



Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
27 March 2014

Original: English

Commission on the Status of Women

Fifty-eighth session

10-21 March 2014

Agenda item 3 (a) (i)

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”: Implementation of strategic objectives and action in critical areas of concern and further actions and initiatives: priority theme: challenges and achievements in the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals for women and girls

Challenges and achievements in the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals for women and girls

Moderator’s summary

1. On 12 March 2014, the Commission on the Status of Women held a panel discussion on the priority theme of the fifty-eighth session of the Commission on the Status of Women, “Challenges and achievements in the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals for women and girls”. The Vice-Chair of the Commission, Christine Löw, moderated the discussion. The panellists were: the Senior Policy Adviser, Ipas Malawi, Chrispine Gwalawala Sibande; the Chair, Global Water Partnership, Ursula Schäfer-Preuss; the Executive Director, Center for Women’s Global Leadership, Rutgers University, Radhika Balakrishnan; member and Rapporteur, Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, Virginia Gomes; and the Director, Social Protection Department, International Labour Organization, Isabel Ortiz. Representatives of Member States, regional groups and civil society contributed to the discussion.

2. Participants in the interactive expert panel identified a number of achievements, challenges and gaps in implementing the Millennium Development Goals for women and girls and highlighted their perspective on priorities for consideration in the post-2015 development agenda. The discussion highlighted examples of good practices, lessons learned and the challenges in meeting the Millennium Development Goals for women and girls.



Progress and challenges in achieving the Millennium Development Goals for women and girls

3. Many participants noted that progress had been made in achieving some of the Millennium Development Goals for women and girls, especially in terms of the targets for universal access to primary education. Those achievements had been reached as a result of efforts such as making primary education free for all children. Participants also noted that progress had been made in areas not monitored by the Millennium Development Goals, for example, through the adoption of laws and policies that contributed to gender equality, women's empowerment and the human rights of women and girls, such as laws on women's sexual and reproductive health, on equality between women and men, on child marriage and on ending violence against women.

4. Significant gaps and challenges remained, however. The pace of progress towards achievement of many targets for women and girls remained unacceptably slow. Participants expressed concern that many of the goals that had not been achieved were the goals most relevant to gender equality and women's empowerment. Participants also highlighted that progress on the Millennium Development Goals had been slow owing to the lack of coherence between the targets of the Goals and international human rights standards. For example, some participants noted the serious challenges in reaching the goal related to maternal mortality because of the absence of a comprehensive approach to sexual and reproductive health and rights. Other participants highlighted that, while they had achieved some targets, that progress had not translated into gender equality in other areas and had not shifted structural gender inequalities.

5. One of the key challenges raised in the discussion related to the multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination that women faced. Lack of attention to such multiple discrimination had contributed to stark gaps in achievement of the Millennium Development Goals for the most marginalized groups of women and girls. Such discrimination against women included the particular experiences of indigenous women, rural women, older women and girls, women with disabilities, and women from sexual minorities. Participants noted that while those women were often the hardest to reach through policy and programme interventions, they also had a key role to play in development through their crucial contributions to economic, political and social life.

6. Many participants acknowledged that pervasive gender inequality was related to the lack of attention within the Millennium Development Goal framework to underlying contexts of discrimination in society, as well as structural economic, political and social constraints. That encompassed the lack of implementation or enforcement of laws, discriminatory social norms, and pervasive gender stereotypes. Participants noted that that lack of attention to structural causes might be because the choice of Millennium Development Goal indicators had led to narrow policy approaches.

A human rights-based approach to development

7. Many participants agreed that a human rights perspective was necessary, both for the acceleration of the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals for women and girls and for framing the post-2015 development agenda. Attention to women's human rights should be informed by and grounded in existing international

agreements, such as the Beijing Platform for Action and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. Despite the existence of international declarations, goals and targets, inclusive development could not be realized if countries faced a lack of political will to address gender equality and women's empowerment issues. Men and women needed to work together for the realization of those goals by formulating and implementing development and economic policies that transformed women's lives.

8. Participants emphasized that human rights standards and principles should underpin monitoring and accountability for gender equality and women's human rights. The Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights set out the immediate obligation of non-discrimination and equality in the realization of economic, social and cultural rights that were particularly relevant for the Millennium Development Goals. Indicators of the post-2015 development agenda should align with the realization of those rights. That included the need for a consistent approach to the participation of rights holders in all aspects of decision-making and the accountability of duty bearers. Human rights principles such as the use of maximum available resources and non-retrogression should also guide policymaking.

9. It was suggested that, while human rights had become a global normative framework, it was necessary to embed a culture of human rights at all levels to achieve transformational change in the lives of women and girls, whether international, regional, national or local. Policymakers should incorporate the principles of human rights into all of their work. Key to developing that culture of human rights was the implementation of existing legal and policy institutions. The laws to protect women's human rights and the policies that contributed to gender equality must be comprehensively implemented at all levels.

