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**Commission on the Status of Women****Fifty-second session**

25 February-7 March 2008

Item 5 of the provisional agenda\*

**Follow-up to Economic and Social Council resolutions and decisions****Implementing the internationally agreed goals and commitments in regard to sustainable development****Note by the Secretariat****I. Introduction**

1. The Economic and Social Council, in paragraph 13 of its agreed conclusions 2002/1 of 26 July 2002,<sup>1</sup> invited its functional commissions to provide inputs to the overall theme of the Council's coordination and high-level segments as they related to their areas of work. In November 2006, the General Assembly adopted new working methods for the Council to strengthen its role as the central mechanism for system-wide coordination in the implementation of, and follow-up to, the outcomes of the major United Nations conferences in the economic, social and related fields (General Assembly resolution 61/16). Within the context of the new working methods, the Assembly decided that the Council should hold an annual ministerial-level substantive review as part of its high-level segment and requested the Council to urge its functional commissions to contribute to the review. In accordance with its oral decision of 2007/272, taken at the 48th meeting of its 2007 substantive session on 4 October 2007, the Council will consider, at the high-level segment of its 2008 substantive session, the theme "Implementing the internationally agreed goals and commitments in regard to sustainable development".

2. The present note was prepared by the Secretariat to assist the Commission on the Status of Women should it consider providing input to the high-level segment of the substantive session of 2008 of the Economic and Social Council. The note highlights the importance of attention to gender perspectives in the implementation of the internationally agreed goals and commitments on sustainable development,

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\* E/CN.6/2008/1.

<sup>1</sup> *Official Records of the General Assembly, Fifty-seventh Session, Supplement No. 3* (A/57/3/Rev.1), chap. V, sect. A, para. 9.



taking into account actions and initiatives contained, inter alia, in the Beijing Declaration<sup>2</sup> and Platform for Action,<sup>3</sup> the outcome of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly, entitled “Women 2000: gender, equality, developments and peace for the twenty-first century” (General Assembly resolution S-23/2, annex and S-23/3, annex), and the agreed conclusions of the Commission on the Status of Women, since 1996, as well as Agenda 21, the plan of action adopted by the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development in 1992<sup>4</sup> and its follow-up in the Plan of Implementation of the World Summit on Sustainable Development in 2002 (Johannesburg Plan of Implementation),<sup>5</sup> the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, and reports and decisions of the Commission on Sustainable Development.

## II. Background

3. Since the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development and the adoption of Agenda 21 in 1992, the concept of sustainable development has increasingly integrated the three essential dimensions of development: economic development, social development, and environmental protection, including a strong focus on poverty eradication. The Johannesburg Declaration on Sustainable Development<sup>6</sup> confirmed the commitment of Governments to ensure that women’s empowerment, emancipation and gender equality are integrated into all activities encompassed within Agenda 21, the Millennium Development Goals and the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation (A/58/135, para. 25).

4. In the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation, it was recognized that the implementation of the outcomes of the Summit should benefit all, in particular women, youth, children and vulnerable groups. It further acknowledged that gender equality is among one of the elements that form the basis for sustainable development. This renewed commitment to gender equality and women’s empowerment is important because of women’s central role in social development, poverty eradication and natural resource management and their often unrecognized, critical contributions to economic development at all levels (ibid.).

5. At the Millennium Summit in 2000, Heads of State and Government resolved to promote gender equality and the empowerment of women as effective ways to combat poverty, hunger and disease and to stimulate development that is truly sustainable (General Assembly resolution 55/25, para. 20). In addition, the need to ensure that the main horizontal policy themes, such as sustainable development, human rights and gender equality, are taken into account in decision-making throughout the United Nations was highlighted in the 2005 World Summit Outcome (Assembly resolution 60/1, para. 169).

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<sup>2</sup> *Report of the Fourth World Conference on Women, Beijing, 4-15 September 1995* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.96.IV.13), chap. I, resolution 1, annex I.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., annex II.

<sup>4</sup> *Report of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, Rio de Janeiro, 3-14 June 1992*, vol. I, *Resolutions Adopted by the Conference* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.93.I.8 and corrigendum), resolution 1, annex II.

