

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

**Emerging issues, trends and new approaches to issues affecting the situation of women or
equality between women and men**

“Key gender equality issues to be reflected in the post-2015 development framework”

Thursday, 7 March 2013, 3-6pm

ISSUES PAPER

I. Introduction

In accordance with its methods of work (ECOSOC resolution 2006/9), the Commission on the Status of Women identifies an emerging issue requiring increased attention for consideration, taking into account developments at the global and regional levels, as well as planned activities within the United Nations. At its fifty-seventh session, the Commission will consider “Key gender equality issues to be reflected in the post-2015 development framework”.

In late 2011, the (then) President of the Economic and Social Council invited Chairs of functional commissions to solicit the views of their membership on the key issues that should find their place in the post-2015 agenda. The contributions by the functional commissions will be compiled into a report and discussed at a meeting of the Council in 2013, and will form the core of the Council’s input to a special event to take place during the General Assembly’s sixty-eighth session in 2013. The outcome of the discussion will serve as the Commission’s input to ECOSOC.

II. Background

As the 2015 target date for achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) approaches, a number of processes are under way among Member States, the UN system, academia, policymakers and civil society to reflect on the post-2015 development framework. Related to these reflections is work towards the development of sustainable development goals, which have been called for by the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, in June 2012. The outcome document of the Conference noted that sustainable development goals should be concise and easy to communicate, limited in number, aspirational, global and universally applicable to all countries. They should be coherent with and integrated into the United Nations development agenda beyond 2015.

The Secretary-General established a UN System Task Team to support system-wide preparations for the post-2015 UN development agenda, in consultation with all stakeholders, including Member States, civil society, academia and the private sector. It brings together over 60 UN entities and agencies and international organizations and supports the multi-stakeholder consultations by providing analytical inputs, expertise and outreach. The Secretary-General also appointed a High-level Panel of Eminent Persons on the post-2015 Development Agenda to advise on the global development framework beyond 2015.

The MDG Taskforce of the UN Development Group has initiated national and thematic consultations. The national consultations are led by Resident Coordinators and UN Country Teams; eleven thematic consultations are taking place over several months and are being co-led by UN entities.¹

In the fall of 2012, the General Assembly reiterated that the full, effective and accelerated implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the outcome of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly are essential to achieving the internationally agreed development goals, including the Millennium Development Goals. In this regard, the Assembly called for the goal of gender equality and the empowerment of women to feature prominently in the discussions of the post-2015 development framework, bearing in mind the importance of mainstreaming a gender perspective.²

III. Critical issues

The current Millennium Development Goals framework, which is based on the Millennium Declaration, has succeeded in galvanizing unprecedented global efforts to end poverty. Countries have made undeniable progress towards achieving some of the goals set out in the MDGs framework, particularly in reducing extreme poverty, increasing access to improved sources of drinking water, improving conditions for people living in slums, and achieving gender parity in primary school attendance.

Nevertheless, despite the critical inclusion of MDG 3 on promoting gender equality and women's empowerment, it is widely acknowledged that the current MDGs framework has not been able to effectively address the underlying structural causes of gender inequality and the multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination experienced by women and girls around the world. Numerous reports have attributed uneven progress on the MDGs to the persistence of intersecting inequalities, both across and within countries and regions.³ In addition to inequalities between men and women, inequalities that exist among women, on the basis of class, race/ethnicity, rural/urban location among others, also serve as obstacles to the realization of goals.

The most recent annual report on the progress of the MDGs noted that women remain disadvantaged in many fields, particularly in terms of access to decent employment opportunities in the formal sector, productive resources, sexual and reproductive health care and participation in political decision-making.⁴ The scourge of violence against women and girls, including conflict-related sexual violence, continues to serve as a major obstacle to the achievement of all the MDGs.

¹ National consultations are taking place in over 60 countries. Thematic consultations cover the following themes: inequalities; population; health; education; growth and employment; conflict and fragility; governance; environmental sustainability; food security and nutrition; energy; and water.

² A/RES/67/148

³ United Nations (2012), The Millennium Development Goals Report.

⁴ A/67/257, Report of the Secretary-General on "Accelerating progress towards the Millennium Development Goals: Options for sustained and inclusive growth and issues for advancing the United Nations development agenda beyond 2015"

The MDGs framework, with its focus on aggregate progress and the use of national averages to evaluate progress, masks these complex social and economic disparities. The lack of sex disaggregated data, particularly on MDG 1 on eradicating extreme poverty and MDG 7 on ensuring environmental sustainability, has further challenged effective measurement of the extent of these inequalities and the resulting social exclusion experienced by marginalized populations. The MDGs also lack sufficient gender-sensitive targets and indicators. While the Beijing Platform for Action contains 12 critical areas of concern, MDG 3 on gender equality has only one target on eliminating gender disparity in education.

