



Contributions to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

ECOSOC functional commissions and other intergovernmental bodies and forums, are invited to share relevant input and deliberations as to how they address goals and targets from the perspective of “*Ensuring that no one is left behind*”.

Inputs could follow the following template, inspired by the report of the Secretary-General on Critical milestones towards coherent, efficient and inclusive follow-up and review at the global level (A/70/684).

Submissions will be publicly posted online at the United Nations Sustainable Development Knowledge Platform, at sustainabledevelopment.un.org, as input to the 2017 meeting of the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development.

Please send the completed form no later than **28 April 2017** to the Secretariat’s e-mail pietracci@un.org

Submission Form

1. An assessment of the situation regarding the principle of “ensuring that no one is left behind” at the global level:

The Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (the Committee) is the international body charged with overseeing the implementation of the legal obligations of the 189 States parties under the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (the CEDAW Convention). The Committee is keenly aware of the nexus between development and the realization of women’s rights. The near universal ratification of the CEDAW Convention, together with the vast experience of the Committee since its establishment in 1982 in relation to women and development garnered through its supervisory mandate, underlines the importance of the Committee’s expertise in the implementation of the principle of “ensuring that no one is left behind”.

A development framework guided by the Convention

Article 1 of the CEDAW Convention prohibits “any distinction, exclusion or restriction made on the basis of sex, which has the effect or purpose of impairing or nullifying the enjoyment and exercise of rights by women, irrespective of their marital status, on a basis of equality of men and women, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural, civil or any other field”.

The CEDAW Convention provides strong standards on equality and non-discrimination for all women, in all fields, going beyond the list mentioned in Article 1. It also provides critical normative standards that are intrinsically linked to the Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development such as those related to non-discrimination, political participation, education,



health, food, housing, and freedoms of expression and assembly. From this perspective, meeting the goals of Agenda 2030 in “ensuring that no one is left behind” requires the adoption of a development framework based on the standards for women’s full enjoyment of human rights as set out in the CEDAW Convention and other international human rights treaties.

A vision of substantive equality

The Committee has repeatedly articulated, through its Concluding Observations as well as its General Recommendations, Views on individual communications and Inquiry reports, a vision of substantive equality and non-discrimination, both direct and indirect. Such vision takes into account the reality of women and girls’ lives as shaped by historical discrimination and biological differences from men.

Laws that establish that women and men have equal rights provide an important basis for demanding and achieving equality in practice. They can be a central reference point for political, social and cultural struggles, driving changes in social norms and popular attitudes as well as policy shifts. But realizing women’s rights requires more than just legal reform. While formal equality refers to the adoption of laws and policies that treat women and men equally, substantive equality is concerned with the results and outcomes of these. Hence, the CEDAW Convention advances not only the absence of a discriminatory legal framework and policies, but also requires that the legal framework and policies must not be discriminatory in effect. A substantive understanding of gender equality can serve as both a vision and an agenda for action for those seeking to advance women’s rights in today’s challenging context.

Assessment of inequality and discrimination

The assessment of the global situation is based primarily on the Committee’s work under Article 18 of the CEDAW Convention, which requires each State Party to present a report to the Committee on its implementation of the Convention, including where progress has been achieved and where obstacles are encountered. The reports of State parties are considered during the Committee’s sessions, at which time the Committee engages in a “constructive dialogue” with each reporting State party.

The constructive dialogue is an important mechanism not only to assess the constitutional and institutional frameworks of the State party but also the concrete factors that shape women’s daily lives and their ability to realize the rights under the Convention. Such factors include: women’s experience of poverty; the impact of sexual stereotypes and gender based violence against women; the conditions and type of work women carry out in the formal labour market; the disproportion of unpaid care labour done by women; the control women have over their own body; women’s control over family income and resources; and, the impact of armed conflicts on the situation of women and girls.