<sup>5</sup> *Report of the World Summit on Sustainable Development, Johannesburg, South Africa, 26 August to 4 September 2002* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.03.II.A.1 and corrigendum), chap. I, resolution 2, annex.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., resolution 1, annex.

6. In efforts to ensure that gender perspectives are considered in issues related to sustainable development, strengthened cooperation and coordination between the Commission on the Status of Women and other organizations in the United Nations system, including the Commission on Sustainable Development, was called for in paragraph 231 (g) of the Beijing Platform for Action. The Commission on Sustainable Development, through the Economic and Social Council, was requested in paragraph 258 (d) to seek input from the Commission on the Status of Women when reviewing the implementation of Agenda 21 with regard to women and the environment. At its forty-first session, in 1997, the Commission on the Status of Women, in paragraph 4 of its agreed conclusions 1997/1 on women and the environment,<sup>7</sup> called for a gender perspective to be mainstreamed into the work of the Commission on Sustainable Development and for the Commission to ensure that the differential impacts on women and men of policies and programmes for sustainable development are well understood and effectively addressed.

### III. Poverty eradication and sustainable development

7. In paragraph 7 of the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation it was noted that eradication of poverty is the greatest global challenge facing the world today and is an indispensable requirement for sustainable development, particularly for developing countries. To achieve the goal of poverty eradication and sustainable development, specific actions outlined were in the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation, including the promotion of women's equal access to and full participation in decision-making at all levels, mainstreaming gender perspectives in all policies and strategies, eliminating all forms of violence and discrimination against women and improving the status, health and economic welfare of women and girls through their full and equal access to economic opportunity, land, credit, education and health-care services, and the provision of access to agricultural resources for people living in poverty, especially women.

8. In paragraph 247 of the Beijing Platform for Action, all States and all people were called upon to cooperate in the essential task of eradicating poverty as an indispensable requirement for sustainable development, in order to decrease the disparities in standards of living and better meet the needs of the majority of the people of the world. As spelled out in paragraph 36 the Beijing Declaration, equitable social development that recognizes empowering the poor, particularly women living in poverty, to utilize environmental resources in a sustainable manner is a necessary foundation for sustainable development. In paragraph 47 of the Beijing Platform for Action it was noted that women and men must participate fully and equally in the formulation of macroeconomic and social policies and strategies for the eradication of poverty. It was also pointed out in paragraph 181 that the empowerment and autonomy of women and the improvement of women's social, economic and political status is essential for the achievement of both transparent and accountable government and administration and sustainable development in all areas of life.

9. It was noted in paragraph 17 of the Beijing Platform for Action that absolute poverty and the feminization of poverty, unemployment, the increasing fragility of

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<sup>7</sup> *Official Records of the Economic and Social Council, 1997, Supplement No. 7 (E/1997/27)*, chap. I.C.

the environment, continued violence against women and the widespread exclusion of half of humanity from institutions of power and governance underscore the need to continue the search for ways of assuring people-centred sustainable development. In the five-year review of the Beijing Platform for Action in 2000, Governments were urged to take measures, with the full and effective participation of women, to ensure new approaches to international development cooperation, based on stability, growth and equity, with the enhanced and effective participation and the integration of developing countries in the globalizing world economy, geared towards poverty eradication and the reduction of gender-based inequality within the overall framework of achieving people-centred sustainable development (General Assembly resolution S-23/3, para. 101 (b)).

10. Functional commissions have recognized the importance of attention to gender concerns to eradicate poverty and achieve sustainable development. At its forty-first session, the Commission on the Status of Women addressed the issue of women, poverty and sustainable development. In paragraph 22 of its agreed conclusions 1997/1 on women and the environment, the Commission called upon Governments to strive to eradicate poverty, especially the feminization of poverty, to change production and consumption patterns and to create sound, well-functioning local economies as the basis for sustainable development.

