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Commission on the Status of Women

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3-14 March 2003

Item 3 (c) of the provisional agenda*

Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and to the special session of the General Assembly entitled “Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century”: implementation of strategic objectives and action in the critical areas of concern and further actions and initiatives

High-level round table on national experiences in institutional capacity-building

Discussion guide prepared by the Bureau of the Commission**

I. Organizational aspects and format

Background

1. At its forty-sixth session in 2002, the Commission on the Status of Women decided, in decision 46/101, to introduce the option of high-level round tables, starting from its forty-seventh session, and authorized its Bureau to decide, after consultation with all interested States through the regional groups, on the number, timing and theme of any such round tables.

2. Following consultations with regional groups, the Bureau of the Commission held a consultative briefing with all interested States on 27 November 2002 to review the organization of a high-level round table. Based on these consultations, the Bureau subsequently decided to convene a high-level round table during the forty-seventh session of the Commission. The Bureau also decided to prepare the present discussion guide to set the framework for the high-level round table, covering the format as well as presenting a series of questions for discussion in relation to the theme.

* E/CN.6/2003/1.

** Following consultations at the end of November 2002, the Bureau of the Commission decided to prepare a discussion guide to set the framework for the high-level round table.

Purpose of the high-level round table

3. The purpose of the high-level round table, as set out in Commission decision 46/101, is to further develop opportunities for sharing national experiences during the annual session of the Commission, in particular with regard to the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action¹ and the outcome of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly,² and to enhance its working methods.

Theme

4. The theme of the high-level round table of 2003 will focus on national experience in institutional capacity-building, in particular in relation to the two themes that the Commission will examine this year.³ Participants should discuss in a very practical and concrete manner their activities, and exchange information, lessons learned and concrete examples of progress and challenges encountered by national machineries for the advancement of women in institutional capacity-building at the national level.

Participants

5. The high-level round table is primarily an opportunity for a dialogue among senior representatives of national machineries for the advancement of women who are attending the forty-seventh session of the Commission from capitals. They will be given priority with respect to intervening to share national experiences. The high-level round table will be open to other Commission members and observers.⁴

Format

6. The format of the high-level round table should be a free-flowing exchange and interactive dialogue among high-level representatives primarily from national machineries for the advancement of women. Participants will be invited to make short comments, raise questions or respond to previous speakers, rather than present prepared statements. Keeping the inputs short will allow participants to take the floor more than once.

7. The Chairperson of the Commission will preside and guide the discussion in a proactive manner to ensure adherence to the interactive format of the round table.

Timing

8. The high-level round table will take place at United Nations Headquarters in New York on Tuesday, 4 March 2003, from 3 to 6 p.m., as part of the forty-seventh session of the Commission.

Outcome

9. The Chairperson will prepare a Chairperson's summary of the high-level round table, which will be included in the report of the Commission on its forty-seventh session.

Other aspects

10. Delegations will have the opportunity to make general statements during the general debate, for which two-and-one-half meetings have been allocated (3 March, a.m., and 5 March, a.m. and p.m.). Delegations are also encouraged to contribute actively to the panel discussions (3 March p.m., and 4 March, a.m.).

II. Elements for discussion

Institutional capacity-building

11. The Beijing Platform for Action highlighted the role of institutional mechanisms for the advancement of women.⁵ The General Assembly, in the annex to resolution S-23/3, adopted on 10 June 2000, also underlined the role of institutions and the need for their continuous dynamic transformation in the pursuit of gender equality when it stated that institutional and conceptual changes were a strategic and important aspect of creating an enabling environment for the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action (para. 61). In adopting the Commission's multi-year programme of work for 2002-2006, the Economic and Social Council identified institutional capacity-building as an important cross-cutting issue in the effective implementation of the Platform for Action and the outcome document of the twenty-third special session of the Assembly (Council resolution 2001/4, para. 2).

12. Capacity-building is a broad concept that aims at enhancing the ability to effectively define and realize goals. The understanding of capacity-building has evolved from an earlier focus on human resources development and the skills of individuals and now also encompasses a focus on organizations and institutions, and their mandates, structures and processes. Capacity itself is not a static concept. Individuals and institutions must evolve, adapt and progress in response to new contexts and requirements. Institutions that learn and evolve can play a dynamic role in national development processes and help create an environment that will be conducive to the promotion of specific goals.⁶

13. Actions aimed at institutional capacity-building in the Platform for Action and the outcome document of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly cover the capacity of specialist institutions at governmental and non-governmental levels (such as national machineries for the advancement of women, women's non-governmental organizations and research institutions focused on women and gender equality). Equally important, they also seek to enhance the capacity of many other institutions (such as line ministries, inter-ministerial committees, and sectoral and technical bodies) to act in a way that actively promotes the achievement of gender equality. Capacity-building for such institutions therefore aims at enhancing their ability to work with, and explicitly address, the gender aspects within their

mandates. The need for cooperation, partnerships and networking among all relevant stakeholders is receiving increasing attention.