Addressing historical disadvantage

The Committee notes that while many countries recognize the principle of non-discrimination based on sex, and some also on gender, substantive equality between women and men is still not fully accepted and implemented in many regions of the world and in many States parties. The translation of equality before the law into equal outcomes is not automatic. Even where gender-equal laws have been put into place, entrenched inequalities, discriminatory social norms, harmful customary practices, as well as dominant patterns of economic development can



undermine their implementation and positive impact. Often States neglect to take legislative measures and policies, either long term or temporary, to overcome discrimination against women and address the consequences of a long history of disadvantage.

Perpetuation of gender-based violence against women

Over the last few years, the elimination of gender-based violence against women has received increasing attention at the regional level. The African, Inter-American, and European States are all developing instruments to address violence against women, as, for instance, the Istanbul Convention. The Committee further notes a growth in a governmental institutional and policy response to combatting gender-based violence against women. However, despite raised awareness of the impact of gender-based violence against women including domestic violence, harmful practices and violence in conflict situations, the level of States parties' implementation of their legal obligations under the Convention and the effectiveness of their national policies remains low. Disturbingly, the level of gender-based violence against women has not diminished, even in the most developed countries. Furthermore, the Committee notes an increase in this form of violence in many parts of the world, as linked with conflict situations, environmental degradation and rising economic and social inequality.

Impeded access to justice

Access to justice by women remains an overall problem. The Committee examines in each constructive dialogue how the State party fulfils its obligation to ensure that women have access to justice as full and equal rights holders. The Committee has observed a number of obstacles and restrictions that impede women from realizing their right of access to justice on a basis of equality. These obstacles occur in a context of structural discrimination and inequality, due to factors such as gender stereotyping, discriminatory laws, including discriminatory procedural and evidentiary requirements and practices, intersecting or compounded discrimination, and a failure to systematically ensure that judicial mechanisms are physically, economically, socially and culturally accessible to all women.

Intersectional discrimination

The intersection of sex with other forms of historical disadvantage, such as race, class, ethnicity, disability and gender identity, is generally overlooked and hence, the increase in inequality between women experiencing multiple discrimination, remains unaddressed. These disparities have narrowed in some countries, but in others they have widened, especially where economic development has not – or insufficiently – been accompanied by democratic and social reforms. Trends in the way the effect of multiple discrimination plays out differs between regions. For example, in the least developed countries, a woman living in a rural area is less likely to give birth with a skilled health professional than her counterpart in the city. In the field of education, in Latin America, for example, indigenous women are more than twice as likely to be illiterate than non-indigenous women.

Low representation in public and political life

The full and equal participation of women in political, public and economic life has increased in many countries, but when examined globally, this trend remains limited in three main ways. Firstly, where progress has been reached, and apart from some exceptions, women's participation in parliament, government, civil service, and decision-making positions in the economic and scientific worlds, peaks at levels well under parity. Secondly, increased representation does not always translate into actual (political) power. Lastly, the representation



of women in political, public and economic life remains absent or extremely limited in some regions.

Retaliation against women human right defenders

Women human right defenders are subject to the same types of risks as any human rights defender, but as women, they are additionally exposed to gender-specific threats and gender-specific violence. Often, the work of women human right defenders is seen as challenging traditional notions of family and gender roles in the society, which can lead to hostility by the general population and authorities. Due to this, they are often subjected to stigmatization and ostracism by community leaders, faith-based groups, families and communities who consider them to be threatening religion, honour or culture through their activities.

Socio-economic inequality

Women, throughout many regions of the world, have made considerable gains, particularly in the areas of health and education, at least at primary and secondary levels. However, women generally remain less economically empowered than men. The recent economic crisis has further hindered their economic empowerment. Significant gaps in gender equality remain in the decision-making process, the access to credit, collaterals, property ownership, as well as to educational and vocational training opportunities. Globally, and with few exceptions, rural women disproportionately experience poverty and exclusion. They face systemic discrimination in accessing land and natural resources. Even when formally employed, they are more often engaged in work that is insecure, hazardous, poorly paid and not covered by social protection. They are less likely to be educated and are at higher risk of being trafficked and forced into labour, marriage, including child marriage, and other harmful practices.