11. The specific vulnerabilities of rural women were also recognized. In paragraph 24 (b) of Agenda 21 Governments were encouraged to take urgent measures to avert the ongoing rapid environmental and economic degradation in developing countries that generally affects the lives of women and children in rural areas suffering drought, desertification and deforestation, armed hostilities, natural disasters, toxic waste and the aftermath of the use of unsuitable agro-chemical products. Governments were urged in paragraph 24 (3) (g) to take active steps to establish rural banking systems with a view to facilitating and increasing rural women's access to credit and to agricultural inputs and implements. At the fourteenth session of the Commission on Sustainable Development, in 2006, the Chairperson's summary stated in paragraph 154 that gender considerations and the energy needs of poor and rural women and children need to be an integral part of energy planning and energy projects.<sup>8</sup> At its forty-sixth session, in 2002, the Commission on the Status of Women, in paragraph 5 (v) of its agreed conclusions on eradicating poverty,<sup>9</sup> called for the development of appropriate socio-economic policies that promote equal access to and control over resources and markets for poor women, including rural and indigenous women. Governments and other stakeholders were requested in paragraph 5 (aa) to ensure that legislative and administrative reform processes promote rural women's rights to resources, in particular land, inheritance and financial services and benefits.

12. The 2005 World Summit resolved to promote gender equality by guaranteeing the free and equal right of women to own and inherit property and ensuring secure tenure of property and housing by women and equal access of women to productive assets and resources, including land, credit and technology (General Assembly resolution 60/1, para. 58 (b) and (e)).

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<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 2006, *Supplement No. 9* (E/2006/29), chap. II.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 2002, *Supplement No. 7* (E/2002/27), chap. I.A.III.

13. At its fourth session, in 2005, the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues emphasized the unique contributions made by indigenous women within their families, communities and nations and at the international level in terms of possessing and transmitting intergenerationally a wealth of traditional knowledge on the conservation of biodiversity and sustainable environment management. At the same time, the Forum expressed concern that indigenous women continue to be one of the most marginalized groups in many countries, being victims of serious acts of discrimination and flagrant violations of their fundamental human rights. The Forum recommended that women's conditions be improved through an expansion of employment opportunities; promotion of the professionalization of their traditional skills, arts and crafts; access to resources, including microcredit, and new technologies and agricultural input.<sup>10</sup> The Permanent Forum pointed out at its fifth session, in 2006, that indigenous women continued to face many obstacles and challenges, which included multiple forms of discrimination based on gender, race and ethnicity, as well as the impact of globalization and environmental degradation.<sup>11</sup>

14. In paragraph 40 of the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation it was pointed out that agriculture plays a crucial role in addressing the needs of a growing global population and is inextricably linked to poverty eradication, especially in developing countries. Enhancing the role of women at all levels and in all aspects of rural development, agriculture, nutrition, and food security is imperative. Sustainable agriculture and rural development are essential to the implementation of an integrated approach to increasing food production and enhancing food security and food safety in an environmentally sustainable way. This would include actions at all levels to enhance the participation of women in all aspects of sustainable agriculture and food security and supporting the contribution of men and women in rural planning and development.

15. In addition, in paragraph 67 of the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation the improvement of sustainable agricultural productivity and food security in furtherance of the Millennium Development Goals was recommended. Among the initiatives highlighted were efforts to secure equitable access to land tenure and clarify resource rights and responsibilities through land and tenure reform processes that respect the rule of law and are enshrined in national law; the provision of access to credit for all, especially women, that enable economic and social empowerment and poverty eradication as well as efficient and ecologically sound utilization of land; and initiatives that enable women producers to become decision makers and owners in the sector, including the right to inherit land.

16. At its eighth session, in 2000, the Commission on Sustainable Development, considering the issue of integrated planning and management of land resources, encouraged Governments to develop and/or adopt policies and implement laws that guarantee to their citizens well-defined and enforceable land rights and promote equal access to land and legal security of tenure, in particular for women and disadvantaged groups, including people living in poverty and indigenous and local communities. The Commission urged Governments to promote land-related research, and extension and dissemination of technological information and innovative practices, and to undertake training programmes for land users, including

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<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 2005, *Supplement No. 23* (E/2005/43), paras. 106, 107, 111.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 2006, *Supplement No. 23* (E/2006/43), para. 44.

