



Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
9 November 2015

Original: English

Commission on the Status of Women

Sixtieth session

14-24 March 2016

Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and to the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly entitled “Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century”

Statement submitted by World Association of Girl Guides and Girl Scouts, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council*

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

* The present statement is issued without formal editing.



Statement

Looking Back on Progress Made and Promises Unfulfilled

As we mark the conclusion of the Millennium Development Agenda, as well as the 21st anniversary of the Beijing Platform for Action, it must be acknowledged that many of the grand promises made in these documents remain unfulfilled. Despite some hard-won gains toward gender equality in the past twenty years, the pace of development has been painfully slow and uneven, particularly for adolescent girls. Girls remain the group that has received the least attention and experienced the least progress since the adoption of the Beijing Platform for Action in 1995 or the adoption of the Millennium Development Goals in 2000. Adolescent girls still face staggeringly high rates of physical and sexual violence, and continue to lag behind in their access to education, health care, and opportunity.

As we move forward into the new era of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, therefore, ‘business as usual’ will not be sufficient. The 2030 Agenda must be taken as an opportunity for renewed, deepened commitment, and a call for stronger, bolder action, to create a more just and equitable world in which all girls are able to fulfil their potential.

The following sections set out firstly, the World Association of Girl Guides and Girl Scouts’ response to the 2030 Agenda, and secondly, our recommendations for implementation to translate this ambitious framework into tangible progress in the lives of girls and women.

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development: A Reaction

Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development represents an agreement of unprecedented scope, setting out a far-reaching and ambitious collection of goals to structure our collective efforts to combat poverty, inequality, and injustice.

As the leading voluntary organization for girls and young women, with 10 million Girl Guides and Girl Scouts in 146 countries, the World Association of Girl Guides and Girl Scouts celebrates the agreement of this document and the potential it represents for transformative change in the lives of girls and women. The World Association of Girl Guides and Girl Scouts particularly welcomes:

- the explicit recognition within the Declaration that gender equality is critical to progress on all other goals
- the existence of a stand-alone goal on gender equality that includes specific targets on the elimination of violence against women and girls
- the ways in which gender issues have been mainstreamed and highlighted throughout the large majority of the other goals and targets
- the explicit commitment to ensuring that all follow-up and review processes be “people-centred, gender-sensitive...and have a particular focus on the poorest, most vulnerable and those furthest behind.”

Yet while there is much to commend in 2030 Agenda, there are several areas in which the Agenda falls short.

Within the Sustainable Development Goals and targets, the World Association of Girl Guides and Girl Scouts remains concerned about the allowance for implementation of certain targets on gender equality as ‘nationally appropriate’ — noticeably in targets 1.3, 5.4, and 5.6.a around social protection policies, care work, and women’s access to land and other economic resources. The World Association of Girl Guides and Girl Scouts is disappointed to see the inclusion of this language, which substantially undercuts and weakens the ambition of these targets, and opens the door to continued discrimination against girls and women. Girls’ and women’s rights should not be contingent to or subject to national context; rather, the sustainable development framework should do more to advance its stated ambition to achieve the human rights of all.

And within the pillars on Means of Implementation and Follow-up and Review, the World Association of Girl Guides and Girl Scouts is generally disheartened by the failure to recognize the importance of participatory implementation and evaluation processes that substantively engage women and girls. The Means of Implementation pillar of the Agenda, for example, contains no reference to women, girls, or youth. The World Association of Girl Guides and Girl Scouts is disappointed that the importance of citizen-led development — particularly youth-led and girl-led development — is not acknowledged here. And while the Follow-up and Review pillar does contain welcome language on people-centred, gender-sensitive monitoring, as mentioned above, this pillar is weakened by not setting out concrete processes to engage civil society in data-gathering and implementation. Robust engagement of civil society is critical to the establishment of the kind of strong accountability mechanisms necessary to deliver on such an ambitious agenda (International Center for Research on Women, 2015).

In reflecting on what is absent from the 2030 Agenda, it becomes clear that, in many ways, the Beijing Platform for Action remains a more bold and far-reaching document, and sets out a vision for gender equality that remains the most progressive of any global political commitment of the past 20 years. The new 2030 Agenda therefore must not be allowed to displace or overshadow the Beijing Platform for Action. Rather, implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action must remain a priority for all countries, and governments should still be held accountable for promises made 20 years ago in Beijing. While the 2030 Agenda does represent a new beginning, implementation of this Agenda should build on, integrate, and continue the work and commitments that began in Beijing.