Low prioritization of sexual and reproductive health

The sexual and reproductive health and rights of women and girls are insufficiently, and sometimes not at all, implemented. The Committee has clearly indicated that women's right to health includes their sexual and reproductive health, thereby entailing States parties' obligation to respect, protect and fulfil this right. Nonetheless, violation of this obligation is frequent and takes many forms including denial of access to services that only women require, such as safe abortion and post abortion care, as well as provision of low quality healthcare services and non-consensual performance of medical procedures including forced sterilization, forced virginity examinations and forced abortion. Situations of conflict and instability exacerbate these violations.

Women's and girls' sexual and reproductive health and human rights are also violated when they are subjected to female genital mutilation and early, child and forced marriages which expose girls to the dangers of early pregnancies. Violations of women's sexual and reproductive health rights are often deeply engrained in societal values pertaining to women's sexuality. Patriarchal concepts of women's roles within the family mean that women are often valued based on their ability to reproduce. Early marriage and pregnancy, or repeated pregnancies occurring too closely together, often as the result of efforts to produce male offspring because of the preference for sons or due to absence of sexual education and/or contraception, have a devastating impact on women's health with sometimes fatal consequences.

Discriminatory family laws

These forms of discrimination are very often related to family laws which are a problem for gender equality in many areas of the world. Family structures, gendered labour division within the family and family laws affect women's economic well-being no less than labour market structures and labour laws. Indeed, women often do not equally enjoy their family's economic wealth and gains, they usually bear the greater cost of the breakdown of the family than men and may be left destitute upon divorce, separation and widowhood, especially if they have children and particularly where the State provides little or no economic safety net.

Inequality in the family underlies all other aspects of discrimination against women and is often justified in the name of ideology, religion, tradition and culture. An examination of the reports of States parties reveals that in many States, the rights and responsibilities of married partners are governed by multiple legal systems, where civil or common law, religious, traditional or customary laws and practices, or some combination of such laws and practices, discriminate against women, including those living in de facto unions, and do not comply with the principles set out in the Convention. Many of the States parties that maintain such legal arrangements have entered reservations to all or parts of articles 2 and 16 of the CEDAW Convention. The Committee has repeatedly noted that these reservations are incompatible with the object and purpose of the Convention.

2. The identification of gaps, areas requiring urgent attention, risks and challenges:

Situations of conflict and instability

Conflicts and situations of instability and insufficient governance exacerbate pre-existing patterns of discrimination against women and girls, exposing them to heightened risks of violations of their human rights. Conflict can result in acceptance of higher levels of violence against women and girls, including arbitrary killings, torture and mutilation, sexual violence, and forced marriage. Women and girls are primarily and increasingly targeted for the perpetration of acts of sexual violence, including as a tactic of war. Violence against women and girls also spikes in post-conflict societies, due to the general break down of the rule of law, the availability of small arms, the breakdown of social and family structures and the "normalization" of gender-based violence as an additional element of pre-existing discrimination. Trafficking in women and girls is also exacerbated during and after conflict owing to the breakdown of political, economic and social structures, high levels of violence and increased militarism. Also, conflict can create a particular war-related demand for women's sexual, economic and military exploitation.

The lack of delivery of essential services to the population experienced during conflict and situations of strife and instability have a disproportionate impact on women and girls. Access to essential services such as health care, including sexual and reproductive health services, can be disrupted, with women and girls exposed to a greater risk of unplanned pregnancy, maternal mortality and morbidity, severe sexual and reproductive injuries and contracting sexually transmitted infections, including as a result of conflict-related sexual violence. Women's exclusion from conflict prevention efforts, post-conflict transition and reconstruction processes are ongoing matters of concern for the international community.

Internal displacement has specific gender dimensions. Internally displaced women can be disproportionately affected by the loss of livelihoods during displacement. They may, for example, be unable to practise their livelihoods due to loss of land and livestock. Loss of housing and land can also affect women disproportionately, for example, where women are denied title to

land. Other major human rights concerns include inequitable access to assistance, education and training. Internally displaced women often have limited access to adequate reproductive health care services and responses and can experience violence and abuse, sexual and labour exploitation, trafficking in persons, forced recruitment and abduction. Internally displaced women are also often excluded from decision-making processes.