farmers and agro-food industries, women and local communities.<sup>12</sup> The Commission also encouraged Governments to adopt and implement measures that guarantee access to technology and research, in particular for women, disadvantaged groups, people living in poverty, and indigenous and local communities, in order to ensure a sustainable use of land and water resources. Access to credit, particularly through microcredit schemes was also considered important.<sup>13</sup>

#### **IV. Environmental sustainability**

17. At its forty-first and forty-sixth sessions, the Commission on the Status of Women focused on the need to ensure environmental sustainability and to incorporate a gender perspective in actions and initiatives dealing with the environment. In paragraph 23 of its agreed conclusions 1997/1 on women and the environment, the Commission noted that the knowledge and expertise of women, especially rural and indigenous women, in the use and protection of natural resources should be recognized, consolidated, protected and fully used in the design and implementation of policies and programmes for the management of the environment. In paragraph 8 of its agreed conclusions on environmental management and the mitigation of natural disasters, the Commission called for the integration of a gender perspective into all policies and treaties related to sustainable development.

18. The Johannesburg Plan on Implementation, in paragraph 65, called upon States to deal effectively with natural disasters and conflicts, including their humanitarian and environmental impacts, and recognized that conflicts in Africa have hindered, and in many cases obliterated, the gains and efforts aimed at sustainable development. It recognized that the most vulnerable members of society, including women and children, were the most impacted victims of natural disasters and conflicts.

19. In order to effectively address the adverse affects of natural disasters on women, the Commission on the Status of Women, in paragraph 1 of its agreed conclusions on environmental management and the mitigation of natural disasters, emphasized the need to incorporate a gender perspective in the development and implementation of disaster prevention, mitigation and recovery strategies. The Commission also recalled the resolve in the Millennium Declaration to intensify cooperation to reduce the number and effects of natural and man-made disasters. At its forty-ninth session, in 2005, the Commission adopted a resolution on post-disaster relief, recovery, rehabilitation and reconstruction efforts, including in the aftermath of the Indian Ocean tsunami disaster.<sup>14</sup> It expressed concern that women and children account for the vast majority of those adversely affected by natural disasters and their aftermath and encouraged, inter alia, Governments and relevant bodies of the United Nations system, to implement gender-sensitive, people-centred and community-based approaches, to ensure women's full and equal participation.

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<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 2000, *Supplement No. 9* (E/2000/29), decision 8/3, Integrated planning and management of land resources.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, decision 8/4, Agriculture.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 2005, *Supplement No. 7* (E/2005/27), chap. I.D, resolution 49/5.

20. In paragraph 7 of its agreed conclusions on environmental management and the mitigation of natural disasters the Commission on the Status of Women urged Governments and other stakeholders to take a number of actions to address the needs of women. These include pursuing gender-equality and gender-sensitive environmental management and disaster reduction, response and recovery as an integral part of sustainable development; ensuring the full participation of women in sustainable development decision-making and disaster reduction management at all levels; and taking measures to empower women as producers and consumers in order to enhance the capacity of women to respond to disasters.

21. As indicated in paragraphs 246 and 247 of the Beijing Platform for Action, women have an essential role to play in the development of sustainable and ecologically sound consumption and production patterns and approaches to natural resource management. In both urban and rural areas, however, environmental degradation results in negative effects on the health, well-being and quality of life of the population at large, especially girls and women of all ages. The Johannesburg Plan of Implementation noted in paragraph 42 that mountain ecosystems support particular livelihoods and include significant watershed resources, biological diversity and unique flora and fauna. Actions at all levels are required to develop and implement, where appropriate, gender-sensitive policies and programmes, including public and private investments that help to eliminate inequities facing mountain communities.

