gender equality and empowerment of women, and/or respond to the panellists' presentations. Interventions from the floor will be limited to three minutes. A moderator's summary of the dialogue will be prepared and posted on the website of the Division for the Advancement of Women. The summary will contribute to the 2010 AMR.

IV. Issues for consideration in the interactive dialogue

The dialogue provides an opportunity to share experiences and bring new ideas to the policy debate about development, gender equality and women's empowerment. The following issues could be considered:

- How can accountability for implementing international goals and commitments on gender equality and empowerment of women and girls be strengthened?
- What are good practices of strategies to empower women and girls and advance the development agenda that could be scaled-up?
- What are good practices in gender-responsive poverty reduction strategies that have focused on pro-poor growth? What factors, mechanisms and processes improved their outcomes?
- How can data collection and analysis on women's poverty be improved to better inform policy-making, planning and monitoring of results?
- How can the involvement of women in decision-making be strengthened with respect to development policy-making, poverty reduction efforts and transitions from armed conflict to peace and development?
- What are good practices of translating gender equality goals and commitments into the rebuilding of administrative, governance, political and judicial structures after conflict?
- What role do various stakeholders play in ensuring sufficient allocation of resources for gender equality and the empowerment of women in development efforts, poverty eradication and peacebuilding?