The refugee crisis in the Middle East requires urgent measures. Refugee camps are cramped, and thousands of people are living in extreme poverty, without access to basic needs including electricity and sanitation. Violence against women is escalating and becoming normalized in camps across Lebanon, Jordan, Turkey, and Iraq.

Global financial crisis

Another risk factor is the volatility of global financial markets and their impact on livelihoods. The austerity policies implemented in many regions of the world in the wake of the financial crisis have led to the erosion, directly or indirectly, of access to economic and social rights globally, consequently weakening women's rights. Many countries continue to struggle with low growth and high unemployment and policy makers in rich and poor countries alike face immense challenges in tackling these issues. An immediate repercussion of austerity policies in both developed and developing countries has been the shifting of unpaid care work onto the shoulders of women and girls.

Financial globalization, trade liberalization, the on-going privatization of public services and the ever-expanding role of corporate interests in the development process, have shifted power relations in ways that undermine the enjoyment of human rights and the building of sustainable livelihoods. As gender discrimination compounds other forms of disadvantage—on the basis of socioeconomic status, geographic location, race, caste and ethnicity, sex, disability, sexual orientation or gender identity—the current trends severely limit women's and girls' opportunities and life chances.

Respecting, protecting and fulfilling women's human rights and establishing the structural conditions to realize these rights requires countercyclical and social policies that avoid transferring the costs that derive from austerity measures, privatization, cuts in cash transfers and social services.

3. Valuable lessons learned on eradicating poverty and promoting prosperity:

A call for mainstreaming a gender perspective

In the Committee's experience, traditional models of development based exclusively on economic growth do not automatically lead to gender equality and the realization of women's rights and empowerment. Rather, the expansion of the democratic space and instauration of peace and security are necessary pre-conditions to achieving this objective. Focusing only on the symptoms and manifestations of women's exclusion (such as lack of access to employment or educational opportunities, and health services), rather than their structural causes (such as discrimination, low access to justice and low representation in decision-making bodies), has often led to narrow, discretionary measures aimed at addressing short-term needs, which do not result in real progress and do not allow for the understanding of the actual contribution of women to sustainable development. Policies for poverty eradication and prosperity promotion that failed to integrate a gender perspective were unsuccessful because they did not address the structural

factors condemning women to poverty.

Addressing the impact of unpaid care work on women's equality

Globally, only about half of all working age women are in the labour force, compared with about four fifths of all men. Moreover, women's participation in the global labour force has stalled for the last two decades. In sub-Saharan Africa, where over 60 per cent of all working women participate in agricultural production, time-related underemployment for women is extremely high -- ranging between 40 and 50 per cent of total employment. Women are most at risk of low-quality employment, illustrated by the fact that they carry out most unpaid work and are more likely to work in informal and precarious jobs.

Due to socially constructed roles as primary caregivers and their responsibility for providing goods and services for their families, women perform the bulk of unpaid care work across all economies and cultures, with variations by age, household structure, social class, location, and so forth. But to say that care is provided on an unpaid basis does not mean that it carries no costs. In fact, women bear the bulk of the costs entailed in its provision in terms of foregone opportunities to engage in paid work or enrol in education or vocational training. So while caregiving is essential for all societies and economies, it is clearly unfair that only women have to provide it. Women's ascribed responsibility for unpaid care work places women in less opportune economic circumstances than men.

Unpaid work, being at the forefront of Agenda 2030, means that such work must be recognized in statistics and policy, and addressed through public investment and programs to address poverty. Policy measures to reduce unpaid domestic and care work are needed to redress inequalities in the provision of care. This includes investment in infrastructure and the redistribution of work not only between women and men, but also between families and society by, for example, using public revenues to fund accessible and quality care services and universal family benefits.