22. At its fifteenth session, in 2007, the Commission on Sustainable Development noted that mainstreaming gender issues into energy decision-making processes was high on the list of priorities that enjoyed broad support from Governments.<sup>15</sup> Specific options highlighted in the dialogue included increasing capacity-building, technical training and enterprise development for women; including women in national energy policies and programmes; and investing in energy infrastructure that addressed the concerns of women. It acknowledged in paragraph 8 of the Chairperson's summary the importance of mainstreaming gender considerations, in particular the role of women in management and decision-making, at all levels, and that this was necessary for implementation of the interlinked issues of energy for sustainable development, industrial development, air pollution/atmosphere and climate change. In paragraph 25 of the Chairperson's summary air pollution was seen as having serious adverse impacts on the quality of life, in particular on human health, the environment and the economy. Indoor air pollution from traditional biomass cooking and heating was a poverty-related issue whose effects were most strongly felt by women and children at the household/local level, particularly in developing countries.

23. At its ninth session, in 2001,<sup>16</sup> the Commission on Sustainable Development invited Governments to consider supporting equal access for women to sustainable and affordable energy technologies through needs assessments, energy planning and policy formulation at the local and national levels. In particular, the Commission encouraged Governments to take into consideration the health and safety concerns of women and children in rural energy programmes and to promote efforts to address the disproportionate burdens experienced by women in rural areas, including carrying loads of fuelwood over long distances and suffering adverse

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 2007, *Supplement No. 9* (E/2007/29).

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 2001, *Supplement No. 9* (E/2001/29), decision 9/1, Energy for Sustainable Development.

health effects from prolonged exposure to open fires. The Commission recommended international cooperation in supporting international endeavours to promote equal access and opportunities for women in relation to energy, including credit facilities and involvement in energy policy decision-making processes.

24. In considering the issue of strategic approaches to freshwater management at its sixth session in 1998,<sup>17</sup> the Commission for Sustainable Development pointed out that because women have a particular role in utilizing and conserving water resources on a daily basis, their knowledge and experience should be considered as a component of any sustainable water management programme. The Commission urged Governments to broaden women's participation and integrate gender analysis in water planning. Effective water resources development, management and protection require appropriate tools for ensuring that women, youth, indigenous people and local communities have equal access to education and training programmes. The pivotal role of women should be reflected in institutional arrangements for the development, management, protection and use of water resources. The Commission recognized the need to strengthen the role of women, who should have an equal voice with regard to water resources development, management, protection and use and in the sharing of benefits. The Commission noted that economic instruments for guiding the allocation of water need to recognize the special role of women in relation to water in many societies.

### **Social development, including health and education**

25. The importance of people-centred sustainable development was highlighted in the outcome of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly. It was recognized that policies and programmes should be formulated to achieve the goal of people-centred sustainable development, secure livelihoods and adequate social protection measures, including safety nets, strengthened support systems for families, equal access to and control over financial and economic resources, and to eliminate increasing and disproportionate poverty among women. All economic policies and institutions as well as those responsible for resource allocation should adopt a gender perspective to ensure that development dividends are shared on equal grounds (General Assembly resolution S-23/3, annex, para. 53). The need to undertake socio-economic policies that promote sustainable development and support and ensure poverty eradication programmes, especially for women, by, inter alia, providing skills training, equal access to and control over resources, finance, and credit, including microcredit was stressed (*ibid.*, para. 74 (a)).

26. The Johannesburg Plan of Implementation addressed in paragraph 54 the gender perspectives of health and sustainable development in a number of areas, including, inter alia, the causes of ill health, including environmental causes; the impact of development; ensuring equal access to health-care services, giving particular attention to maternal and emergency obstetric care; promoting healthy living; including reproductive and sexual health; transfer and dissemination of technologies for safe water, sanitation and waste management and rural and urban areas; and reduction of HIV/AIDS. Specific action mentioned in paragraph 56 included the reduction of respiratory diseases and other health impacts resulting

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<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 1998, *Supplement No. 9* (E/1998/29), decision 6/1, Strategic approaches to freshwater management.



from air pollution, with particular attention to women and children, including by assisting developing countries in providing affordable energy to rural communities, particularly to reduce dependence on traditional fuel sources for cooking and heating, which affect the health of women and children.