Resource allocation, gender-responsive budgeting and social protection

10. Macroeconomic policies, including monetary and financial sector regulations, set the broad parameters within which resources could be mobilized for public social expenditure. In order to achieve the Millennium Development Goals and to ensure that States were accountable for their commitments to those Goals, it was important to focus on the tracking of budgets and the availability and distribution of resources for gender equality. Gender responsive budgeting was raised as an important tool that could be implemented by all countries to ensure that resources were committed to the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals for women and girls.

11. It was necessary to look not only at how budgets were allocated but also how resources were mobilized, by assessing taxation policies, trade policies and fiscal policies. Governments should be held accountable for the management of resources to ensure that dedicated resources and budgets were being effectively spent. Often the failure to address economic, social and cultural rights of women was not necessarily a result of a lack of resources, but instead a lack of prioritization and proper distribution of resources. In addition to considering the allocation of existing resources, it was important to consider resource generation and the possibility of changes in the policies that generated resources.

12. Although the provision of a social protection floor was an essential tool to fight poverty and promote inclusive development, the fulfilment of economic and social rights was often not realized and not given sufficient priority by policymakers.

At the same time, several participants noted that social protection had been a key strategy in many countries for meeting Millennium Development Goal targets. Numerous country experiences provided examples of good practices in promoting social protection, such as maternity benefits, as well as universal access to essential services, such as health care and education. Lessons learned could be shared among countries and with the international community to promote future development strategies that addressed the delivery of inclusive social protection services.

13. The macroeconomic context had a significant impact on fiscal policies. The immediate response to the 2008 crisis by many countries was to put in place new social protection measures or to strengthen already existing ones in order to protect the population from the economic and social fallouts of the crisis, including mass unemployment and precariousness of jobs. Since 2010, however, the trend had been reversed, with austerity measures taking hold in various regions. Cuts in social spending as a result of austerity measures often translated into a reduction in opportunities for vulnerable populations as well as a shift in the burden of caring from the paid to the unpaid economy disproportionately assumed by women and girls.

14. The investment in social protection infrastructure had long-term effects on stabilizing a society and on contributing to its development. Participants suggested that in times of crisis in particular, social protection measures should be strengthened rather than reduced, in order to guard vulnerable population groups from its most adverse effects. Realization of the right to social security needed to be enforced for all, especially women, who often shouldered both paid and unpaid work in sustaining their households. Similarly, women's participation in decision-making at all levels was essential to ensure that social protection addressed gender-specific needs.

Lack of sex-disaggregated data and a focus on data collection

15. Gender statistics were essential to inform policy formulation and to hold actors accountable for results with respect to gender equality and women's empowerment. Significant efforts had been made towards the formulation of measurement frameworks, including goals, targets and indicators for monitoring progress. Participants called for a focus on the compilation of sex-disaggregated data and the production of gender statistics, to inform proper planning based on adequate gender analysis.

16. Baselines were also necessary to set up specific targets in the context of a post-2015 development framework. Therefore, participants suggested that national statisticians should work with the international statistical community to promote the collection of sex-disaggregated and gender relevant data that was internationally comparable and of quality. Civil society could also play a key role to advocate for evidence-based decision-making in the context of inclusive policy formulation and financial allocations.

Women in crisis and conflict situations

17. Participants noted that data was particularly scarce in countries suffering from conflict and natural disasters. Given their special needs, those countries faced significant challenges in achieving the Millennium Development Goals. Therefore they might require targets that differed from the globally agreed benchmarks. Similarly, conflict and post-conflict countries might benefit from specific indicators on women, peace and security that better captured their realities and allowed for

context-specific policy formulation. Issues such as violence and women's participation in conflict resolution should be included in future development frameworks and national development strategies for that specific group of countries. The collection of gender statistics in that context was extremely relevant and could serve as an advocacy tool for social protection even in situations of instability when national resources were limited.

18. The growing concentration of displaced people and victims of conflict also required further analysis. For example, displaced women and girls were significantly more vulnerable to violence and were often denied the right to participate in decision-making, to legal assistance and to gain access to quality reproductive health services and education. All those issues needed to be taken into account and, despite their context-specific nature, should be included in the post-2015 development agenda.

A stand-alone goal on gender equality and gender mainstreaming

19. Participants expressed wide support for a stand-alone goal on gender equality in the post-2015 development agenda as a necessary component to ensure sustainable development. A new goal on gender equality should address the shortcomings of the Millennium Development Goal framework, including the failure to address violence against women, women's sexual and reproductive health, women's access to assets, women in conflict and post-conflict zones, and women's paid and unpaid work. Some participants noted that while goals and targets should be tailored to the national context, a stand-alone goal should address the underlying forms of discrimination and inequality that women experienced.

20. In addition to a stand-alone goal on gender equality, most participants in the discussion agreed that gender mainstreaming throughout the post-2015 development agenda was a key priority. Gender equality considerations should be included in each indicator for each goal. That would promote the systemic incorporation of gender perspectives across the post-2015 agenda. Further work should be undertaken to mainstream gender perspectives throughout the Millennium Development Goal framework to ensure that gender equality considerations were addressed in each goal and target.
