

“Financing for gender equality and the empowerment of women”

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I am very grateful for the opportunity to provide you with some information on the outcome of the recent discussions in the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women on “Financing for gender equality and the empowerment of women.”

The United Nations Commission on the Status of Women plays a catalytic role in advancing the global policy agenda on gender equality and the empowerment of women. The Commission focuses on one priority theme at each annual session, and adopts policy recommendations which aim to enhance achievement of gender equality and empowerment of women at national level. These recommendations are broadly disseminated to governments, the United Nations system, NGOs and other stakeholders.

Prior to each of the annual sessions of the Commission, the Division for the Advancement of Women holds an expert group meeting on the priority theme to ensure access to the latest research and practical experience. The report from this informal meeting feeds into the report of the Secretary-General which is the official basis for discussions by Member States. I am happy to provide you with copies of the experts’ report and the recommendations adopted by the Member States at the Commission on the Status of Women on the theme of “Financing for gender equality and empowerment of women.”

The Beijing Platform for Action adopted at the Fourth World Conference in 1995 is the global “blueprint” on gender equality and empowerment of women, guiding the work of governments at national level. It included a specific chapter on resources. The decision of the Commission to focus on “Financing for gender equality and empowerment of women” at its 2008 session was taken to ensure follow-up to the recommendations on resources made in the Platform for Action, including on funding for the mechanisms established at national level to promote and monitor gender equality and on funding for the women’s movement. Although the issue of resources has come up in relation to many of the themes the Commission has considered since 1995, this was the first time the Commission had considered the issue of resources as a specific theme.

The decision to focus on this particular

interventions should be based on locally-identified needs, within the framework of broader global goals and targets. The costs for areas where progress has been particularly slow should be specifically assessed, such as violence against women, women, peace and security, and women's participation in decision-making.

While the costs of addressing gender inequality are significant, the means to meet these costs are available. While research has shown that investing in women is affordable within existing commitments on official development assistance (ODA) from external sources, gender equality should be funded, at least in part, through the mobilization of domestic resources to promote ownership and sustainability.

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Research in preparation for the Commission showed that, despite all this evidence, and the many calls for gender mainstreaming in economic policies and programmes and in budget processes, macro-economic development and public sector expenditure have not systematically addressed gender equality concerns. Efforts have been made in many countries to integrate gender perspectives into national budgets in order to better align policy commitments on gender equality with resource allocations. These efforts have involved a wide range of stakeholders, including researchers, non-governmental organizations, ministries of s

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increased resources for gender mainstreaming, including for capacity

decision-making positions), as well as by “a deep-rooted desire to preserve traditional male networks and the chemistry and comfort level that go with them.” It is positive, however, that a growing number of companies are actively searching for women to serve as directors, as part of the push for diversity of perceptions and approaches in economic decision-making as a means to enhance economic performance.

One success story in this area is having positive implications for developments in other countries. Norway has put in place a law requiring companies to fill 40 per cent of corporate board seats with women, with the threat of penalties if companies do not comply. This was deemed necessary because in 1993 women held only 3 per cent of corporate board seats, and by 2002 this had only increased to 6 per cent. With this rate of growth it would have taken 100 years to reach 40 per cent. Five years after the initiation of the discussion, Norway has already almost met the 40 per cent requirement. The new law has been termed “the largest transfer of power to women since they got the vote”. The success on corporate boards in Norway has raised the expectations among women in other parts of the world.

The General Assembly will consider women’s economic empowerment in 2009. The Division for the Advancement of Women will prepare a “flagship” report to guide the Member States.

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