Domestic resource mobilization policies need to be reviewed for their impact on women's income, work, including unpaid labour and unpaid care, and property and assets ownership. Specific commitments must be made to include care as a core axis of social protection, and to transform current patterns of gendered division of labour, including the unequal distribution of unpaid care work, through improving social infrastructure, expanding universal care services and promoting the transformation of gender roles that reinforce an unequal social distribution of care work. The systematic collection of comprehensive and disaggregated data and information about women and girls is a first step to meeting these challenges.

Realizing women's economic rights necessitates going beyond the promotion of women's empowerment in the formal labour market. It concerns the enforcement of labour rights, the quality of employment, provision of social protection, and continuity of earnings. Work must be viewed as a continuum that encompasses both paid and unpaid labour in order to understand the constraints women face in realizing their right to decent work.

In this respect, it is important to highlight that Member States must implement specific policies towards full and productive employment and decent work for all women and men (SDG target 8.5) and to promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization and foster innovation (SDG 9). In particular, States parties should ensure the provision of retraining to enable women who lose

their jobs due to the transformations brought about by technological change to find new employment opportunities. State parties should further delink social protection from contributory schemes based on employment in order to include the rising number of women who will never fulfil the present onerous conditions to benefit from the social protection accorded to those holding formal jobs during their whole adult life, with no interruptions or limitations due to unpaid care work.

Discrimination and inequality fuel social instability and income disparities. If efforts to close gender gaps and to promote better employment opportunities for women are not stepped up, current mega trends – such as climate change, demographic trends, migration flows and the technical revolution – will affect women and girls disproportionately.

4. Emerging issues likely to affect the realization of poverty eradication and achieving prosperity:

The many factors affecting the realization of poverty eradication of women and girls include: the rise of extremism, escalating violent conflict, recurrent and deepening economic crises, volatile food and energy prices, food insecurity, natural disasters and the effects of climate change. All these have intensified situations of vulnerability and increased gender inequalities. The impact of technological change on the existence and quality of jobs may also negatively influence poverty eradication notwithstanding that its effects may be varied depending on the region, the level of a country's development, the measures taken to accompany this evolution and the type of social protection offered.

By the same token, these emerging issues constitute strategic opportunities for women to act as main drivers of change in achieving sustainable development. Namely, a response to these challenges call for robust governance, thereby presenting an opportunity for women to fully participate in each level of the decision-making process in the design, implementation and management of action plans to remove these global obstacles to sustainable development.

Furthermore, in order to address systemic issues and create the conditions to respect, protect and fulfil human rights, in particular women's rights, it is important to acknowledge the macro-economic dimension of the unpaid domestic and care work and the need to reduce and redistribute it among the State, private sector, communities, families, men and women avoiding the instrumentalization of women's empowerment as a means to achieve economic growth, to increase productivity and to improve economic performance. Women's unpaid care work can not be seen as a stabilizer and shock absorber of the economic and financial crises. This reference to "Gender Equality as Smart Economics" rather than to women and girls' entitlement to human rights is limiting, rather than realizing women's and girls' human rights as per the foundation of the United Nations.

Ensuring the accountability of the private sector

Another risk in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda is represented by the difficulty to monitor the role of the private sector, especially of big business, which often contradicts and undermines human rights, in particular, women's rights. Despite the evidence that the benefits of trade liberalization have been distributed extremely unevenly between and within nations, in many countries the exploitation of women's cheap labour and precarious employment as a source of competitive advantage and the displacement and appropriation of indigenous people's



knowledge, are used to attract foreign investment that are necessary for the development of domestic industry.

There is insufficient evidence on the efficiency and quality of infrastructure and public services provided by private-public partnerships (PPPs) as well as on their impact on poverty reduction and promotion of gender equality. Nonetheless, PPPs are promoted with insufficient safeguards to ensure accessibility, affordability and quality of the services and infrastructures that they are expected to deliver, or to ensure that they do not create unacceptable contingent liabilities for governments. There is an asymmetry between the set of binding juridical instruments States have been establishing over the past 40 years to protect and promote the interests of transnational corporations, on the one hand, and the lack of binding instruments to hold corporations accountable for human rights violations, on the other.

