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PANEL I

Enhanced participation of women in development: an enabling environment for achieving gender equality and the advancement of women, taking into account, inter alia, the field of education, health and work

Written statement* submitted by

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Dear Chair of the CSW Panel, Members of the Panel, colleagues,

discourses; dominance of neo-liberal macro-economic policies over human rights; and the

reproductive, productive and community responsibilities. Persistent violence against women is another major obstacle. These unequal divisions influence political, public, social and cultural institutions and affect how well these respond to women's rights and needs.

The gendered nature of institutions and related discourses refers to the organization and mode of operation of institutions and the way they deliver services (such as education and health) to women. Policy change needs to be coupled with organizational change that seeks to reform traditional and often patriarchal cultures of institutions and challenges the underlying structures that reinforce inequality. For example, women's access to property inheritance and the income it can generate are often compromised by community members even when equitable laws have been enacted. However, these institutions do not function in a vacuum. They are influenced by global trends and policies which gravely impact women's access to resources and their participation in development.

Predominant, gender-blind neo-liberal fiscal and monetary policies largely ignore differential impacts on women and men and reinforce disparities in education, health, access to productive assets, increased time burden, etc. For example, structural adjustment programmes have prioritized economic growth over equality and equity and increased poverty and gender inequality. Globalization, while having some positive impact on women's participation in the labour force, has created barriers to expansion of women's employment in the sphere of the formal economy and their over-representation in the informal economy.

Finally, the experts noted the absence of or slow progress towards participatory democracy, and the challenges presented by conflict. These include situations such as cross border conflicts, ideological, ethnic and religious clashes, humanitarian disasters, natural disasters, resulting displacement of persons, and global pandemics such as HIV/AIDS.

In light of the constraints highlighted above, and the factors required to support women's full empowerment, the experts arrived at a common understanding of the kind of enabling environment it would take to support women's empowerment and advancement. This includes consideration of interrelated factors such as legal and regulatory policies (both national and international); resources allocation and investments; institutional and organizational arrangements; and socio-cultural issues.

Recommendations

An enabling environment also necessitates improvement and advancement in education, health and work opportunities for both women and men. Men and boys play a critical role in addressing gender stereotypes that can transform discriminatory practices in communities. The experts noted that education, health and work needed to better respond to women's rights, concerns and needs. They need to be improved along the following lines:

Education should promote equality and rights. Schools should offer knowledge leading to self-empowerment and provide the skills to critically challenge unequal social, cultural, political and economic status of women and men.

Effective health systems should provide women the opportunity to express their needs and exercise choices that enable them to promote their health, prevent disease and access acceptable and appropriate health care, including in the area of sexual and reproductive health.

Work should increase women's mobility and enable them to acquire greater capacities and skills, access, agency, greater economic independence and mobility.

Education, health and work are mutually dependent and beneficial but one does not automatically guarantee the other. In an era of multiple providers and erosion of State capacity, Governments must re-establish their role as primary providers of education, public health and maintain minimum standards of access, quality and equality to protect and promote women's rights and principles of non discrimination. Finally, sex-disaggregated data needs to be systematically collected in all sectors, including on financial matters, and should inform changes in policy and programmes. Indicators that track the quantitative achievements are important and should continue to be collected systematically. However, indicators and measurements that consider the processes and differential impact of policies and programmes on women and men must be collected in order to paint a complete picture of the current status of women, and what specifically needs to change in order for empowerment to take hold and transformation of inequalities to occur. Experts also recommended mainstreaming gender-responsive budgeting in

Policies/Strategies should promote retention of health staff and outreach to vulnerable and poor women.

Accurate information and access to sexual and reproductive health, as well as to HIV/AIDS services should be provided to women and girls. Messages of abstinence and use of condoms do not account for women's lack of ability or power to negotiate.

The impact of health sector reforms on women and girls should be assessed to ensure new infrastructure and technologies take into account gender perspectives and health services are responsive to women's needs, combating stigmatization (violence, feminization of HIV/AIDS).

Public awareness campaigns on the root causes of gender discrimination in health, including legal, economic, socio-cultural and sexuality issues should be conducted, and men and boys should be involved.

Work

Gender equality legislation, standards and accountability mechanisms for protection and promotion of women worker's rights should be adopted and enforced, regardless of the sector of employment or place of work.

Wage gaps and occupational segregation should be eliminated.

Corporate social responsibility for gender equality, affirmative action measures, quotas for decision-making roles for women, and formal sources of credit should be promoted.

Economic and productive value should be assigned to unpaid care, reproductive work, and work in the informal sector.

Services and infrastructure at the workplace should be provided for women, including transport, health, child care, and education.

Institutions defining macro-economic policies should undertake gender-responsive budgeting and planning, and collect and use sex-disaggregated statistics. Data should be disaggregated in national accounts, and time-use studies undertaken.

Conclusions

The experts stressed that all disabling conditions discussed above and the enforcement of the recommendations call for adopting an integrated, rights-based approach to development. This implies a harmonization of national laws and regulatory frameworks and national development strategies with global commitments on gender equality and women's human rights. This approach would deal with the root socio-cultural constraints as identified earlier in this report and lead to gender-sensitive policies that specifically have as a goal the empowerment and advancement of women. In order to achieve this goal, all stakeholders may need to concretely consider what type of underlying changes need to take place in political, economic, social and cultural institutions and organizations that continue to perpetuate inequalities. Further efforts at

mainstreaming gender perspectives are required. These changes will also require a substantial increase in resources and investments in health, education, work and other sectors.

This substantial increase in investment will require Governments to garner greater domestic resources (without penalizing the poor in terms of greater taxes) and challenge donor agencies and Governments to meet their stated goal of 0.7% of GDP of official development assistance. It also means harmonizing macro-economic policies with international human rights commitments. For example, Governments should challenge the strict fiscal and monetary policies (low fiscal deficit levels and low-single digit inflation, prioritization of debt repayment) adopted in accordance with guidelines by International Financial Institutions and ministries of finance and central banks, which restrict spending on social sectors. Governments should adequately consider the trade offs and sacrifices undertaken to achieve the macroeconomic goals and increase spending on women's empowerment.

Governments stated commitment to create an enabling environment for enhancing women's participation will more than likely require transforming the make up of current institutions and structures in addition to better policies and programmes which respond to 164 Tc 0.2039 en0.547eoy TD 0.042