Transitioning from Rhetoric to Reality: Recommendations

The challenge now lies in implementing the ambitious 2030 Agenda — in translating the aspirational rhetoric of the Sustainable Development Goals into real progress, particularly in the lives of the most vulnerable and marginalized.

The World Association of Girl Guides and Girl Scouts **recommendations to deliver real change for girls and young women include:**

Measure what matters

Most immediately, we now need a robust framework of indicators that adequately captures the expansive spirit of the Sustainable Development Goals. One of the most significant flaws of the Millennium Development Goals was the reliance on overly narrow and reductive indicators that did not sufficiently represent

complex goals such as gender equality. As the Inter-Agency and Expert Group on the Sustainable Development Goal Indicators continues to formulate the indicator framework that will be used to measure progress against the Sustainable Development Goals, it is critical that the Group allow multiple indicators per target and take seriously the recommendations of civil society organizations on the language and nature of these indicators. Multiple indicators are particularly necessary on goals such as gender equality, which require multi-dimensional change at a variety of levels, from the individual to the institutional.

It is equally essential that, for all targets, data is disaggregated by both age and gender (among other variables) so that girls' needs are visibly captured in all monitoring. The 2030 Agenda offers a critical impetus to revive Beijing commitments to address key data gaps — particularly around girls' experiences — by strengthening national capacities to systematically collect and analyse gender statistics.

Invest in girls

In recent years, there has been increasing interest in and recognition of the multiple benefits of investing in programming for adolescent girls. However, at present, the rhetorical commitment to girls is not matched by actual investment levels. Today, fewer than two cents of every international development dollar goes to girls (Chaaban & Cunningham, 2011). Moving forward, governments must ensure adequate financial commitments are made to programmes that address girls' needs, either through domestic resources and/or official development assistance. International development agencies must similarly commit more substantial levels of resources to specialized programmes aimed at girls and young women.

Governments should also commit generally to implementing gender-responsive budgeting to ensure that investments in all sectors deliver real benefits for girls and women.

Combat discriminatory norms and practices, especially violence against women and girls

One of the innovative strengths of the Beijing Platform for Action was its recognition of the role of discriminatory laws, beliefs and practices in driving gender inequalities. Such recognition was sorely lacking in the Millennium Development Goals and has consequently been largely absent from follow-up reviews and discussions. With a renewed commitment within the 2030 Agenda to ending all forms of discrimination against women, it will be critical that national governments and development agencies commit to reforming the cultural and institutional practices that systematically disadvantage and harm girls and women.

Particular attention must be paid to the continuing global pandemic of violence against women and girls. Currently at least 35 per cent of women worldwide will experience either physical and/or sexual violence within their lifetime (WHO, 2014). Young women are particularly vulnerable, with up to 50 per cent of all sexual assaults committed against girls under 16 (UNFPA, 2003).

Any efforts to empower women or create a sustainable, equitable society first require concerted action to address these unacceptably high rates of violence against girls and women. Governments and development agencies must take steps to combat

gender-based violence, in accordance with the recommendations laid out in the agreed conclusions from the 57th Commission on the Status of Women (UN-Women, 2013). The World Association of Girl Guides and Girl Scouts particularly highlights the importance of programmes that provide:

- prevention education for both boys and girls that will begin to address rigid gender norms and attitudes on the acceptability of violence (B.11)
- robust protection and support services for survivors, including practical and emotional support, as well as improved access to justice (A.c)

Such programmes must be adequately financed through dedicated, ring-fenced resources and backed by genuine commitment to address the scourge of violence against women and girls.

Build the capacity of girls and young women to participate in and drive change

Finally, girls and young women must be considered more than just the objects or beneficiaries of the new development agenda — they must be active participants and agents of change. For this to happen, it will be essential to adopt a rights-based approach to development in which girls and young women are:

- educated through both formal and non-formal channels about the enactment of the 2030 Agenda and their rights and entitlements
- substantively involved and consulted in the design and implementation of national action plans and non-governmental programming
- empowered to advocate for change and hold governments and other duty-bearers to account

While the 2030 Agenda is not without flaws, it represents an historic document that has the potential to deliver significant positive change for girls and women. The key challenge now is to turn rhetoric into reality and to deliver on the promises made. Governments and development agencies must commit substantial resources and attention to girls' programming and, more importantly, listen to girls' voices on how those resources can be best allocated to address the structural causes of gender inequality and enable girls to reach their full potential. Girls are the experts on their own needs and lived experience and can make a genuine contribution to the success of the 2030 Agenda if given the tools and the spaces to do so. In order to effect real change in the lives of girls and women around the world, we must equip and empower them to be the drivers and agents of the 2030 Agenda.