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**Commission on the Status of Women**

**Fifty-second session**

25 February-7 March 2008

Item 5 of the provisional agenda\*

**Follow-up to Economic and Social Council resolutions and decisions**

**Implementing the internationally agreed goals and commitments in regard to sustainable development**

**Note by the Secretariat**

**I. Introduction**

1. The Economic and Social Council, in paragraph 13 of its agreed conclusions 2002/1 of 26 July 2002,<sup>1</sup> invited its functional commissions to provide inputs to the overall theme of the Council's coordination and high-level segments as they related to their areas of work. In November 2006, the General Assembly adopted new working methods for the Council to strengthen its role as the central mechanism for system-wide coordination in the implementation of, and follow-up to, the outcomes of the major United Nations conferences in the economic, social and cultural fields.



taking into account actions and initiatives contained, inter alia, in the Beijing Declaration<sup>2</sup> and Platform for Action,<sup>3</sup> the outcome of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly, entitled “Women 2000: gender, equality, developments and peace for the twenty-first century” (General Assembly resolution S-23/2, annex and S-23/3, annex), and the agreed conclusions of the Commission on the Status of Women, since 1996, as well as Agenda 21, the plan of action adopted by the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development in 1992<sup>4</sup> and its follow-up in the Plan of Implementation of the World Summit on Sustainable Development in 2002 (Johannesburg Plan of Implementation),<sup>5</sup> the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, and reports and decisions of the Commission on Sustainable Development.

## II. Background

3. Since the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development and the adoption of Agenda 21 in 1992, the concept of sustainable development has increasingly integrated the three essential dimensions of development: economic development, social development, and environmental protection, including a strong focus on poverty eradication. The Johannesburg Declaration on Sustainable Development<sup>6</sup> confirmed the commitment of Governments to ensure that women’s empowerment, emancipation and gender equality are integrated into all activities encompassed within Agenda 21, the Millennium Development Goals and the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation (A/58/135, para. 25).

4. In the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation, it was recognized that the implementation of the outcomes of the Summit should benefit all, in particular women, youth, children and vulnerable groups. It further acknowledged that gender equality is among one of the elements that form the basis for sustainable development. This renewed commitment to gender equality and women’s empowerment is important because of women’s central role in social development

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6. In efforts to ensure that gender perspectives are considered in issues related to sustainable development, strengthened cooperation and coordination between the Commission on the Status of Women and other organizations in the United Nations system, including the Commission on Sustainable Development, was called for in paragraph 231 (g) of the Beijing Platform for Action. The Commission on Sustainable Development, through the Economic and Social Council, was requested in paragraph 258 (d) to seek input from the Commission on the Status of Women when reviewing the implementation of Agenda 21 with regard to women and the environment. At its forty-first session, in 1997, the Commission on the Status of Women, in paragraph 4 of its agreed conclusions 1997/1 on women and the environment,<sup>7</sup> called for a gender perspective to be mainstreamed into the work of the Commission on Sustainable Development and for the Commission to ensure that the differential impacts on women and men of policies and programmes for sustainable development are well understood and effectively addressed.

### **III. Poverty eradication and sustainable development**

7. In paragraph 7 of the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation it was noted that eradication of poverty is the greatest global challenge facing the world today and is an indispensable requirement for sustainable development, particularly for developing countries. To achieve the goal of poverty eradication and sustainable development, specific actions outlined were in the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation, including the promotion of women's equal access to and full participation in decision-making at all levels, mainstreaming gender perspectives in all policies and strategies, eliminating all forms of violence and discrimination against women and improving the status, health and economic welfare of women and girls through their full and equal access to economic opportunity, land, credit, education and health-care services, and the provision of access to agricultural resources for people living in poverty, especially women.

8. In paragraph 247 of the Beijing Platform for Action, all States and all people were called upon to cooperate in the essential task of eradicating poverty as an indispensable requirement for sustainable development, in order to decrease the disparities in standards of living and better meet the needs of the majority of the people of the world. As spelled out in paragraph 36 the Beijing Declaration, equitable social development that recognizes empowering the poor, particularly women living in poverty, to utilize environmental resources in a sustainable manner is a necessary foundation for sustainable development. In paragraph 47 of the Beijing Platform for Action it was noted that women and men must participate fully and equally in the formulation of macroeconomic and social policies and strategies for the eradication of poverty. It was also pointed out in paragraph 181 that the empowerment and autonomy of women and the improvement of women's social, economic and political status is essential for the achievement of both transparent and accountable government and administration and sustainable development in all areas of life.

