

Event: Interactive Dialogue with Major Groups and other Stakeholders (March session)
Date: Wednesday 25th March
Speaker: Elles Blanken, VSO Papua New Guinea

Thank you co-facilitators, Excellencies, colleagues and UN DESA for allowing me to speak here today.

I would like to do so from the perspective of a volunteer who works on capacity building on gender equality in Papua New Guinea. Drawing from my experiences and those of my VSO-colleagues in other countries I fully support the consensus on a standalone goal on gender equality and women's empowerment. Only by achieving this goal we will have real inclusive development, since it will positively affect all other goals and targets.

In my work I've seen how women face double hardship: they are heavily affected by lack of services that address their needs, and yet they have no say in what services are being prioritized for their communities, or in the spending of local budgets. This is why I am pleased to see that target 5.5 puts a focus on one of the most persistent inequalities that women face: their lack of equal voice and influence in decision making, at all levels.

The ambition of all goals and targets must be translated into equally ambitious indicators. In order to truly judge whether we are achieving the change we want to see for women and girls, we need to involve them in these processes. Women themselves must be seen as experts.

The setting of indicators, and the collection and analysis of data must ensure participation of women, as well as the active citizens and civil society, including volunteers such as myself, that work closest to them. When measuring change, we should not only focus on numbers, but also – and maybe even more so – on the actual transformative change in communities, and in women's lives. For instance measuring the proportion of women in local government under target 5.5 does not tell us about the quality of participation or actual influence they will have on decisions, and surely that is critical to our definition of success of this target.

On this note I ask that the architecture for indicator setting is opened up for a wider range of experts. Yes, the knowledge and guidance of statistical experts is crucial, but women themselves are experts on the change they need. Their perspectives must be captured. Qualitative indicators are challenging, but we cannot truly assess progress without them. Let's measure what is needed, so that we do not fall into the trap of just doing what is measurable.