14. In addressing issues of institutional capacity-building, with particular emphasis on the areas of media/information and communication technologies (ICT) and women's human rights/violence against women, the high-level round table could address the aspects discussed below. In each instance, emphasis should be placed not only on the capacity of the institutions whose mandate focuses on the advancement of women and gender equality, but, in particular, also on the capacity of those institutions whose primary focus is on other goals but that have an explicit responsibility for incorporating gender perspectives in their work.

Discussion points

1. Mandates/terms of reference

15. The mandate or terms of reference of an institution usually provides its framework for action, and clarity of mandate enhances capacity to act in pursuit of stated goals. National and international developments will often require that the mandates of institutions undergo adaptation in order to maintain their effectiveness and relevance. Violence against women, and women and the media, for example, have been an explicit concern in the mandates of national machineries and other bodies for many years, while the role of ICT in supporting gender equality goals has only recently appeared in national and international agendas and may not be explicitly addressed in mandates.

- How have mandates of national machineries evolved since 1995 in response to new development challenges, and to the experience gained in implementing the Platform for Action?
- How have mandates of other institutions, especially of line ministries, changed in response to commitments to the gender equality goal and the mainstreaming of gender perspectives in all policies and programmes?
- What lessons can be learned from past experience to ensure that national machineries have the mandate to be proactively involved in setting gender-sensitive national development agendas, and how can these lessons contribute to further institutional development for gender equality?
- How are national machineries responding to persistent challenges (such as violence against women, and women's participation in the media), and taking up new issues (such as ICT)?

2. Structures

16. The structures of institutions have an impact on their effectiveness and relevance. For example, national machineries may consist solely of a centralized office, or may also include regional and local offices. They may benefit from extensive and active networking with women's non-governmental organizations, but have few links to sectoral ministries or interest groups and professional associations. A holistic approach to promoting women's human rights and combating violence against women will require the involvement of the national machinery, parliament, law and justice ministries, social support service institutions, women's non-

governmental organizations, and other actors. Efforts to encourage women's participation in and access to the media, and to ensure that information and communication technologies become a tool for the empowerment of women will, on the other hand, require linkages and networking with information and telecommunications ministries, regulatory bodies, media organizations, the private sector, and others.

- What are some of the challenges, and good practices, in developing and sustaining successful structures in pursuit of specific goals, and how can challenges be overcome?
- What structural arrangements have facilitated an effective national effort to promote women's human rights and combat violence against women?
- What mechanisms have enhanced women's access to and participation in the media?
- How can lessons learned from success in one sector be applied to other sectors, such as ICT? What are the institutions and bodies that need to be engaged in the ICT sector for effective pursuit of the gender equality goal?
- How can national machineries effectively utilize ICT to enhance structural arrangements in support of the gender equality goal?

3. Processes

17. National machineries act in many instances as catalysts to ensure that the gender equality goal is pursued as part of overall national development, and that it forms part of policy and planning in sectoral areas. National machineries also play a key role in monitoring. Their timely access to, and ability to engage effectively with, relevant planning processes (such as line ministries, regulatory bodies and planning commissions) are critical for effective discharge of these functions. Furthermore, effective interaction with all relevant stakeholders will strengthen sustainable progress towards gender equality. Gaining such access and developing relevant ability may be particularly challenging with regard to emerging issues, such as ICT, where gender perspectives remain less well understood.

- What challenges do national machineries have to overcome to develop effective processes, involving all stakeholders, for a comprehensive and holistic approach to promoting women's human rights and combating violence against women?
- How can national machineries gain access to established processes in the ICT sector, and how can they develop the ability to effectively engage in such processes?
- What kinds of partnerships, and with what stakeholders, can national machineries foster to enhance women's access to and participation in the media?

Notes

¹ See *Report of the Fourth World Conference on Women, Beijing, 4-15 September 1995* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.96.IV.13).

² General Assembly resolutions S-23/2 and S-23/3.

- ³ Participation and access of women to the media, and information and communication technologies (ICT) and their impact on and use as an instrument for the advancement and empowerment of women; Women's human rights and the elimination of all forms of violence against women and girls as defined in the Beijing Platform for Action and the outcome document of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly.
- ⁴ Representatives of the entities of the United Nations system and of non-governmental organizations in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council will have the opportunity to observe the dialogue.
- ⁵ See critical area of concern H of the Platform for Action and, in connection therewith, General Assembly resolution S-23/3, annex, in particular paras. 24, 25, 61, 76 and 93.
- ⁶ See, for example, the report of the Secretary-General on United Nations system support for capacity-building (E/2002/58).
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