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Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and to the 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

Discussion guide for the high-level round table on the challenges and achievements in the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals for women and girls

Note by the Secretariat

I. Introduction

1. At its fiftieth session, in 2006, the Commission on the Status of Women decided that an annual interactive high-level round table would focus on experiences, lessons learned and good practices in relation to the implementation of previous commitments made with regard to the priority theme of the annual session (Economic and Social Council resolution 2006/9, para. 3).

II. Organizational matters

A. Theme

2. The high-level round table will focus 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” (Economic and Social Council resolution 2009/15, para. 2 (e)).



B. Participants

3. The high-level round table provides an opportunity for high-level representatives of Member States attending the fifty-eighth session of the Commission to engage in dialogue and share experiences and lessons learned. The representatives may include ministers for women's affairs, heads of national mechanisms for gender equality, and senior officials from other relevant ministries, such as those of development, health, education, agriculture, labour, justice, trade, industry, energy and the environment, finance and foreign affairs, as well as national statistical offices. The round table will be open to all Member States and observers.

C. Timing

4. The high-level round table will be held at United Nations Headquarters in New York on Monday, 10 March 2014, from 3 to 6 p.m.

D. Format

5. To allow for interactions among as many participants as possible, the round table will be conducted simultaneously in two parallel meetings on the same theme.

6. The Chairs of the two parallel meetings will guide the discussions with a view to promoting the interactive nature of the round table. Interventions shall not exceed three minutes. Speakers will be encouraged to ask questions and offer comments on interventions made during the dialogue. Written statements are strongly discouraged.

7. A senior official from an entity of the United Nations system and a representative of civil society will provide comments at the end of the dialogue. The Chairs will then close the meetings.

E. Outcome

8. The outcome of the high-level round table will be a summary by the Chairs.

III. Elements for discussion in the high-level round table

A. Background

9. The United Nations Millennium Declaration (General Assembly resolution [55/2](#)), from which the Millennium Development Goals were derived, was adopted following several important advances in international norms and standards on women's rights and gender equality. The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women was adopted in 1979. It calls on States parties to "take in all fields, in particular in the political, social, economic and cultural fields, all appropriate measures, including legislation, to ensure the full development and advancement of women, for the purpose of guaranteeing them the exercise and enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms on a basis of equality with men" (article 3). The Convention followed the International Covenant

on Civil and Political Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights in requiring States parties to ensure that the rights within each covenant are enjoyed without discrimination on the basis of sex.

10. In 1993, 45 years after the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was adopted, and eight years after the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women entered into force, the World Conference on Human Rights held by the United Nations in Vienna affirmed that the “human rights of women and of the girl-child are an inalienable, integral and indivisible part of universal human rights”.¹ At the 1994 International Conference on Population and Development in Cairo, Governments reached a consensus that gender equality and empowerment of women were global priorities. The Programme of Action of the Conference highlights a number of critical areas for advancing gender equality and empowering women, including universal access to family planning and sexual and reproductive health services and enjoyment of reproductive rights; equal access to education for girls; equal sharing of responsibilities for care and housework between women and men; the individual, social and economic impact of urbanization and migration; and sustainable development and environmental issues associated with population changes.

11. The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, adopted by Member States in 1995, is a global agenda for women’s human rights, gender equality and the empowerment of women. The Platform for Action covers 12 critical areas of concern. For each critical area of concern, strategic objectives are identified, as well as a detailed catalogue of related actions to be taken by Governments and relevant stakeholders, at the national, regional and international levels. At the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly in June 2000, Governments reviewed the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and agreed on further actions to accelerate the implementation of the Platform for Action and to ensure that commitments for gender equality, development and peace were fully realized.

12. Adopted by the General Assembly at the Millennium Summit on 8 September 2000, the United Nations Millennium Declaration built upon the outcomes of the major summits and world conferences of the 1990s. In the Declaration, Member States affirmed six fundamental principles essential to international relations, including freedom, equality, solidarity, tolerance, respect for nature and shared responsibility, and called for action in key areas, including development and poverty eradication, peace and security, and democracy and human rights. Governments also confirmed their resolve to promote gender equality and the empowerment of women as effective ways to combat poverty, hunger and disease and to promote sustainable development. The importance of ensuring equal human rights for women and men, combating all forms of violence against women and implementing the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women was also highlighted in the Declaration.