An additional critique of the current MDG framework has focused on the fact that the goals do not reflect the transformative dimensions of the Millennium Declaration from which they are derived. The Declaration reaffirmed the commitments of Member States to international human rights law and treaties on sustainable development, as well as to the principles of freedom, equality, tolerance, shared responsibility, protecting the vulnerable, human rights, democracy and good governance. However, these principles were not fully reflected in the goals.

Given the above-mentioned short-comings of the current MDGs framework to address today's complex spectrum of global challenges, the Secretary-General has initiated a wide range of consultative processes to promote dialogue on the possible shape and content of a post-2015 development framework. In its 2012 report, *Realizing the Future We Want for All*,⁵ the UN System Task Team proposes a vision for transformative change that is based on inclusive, people-centred, sustainable development. The Task Team envisions a future framework that is built on the core values of human rights, equality and sustainability, and is organized along a holistic approach that incorporates four key dimensions: inclusive social development; inclusive economic development; environmental sustainability; and peace and security.

In November 2012, UN Women hosted an Expert Group Meeting (EGM) where the participants reflected upon the achievements and shortcomings of the MDGs from a gender perspective, as well as their vision for a post-2015 development agenda. The participants argued that given the potential scope of a transformative agenda designed to address the structural barriers to development, one of the guiding principles should be gender equality. There was also consensus that the new framework should be based on and consistent with existing international norms and standards on gender equality, as well as be coherent with the three dimensions of sustainable development (economic, environmental and social).

There is wide consensus that the process for developing the post-2015 development agenda should be participatory, inclusive, transparent and underpinned by a clear accountability framework. Furthermore, it will be important for the post-2015 agenda to articulate a clear accountability framework within and among countries that is applicable to relevant rights holders and duty bearers, including citizens, governments, the private sector, civil society and international organizations. Women are key agents of change, and they should not only be central players in the development of the post-2015 framework, but also central actors in its implementation, monitoring and evaluation. While present limits on data must be addressed, the new framework has the potential to serve as a driver for the collection and analysis of new and

⁵ http://www.un.org/en/development/desa/policy/untaskteam_undf/report.shtml

existing data. If the new development framework includes goals and targets, the choice of indicators should be driven by the most pressing issues, and not by current data availability.

A number of high priority issues for women were not included in the MDGs framework, such as the epidemic of violence against women. In addition, women have been heavily impacted by the global crises that have arisen or intensified since the establishment of the MDGs, including the global financial and economic crisis, climate change and the food and fuel crises. The new development framework will therefore need to be able to address pressing and emerging issues for women that require urgent action, some of which include: macroeconomic policies; access to decent and productive work; equal access to and control over resources; access to universal and gender-sensitive social protection and high quality public services; freedom from fear and violence; sexual and reproductive rights; women's agency and governance; and the achievement of sustainable development. Attention to these priority issues can also trigger progress in a number of other areas related to gender equality and women's empowerment, as well as contribute to stable, equitable and inclusive growth and sustainable and human development.

If the new post-2015 development framework is to include a set of goals, targets and indicators, one way to ensure that gender equality and women's empowerment is fully incorporated in the framework would be to include a specific goal on gender equality, and with gender-sensitive indicators mainstreamed across all the other goals. The new goal would need to be transformative and address the structural determinants of gender inequality in the economic, social, political, and environmental realms.

IV. Format and outcome of the interactive discussion

The discussion on the emerging issue will be launched by introductory presentations of 7 to 8 minutes to provide overviews on the current status and expectations. The ensuing dialogue will be summarized and submitted by the Chair as the Commission's input to the ECOSOC's own work on the post-2015 development framework. Representatives of Member States and non-governmental organizations will be encouraged to share their vision, expectations, proposals and perspectives for the integration of a gender perspective in the post-2015 agenda. Interventions from the floor will be limited to three minutes. A discussant will synthesize the comments and contribute guiding questions in the course of the discussion, as appropriate. The moderator's summary will be posted on the website of UN Women, and the panel discussion will also be available via live webcast.

V. Issues for consideration in the interactive discussion

The Commission has the opportunity to exercise its catalytic role in ensuring that intergovernmental discussions on the post-2015 development framework consistently and systematically integrate a gender perspective, contribute to the accelerated achievement of the goal of gender equality and the empowerment of women, and contribute to enhanced accountability for progress.

The following issues could be considered:

- What key principles should underpin the post-2015 development framework to ensure it is conducive to the achievement of gender equality and the empowerment of women?
- What specific aspects should be captured in a gender equality goal so that it can be more encompassing and inclusive than the current MDG3?
- How should gender equality best be integrated into a sustainable development agenda?
- What could be some of the concrete targets and indicators that would help to promote accountability and increase the effectiveness of gender equality measures?