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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”: women’s empowerment and the link to sustainable development

Women’s empowerment and the link to sustainable development

Chairs’ summary

1. On 13 and 14 March 2019, in a series of interactive dialogues, the Commission on the Status of Women evaluated progress in the implementation of the agreed conclusions on the priority theme of its sixtieth session, namely, women’s empowerment and the link to sustainable development (see [E/CN.6/2019/4](#)). The Vice-Chairs of the Commission, Koki Muli Grignon (Kenya) and Rena Tasuja (Estonia), chaired the interactive dialogues.
2. As part of the review, the following 12 Member States presented information, on a voluntary basis, on trends and challenges faced and actions and initiatives taken towards the gender-responsive implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, followed by questions and comments by their partners:¹ Italy (Bulgaria and Mexico), Qatar (Iraq and Ghana), Spain (Argentina and Portugal), Philippines (Australia and Thailand), Egypt (United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women) and European Union), Bulgaria (Italy, Austria and Singapore), Cabo Verde (Spain and Uruguay), Honduras (Dominican Republic and Panama), Panama (El Salvador, Dominican Republic and Honduras), Saudi Arabia (United Arab Emirates and Maldives), Slovakia (Namibia and Luxembourg) and Algeria (Cuba).
3. The officer-in-charge of economic empowerment of UN-Women, Seemin Qayum, presented the report of the Secretary-General on the review theme ([E/CN.6/2019/4](#)), which was based on input from 49 Member States and other information. In the report, measures were identified that aimed at achieving gender

¹ Indicated in parentheses after the presenting Member State.



equality and the empowerment of women and girls in the context of sustainable development by strengthening normative, legal and policy frameworks, fostering enabling environments for gender-responsive financing, strengthening women's leadership and participation in decision-making, strengthening gender-responsive data collection, follow-up and review processes and enhancing national institutional arrangements.

Strengthening normative, legal and policy frameworks

4. All the countries giving voluntary national presentations reported progress on strengthening normative, legal and policy frameworks. They reaffirmed the alignment of national development strategies with the 2030 Agenda and in support of the implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. Participants highlighted new and existing laws, policies and action plans on violence against women, including with respect to the provision of assistance, protection and women's shelters and crisis centres for victims of domestic violence, trafficking and sexual harassment; the introduction of stricter punitive measures and the rehabilitation of perpetrators; and the criminalization of sexual harassment and female genital mutilation. In addition, the issue of femicide was the focus of a number of legal and policy measures.

5. Member States have enacted laws and policies that promote women's participation in the world of work, work-life balance and public services for working mothers and families with children. Measures included incentives for the recruitment and retention of women in the public and private sectors and greater flexibility with regard to the uptake of paid maternity and paternity leave. Bulgaria, for example, allows up to 59 weeks of paid maternity leave and 15 days of paid paternity leave; after an infant reaches 6 months of age, mothers may transfer their paid leave to fathers. Some participants reported providing free health care for parents and children, as well as sexual and reproductive health care and childcare services in public institutions. Participants highlighted laws that ensure equal opportunities for entrepreneurship and for education and equal pay for work of equal value. Cabo Verde removed the barrier that prevented pregnant girls from going to school. Participants also reported amending inheritance laws in favour of equality for women and passing anti-discrimination laws, thereby advancing economic empowerment for all women, including indigenous women and women belonging to minority groups.

Fostering enabling environments for financing gender equality

6. Noting the impact of financing on women's economic empowerment, participants reinforced the need to increase financing for gender equality in line with the Addis Ababa Action Agenda of the Third International Conference on Financing for Development. Several countries highlighted the implementation of gender-responsive budgeting policies. Honduras and Saudi Arabia make specific allocations in national planning and budgeting for the promotion of gender equality and for gender mainstreaming. The Philippine Commission on Women oversees public plans and budgets to ensure that support is provided for issues relating to gender and development, and conducts annual audits. Many presentations discussed ways in which Governments and partners promote access to credit for women-owned micro-, small and medium-sized enterprises and cash transfer programmes or subsidies for childcare services and early and continuing education. Algeria subsidizes education from the elementary to university levels, allowing girls from poor families to continue their studies. Spain, Italy, Qatar and others emphasized the role of official development assistance and South-South cooperation, which has been instrumental in

strengthening gender mainstreaming and targeting action towards women's economic empowerment and opportunities for decent work.

Strengthening women's leadership and participation in decision-making

7. Member States highlighted significant advances in women's representation in politics. Many countries underlined their support for women's participation in public life, including subsidies to support women in politics as well as protection and services for women who are victims of political violence. Many more women now hold political office, either through appointment or election, as a result of quotas or other relevant measures. Saudi Arabia recently appointed its first woman ambassador. Member State support for women's leadership and participation in the economy was similarly stressed. Some participants reported promoting women's representation in senior positions within the private sector, while others described making active efforts to support women's economic rights and decision-making and to eliminate barriers to women's entrepreneurship.

8. Participants emphasized their financial and other support to civil society organizations, including their commitments to protecting human rights defenders. Slovakia provides financial support to non-governmental organizations that promote gender equality. Several Member States invited representatives from civil society to contribute to the voluntary presentations during the interactive dialogues, highlighting the productive and successful partnerships between Governments and women's civil society organizations.

Strengthening gender-responsive data collection, follow-up and review processes

9. Participants reported progress on strategies to improve the regular collection, analysis and dissemination of sex-disaggregated data in national development frameworks, in line with the Sustainable Development Goals, including by strengthening the capacity of national statistical offices. Egypt established a dedicated national gender observatory in 2017 to provide comprehensive data on gender indicators, metadata and infographics. Participants reported collaborating with international mechanisms to support the generation of data and statistics on women's rights and empowerment and using gender-responsive budgeting to fund the collection and analysis of sex-disaggregated data. Countries also emphasized the engagement of local government and partners to assist with gender-responsive data collection and monitoring.

Enhancing national institutional arrangements

10. Countries reported on concrete steps taken to bolster national gender equality mechanisms and other institutional arrangements for the empowerment of women and girls. Some countries have established or strengthened gender equality departments and gender mainstreaming across governmental agencies and sectors, notably in public education and in training for public officials on gender-based violence. Special attention has been paid to the concept of leaving no one behind, including the establishment of national councils for women and men with disabilities and, as in Panama, the promotion of national mechanisms that reach rural and indigenous women.

Challenges and gaps

11. Member States identified challenges and gaps that should be addressed in order for progress to be made in achieving the 2030 Agenda:

(a) Whereas laws and policies concerning gender equality and women's empowerment have been enacted or reformed, enforcement efforts need to be strengthened in order for change to be effected on the ground;

(b) Difficulties in reaching women in marginalized and underserved areas, especially women in rural and remote areas, need to be overcome;

(c) More participatory approaches to the gender-responsive implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals are needed, such as innovative public awareness-raising and the engagement of men and boys;

(d) Funding for gender equality and women's empowerment needs to be increased through local and national sources, as well as through international bilateral and multilateral finance mechanisms.