States have duties and responsibilities to protect people from harms caused by some elements of the private sector, and to ensure that businesses respect human rights in their activities. Unambiguous mandatory rules and accountability mechanisms are needed to ensure private sector compliance with human rights, including women's and indigenous people's rights. Regulation of the private sector, especially transnational corporations, and a radical change in trade and investment rules are urgently needed as well as initiatives for ensuring that private sector accountability and its human rights impact are central in national strategies. New social compacts that can be implemented according to the Agenda 2030 should not blur the obligations of States parties to fulfil the human right to social security established in Article 22 of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights, Article 9 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and articles 11, 13, and 14 of the CEDAW Convention.

5. Areas where political guidance by the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development is required:

The equal application of human rights to all persons, as well as in the development of systems of accountability poses a real challenge over the coming decades. Given the concern about current patterns of development, political guidance by the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development could be essential to address the structural reforms needed to overcome poverty and inequality; reforms which must tackle the main causes of gender inequality.

In this regard, encouraging a multi-stakeholder accountability mechanism that ensures the robust participation of a diversity of stakeholders at both national and international levels, could be helpful. The Universal Periodic Review mechanism of the Human Rights Council could be an inspiration to encourage and incentivise regular and universal reporting and robust peer review by Member States, and by inviting independent 'shadow reports' from civil society organisations alongside the official government reports, as is the practice of the Committee and the other human rights treaty bodies.

It is recommended that the High-level Political Forum emphasize the integration of women's rights and women's empowerment as pillars of sustainable development. In this regard, it is encouraged to promote technical assistance for implementing the CEDAW Convention and to facilitate inclusion of the Committee's recommendations in the implementation of development policies.

6. Policy recommendations on ways to accelerate progress in poverty eradication:



The framework of the CEDAW Convention is constructed on three main principles: equality; non-discrimination, both direct and indirect; and States parties' obligations to uphold equality and eliminate gender discrimination in the entire sphere of the civil, political, economic, social and cultural life. These three principles provide the instrument to analyse and correct all forms of gender discrimination and to respect, protect and fulfil women's rights. From this perspective, the achievement of substantive equality requires action in three interrelated areas: redressing women's socioeconomic disadvantage; addressing stereotyping, stigma and violence; and strengthening women's agency, voice and participation. Coordinated public action across all three of these dimensions has the potential to trigger lasting transformations in structures and institutions that constrain women's enjoyment of their rights. "More of the same" will not do for women and girls.

While numerical parity in access to education, employment or social protection is an important goal, it does not always translate into substantive equality. This requires the fundamental transformation of economic and social institutions, including the beliefs, norms and attitudes that shape them, at every level of society, from households to labour markets and from communities to local, national and global governance institutions. For example, rather than simply absorbing more girls into fragile and underfunded educational systems, schools must provide a safe learning environment for girls and boys as well as provide quality education and contribute to the promotion of equality through progressive curricula and well trained teachers. It is inadequate to incorporate more women into increasingly precarious and unrewarding forms of employment. Rather, labour markets must be transformed in ways that work for both women and men and benefit society at large. The equal redistribution of responsibilities for income-earning, caregiving and domestic work is needed, both between women and men and between households and society more broadly. Rather than trying to extend social protection to women in the labour market, States parties should establish a new basis that is all inclusive, and therefore cannot be linked, as it is presently, to paid employment.

The measure of progress towards substantive gender equality should be the level to which it includes and affects the rights of poor and marginalized women and girls. To reinforce substantive equality, legal, economic and social policies need to work in tandem. Typically, the role of economic policies is seen primarily in terms of promoting economic growth, while social policies are supposed to address its 'casualties' by redressing poverty and disadvantage and reducing inequality. But macroeconomic policies can pursue a broader set of goals, including gender equality and social justice. Conversely, well-designed social policies can enhance macroeconomic growth and post-crisis recovery through redistributive measures that increase employment, productivity and aggregate demand and implement the principle of "ensuring that no one is left behind".