9. It was noted in paragraph 17 of the Beijing Platform for Action that absolute

the environment, continued violence against women and the widespread exclusion

13. At its fourth session, in 2005, the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues emphasized the unique contributions made by indigenous women within their families, communities and nations and at the international level in terms of possessing and transmitting intergenerationally a wealth of traditional knowledge on the conservation of biodiversity and sustainable environment management. At the same time, the Forum expressed concern that indigenous women continue to be one of the most marginalized groups in many countries, being victims of serious acts of discrimination and flagrant violations of their fundamental human rights. The Forum recommended that women's conditions be improved through an expansion of employment opportunities; promotion of the professionalization of their traditional skills, arts and crafts; access to resources, including microcredit, and new technologies and agricultural input.<sup>10</sup> The Permanent Forum pointed out at its fifth session, in 2006, that indigenous women continued to face many obstacles and challenges, which included multiple forms of discrimination based on gender, race and ethnicity, as well as the impact of globalization and environmental degradation.<sup>11</sup>

14. In paragraph 40 of the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation it was pointed out that agriculture plays a crucial role in addressing the needs of a growing global population and is inextricably linked to poverty eradication, especially in developing countries. Enhancing the role of women at all levels and in all aspects of rural development, agriculture, nutrition, and food security is imperative. Sustainable agriculture and rural development are essential to the implementation of an integrated approach to increasing food production and enhancing food security and food safety in an environmentally sustainable way. This would include actions at all levels to enhance the participation of women in all aspects of sustainable agriculture and food security and supporting the contribution of men and women in rural planning and development.

15. In addition, in paragraph 67 of the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation the improvement of sustainable agricultural productivity and food security in furtherance of the Millennium Development Goals was recommended. Among the initiatives highlighted were efforts to secure equitable access to land tenure and clarify resource rights and responsibilities through land and tenure reform processes that respect the rule of law and are enshrined in national law; the provision of access to credit for all, especially women, that enable economic and social empowerment and poverty eradication as well as efficient and ecologically sound utilization of land; and initiatives that enable women producers to become decision makers and owners in the sector, including the right to inherit land.

16. At its eighth session, in 2000, the Commission on Sustainable Development, considering the issue of integrated planning and management of land resources, encouraged Governments to develop and/or adopt policies and implement laws that guarantee to their citizens well-defined and enforceable land rights and promote equal access to land and legal security of tenure, in particular for women and disadvantaged groups, including the right to inherit land.

farmers and agro-food industries, women and local communities.<sup>12</sup> The Commission also encouraged Governments to adopt and implement measures that guarantee access to technology and research, in particular for women, disadvantaged groups, people living in poverty, and indigenous and local communities, in order to ensure a sustainable use of land and water resources. Access to credit, particularly through microcredit schemes was also considered important.<sup>13</sup>

#### **IV. Environmental sustainability**

17. At its forty-first and forty-sixth sessions, the Commission on the Status of Women focused on the need to ensure environmental sustainability and to incorporate a gender perspective in actions and initiatives dealing with the environment. In paragraph 23 of its agreed conclusions 1997/1 on women and the environment, the Commission noted that the knowledge and expertise of women, especially rural and indigenous women, in the use and protection of natural resources should be recognized, consolidated, protected and fully used in the design and implementation of policies and programmes for the management of the environment. In paragraph 8 of its agreed conclusions on environmental management and the mitigation of natural disasters, the Commission called for the integration of a gender perspective into all policies and treaties related to sustainable development.

18. The Johannesburg Plan on Implementation, in paragraph 65, called upon States to deal effectively with natural disasters and conflicts, including their humanitarian and environmental impacts, and recognized that conflicts in Africa have hindered, and in many cases obliterated, the gains and efforts aimed at sustainable development. It recognized that the most vulnerable members of society, including women and children, were the most impacted victims of natural disasters and conflicts.<sup>14</sup>

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20. In paragraph 7 of its agreed conclusions on environmental management and the mitigation of natural disasters the Commission on the Status of Women urged Governments and other stakeholders to take a number of actions to address the needs of women. These include pursuing gender-equality and gender-sensitive environmental management and disaster reduction, response and recovery as an integral part of sustainable development; ensuring the full participation of women in sustainable development decision-making and disaster reduction management at all levels; and taking measures to empower women as producers and consumers in order to enhance the capacity of women to respond to disasters.

21. As indicated in paragraphs 246 and 247 of the Beijing Platform for Action, women have an essential role to play in the development of sustainable and ecologically sound consumption and production patterns and approaches to natural resource management. In both urban and rural areas, however, environmental degradation results in negative effects on the health, well-being and livelihoods of women and their families.





from air pollution, with particular attention to women and children, including by assisting developing countries in providing affordable energy to rural communities, particularly to reduce dependence on traditional fuel sources for cooking and heating, which affect the health of women and children.

27. The Beijing Platform for Action stated in paragraph 69 that investing in formal and non-formal education and training for girls and women, with its exceptionally high social and economic return, has proved to be one of the best means of

mainstreaming and its impact. The Commission also urged the international community and United Nations agencies to continue to assist developing countries in developing the capacity to carry out gender impact assessments and in devising analytical tools and gender-sensitive guidelines. The agreed conclusions also urged in paragraph 14 that a gender perspective should be mainstreamed into all environmental impact assessments.

31. In paragraph 15 the Commission further urged Governments, civil society, United Nations agencies and bodies and other international organizations to collect, analyse and disseminate data disaggregated by sex and information related to women and the environment so as to ensure the integration of gender considerations into the development and implementation of sustainable development policies and programmes.

32. In paragraph 16 the Commission also pointed out that the United Nations, international financial institutions, Governments and civil society should apply a gender perspective in all funding programmes for sustainable development. Strengthening or establishing mechanisms at the national, regional and international levels to assess the impact of development and environmental policies on women was also recommended in the Beijing Platform for Action. The Platform