27. The Beijing Platform for Action stated in paragraph 69 that investing in formal and non-formal education and training for girls and women, with its exceptionally high social and economic return, has proved to be one of the best means of achieving sustainable development and economic growth that is both sustained and sustainable. The Johannesburg Plan of Implementation further recommended in paragraph 120 that gender disparity in education be eliminated by 2015 to meet the development goals contained in the Millennium Declaration, with action to ensure, inter alia, equal access to all levels and forms of education, training and capacity-building by gender mainstreaming, and by creating a gender-sensitive educational system.

28. In its resolution 13/1 adopted at its thirteenth session, in 2005,<sup>18</sup> the Commission on Sustainable Development highlighted in paragraph 3 (a) (iv) the need to involve all stakeholders, particularly women and youth, in the planning and management of water services and, as appropriate, in decision-making processes. The role of women in planning, decision-making and management of sanitation systems was also called for in paragraph 3 (k) (ii). The Commission, in paragraphs 3 (m) (i) and (ii), of the same resolution, urged the support of countries in promoting sanitation and hygiene education and awareness-raising, and in particular, in promoting gender-sensitive sanitation and hygiene education and awareness, and promoting the involvement of women, youth and community groups in sanitation and hygiene education programmes. There was also a call in paragraph 3 (r) (v) for improving access to basic services and land tenure, with particular attention to the equal rights of women. In relation to employment and enterprise promotion, the provision of education and vocational training to women and youth, including to improve their access to decent jobs was also urged in paragraph 3 (s) (iv) of the resolution.

29. The Commission on Sustainable Development noted at its fourteenth session in 2006<sup>19</sup> that including improved education, income opportunities and the social benefits of avoiding premature deaths and poor health for women and children in cost-benefit analyses has provided for more accurate assessments of project potential and viability.

### **Programme planning implementation and monitoring and evaluation**

30. In its agreed conclusions on women and the environment the Commission on the Status of Women called for the integration of a gender perspective through the development and application of analytical tools in designing and implementing environmental programmes and policies. It also noted in paragraph 3 that monitoring and accountability mechanisms needed to be in place to assess gender

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 2005, *Supplement No. 9* (E/2005/29), resolution 13/1, Policy options and practical measures to expedite implementation in water, sanitation and human settlements.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 2006, *Supplement No. 9* (E/2006/29), Chairperson's summary, para. 78.

mainstreaming and its impact. The Commission also urged the international community and United Nations agencies to continue to assist developing countries in developing the capacity to carry out gender impact assessments and in devising analytical tools and gender-sensitive guidelines. The agreed conclusions also urged in paragraph 14 that a gender perspective should be mainstreamed into all environmental impact assessments.

31. In paragraph 15 the Commission further urged Governments, civil society, United Nations agencies and bodies and other international organizations to collect, analyse and disseminate data disaggregated by sex and information related to women and the environment so as to ensure the integration of gender considerations into the development and implementation of sustainable development policies and programmes.

32. In paragraph 16 the Commission also pointed out that the United Nations, international financial institutions, Governments and civil society should apply a gender perspective in all funding programmes for sustainable development. Strengthening or establishing mechanisms at the national, regional and international levels to assess the impact of development and environmental policies on women was also recommended in the Beijing Platform for Action. The Platform recommended, in paragraph 258, developing gender-sensitive databases, information and monitoring systems and research on the knowledge and experience on the part of women concerning the management and conservation of natural resources for incorporation in the databases and information systems for sustainable development. It was also recommended in paragraph 254 that consideration and impact of gender perspectives be taken into account in the work of the Commission on Sustainable Development and other appropriate United Nations bodies and in the activities of international financial institutions.

33. The Monterrey Consensus<sup>20</sup> called upon Governments to mainstream a gender perspective into development at all levels and in all sectors. It called for gender-sensitive investments in basic economic and social infrastructure, especially ones that are fully inclusive of the rural sector, in recognition of the importance of social and economic aspects in combating poverty and ensuring sustainable development. The Consensus also recognized the importance of microfinance and microcredit schemes, including in rural areas, particularly for women, and advocated capacity-building and gender budget policies in developing countries (A/58/167, para. 26).

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<sup>20</sup> *Report of the International Conference on Financing for Development, Monterrey, Mexico, 18-22 March 2002* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.02.II.A.7), chap. I, resolution 1, annex.