13. Inspired by the Millennium Declaration, the eight Millennium Development Goals, accompanied by a set of time-bound targets for advancing development and reducing poverty by 2015, were introduced one year later in the Secretary-General’s

¹ Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action, 1993 (A/CONF.157/24 (Part I)), chap. III, sect. I, para. 18.

implementation plan for the Declaration as a road map to monitor progress ([A/56/326](#)). The Millennium Development Goals aim to: eradicate extreme poverty and hunger (Goal 1); achieve universal primary education (Goal 2); promote gender equality and empower women (Goal 3); reduce child mortality (Goal 4); improve maternal health (Goal 5); combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases (Goal 6); ensure environmental sustainability (Goal 7); and develop a global partnership for development (Goal 8). Currently there are 21 targets to meet those goals, accompanied by 60 indicators.

14. As a set of time-bound targets, the Millennium Development Goals have drawn significant attention to global development issues. Goal 3, in particular, has sent an important signal that gender equality and women's empowerment are a global priority. However, the achievement of the targets for women and girls has been uneven, with relatively good progress in some areas such as primary education, but stark gaps remain in many areas. Several targets, such as those relating to maternal mortality, women's access to decent work and access to improved sanitation facilities are at risk of not being met by the 2015 deadline. Moreover, gender mainstreaming across the framework has been limited, particularly for Goals 7 and 8. While the Millennium Development Goals capture some important aspects of gender equality such as in education, political participation and maternal health, the targets have been broadly recognized as limited in focus and misaligned from the full spectrum of women's and girls' rights that are set out in key global agreements and treaties such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development and the Beijing Platform for Action. Several critical issues are omitted, such as unpaid care work and violence against women and girls.

15. In 2010, the high-level plenary meeting of the General Assembly on the Millennium Development Goals reviewed progress and concluded with the adoption of a global action plan towards achieving those goals by the 2015 target date and recommendations to advance the United Nations development agenda beyond 2015 (see resolution [65/1](#)). During the special event convened by the President of the General Assembly to follow up efforts made towards achieving the Millennium Development Goals held in September 2013, Member States reaffirmed those commitments with a particular focus on off-track Millennium Development Goals and an emphasis on inclusivity and accessibility for all in accelerating achievements, and agreed to launch an intergovernmental process for formulating a post-2015 development agenda (see resolution [68/6](#)).

16. The Commission on the Status of Women undertook a 15-year review of the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the outcome of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly in 2010. Emphasis was placed on the sharing of experiences and good practices, with a view to overcoming remaining obstacles and new challenges, including those related to the Millennium Development Goals. The Declaration on the occasion of the fifteenth anniversary of the Fourth World Conference on Women stresses the need for the full and effective implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action in achieving the internationally agreed development goals, including those contained in the Millennium Declaration.

B. Discussion guide

17. During the round table, high-level representatives from Member States are expected to focus on actions taken, lessons learned, achievements and good practices, as well as gaps and challenges, with supporting data where available, with respect to implementation at the national level of commitments on the priority theme. The reports of the Secretary-General on the challenges and achievements in the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals for women and girls and on progress in mainstreaming a gender perspective in the development, implementation and evaluation of national policies and programmes, with a particular focus on the challenges and achievements in the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals for women and girls present relevant issues related to the priority theme of the fifty-eighth session of the Commission on the Status of Women. The meeting participants will discuss actions undertaken and results achieved in:

- (a) Implementing the Millennium Development Goals for women and girls with reference to areas of progress and remaining challenges and gaps, including gender mainstreaming across sectors and targeting the most marginalized groups;
 - (b) Developing and expanding institutional arrangements for implementing the Millennium Development Goals for women and girls, including strengthening monitoring and accountability mechanisms, data collection and reporting;
 - (c) Establishing mechanisms to ensure coherence between policies to implement the Millennium Development Goals and other national policies such as fiscal policy;
 - (d) Adopting a gender-responsive approach to allocating resources for implementation of the Millennium Development Goals and ensuring sufficient financial resources for implementing those goals for women and girls;
 - (e) Developing and expanding partnerships with civil society organizations, especially women's organizations, and engaging different segments of society throughout the process of implementing Millennium Development Goals for women and girls, in particular the monitoring and accountability processes;
 - (f) Identifying and building on lessons from the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals for women and girls in the elaboration of the post-2015 development agenda.
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