

Commission on the Status of Women
Contribution to the High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development
“Empowering people and ensuring inclusiveness and equality”
March 2019

The universal 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development confirms the centrality of gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls to sustainable development and poverty eradication, and for progress across all the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and targets. It envisaged a world in which every woman and girl enjoys full gender equality and all legal, social and economic barriers to their empowerment have been removed.

In addressing its priority and review themes since the adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the Commission has consistently built synergies between the realization of gender equality and the empowerment of women, and the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. In this regard, the Commission emphasizes the important contribution of women and girls to sustainable development. It has reiterated that gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls and women’s full and equal participation and leadership in the economy are vital for achieving sustainable development, promoting peaceful, just and inclusive societies, enhancing sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth and productivity, ending poverty in all its forms everywhere and ensuring the well-being of all.

At its sixty-third session, the Commission on the Status of Women considered “Social protection systems, access to public services and sustainable infrastructure for gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls” as its priority theme. In its agreed conclusions, the Commission emphasized the mutually reinforcing relationship among achieving gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls, and the full, effective and accelerated implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the gender-responsive implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The agreed conclusions draw strong linkages to Goal 5, Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls and its targets. They also extensively align the situation of women and girls with the Goals under review by the HLPF in 2019, namely, Goals 4, 8, 10, 13, 16, 17, as well as other SDGs. The Commission also reviewed implementation of the agreed conclusions from its sixtieth session on “Women’s empowerment and its link to sustainable development”, which enabled Member States to assess how far they have come in the gender-responsive implementation of the 2030 Agenda. This confirms and reinforces the Commission’s echoing of the need for the 2030 Agenda to be systematically implemented in a gender-responsive manner.

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

With its focus on the social protection systems, access to public services and sustainable infrastructure for gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls as its priority theme, the Commission demonstrated its commitment to the principle of ‘leave no one behind’ and provided an extensive agenda for action in response. It acknowledged that all women and girls might not be able to fully access and benefit from social protection systems, public services and sustainable infrastructure when they face multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination and marginalization. They continue to face structural barriers owing to the

persistence of historical and structural unequal power relations between women and men, poverty, inequalities and disadvantages in access to, ownership of and control over resources, growing gaps in equality of opportunity and limited access to social protection systems and public services, including universal health-care services and education, gender-based violence, discriminatory laws and policies, negative social norms and gender stereotypes, and the unequal sharing of unpaid care and domestic work.

While respecting and valuing the diversity of situations and conditions of women and girls, the Commission also recognized that some women face particular barriers to their empowerment and have particular needs and priorities, requiring appropriate responses. In this regard, it gave attention to specific groups of women and girls, namely, women and girls living in rural areas, indigenous women and girls, women and girls with disabilities, women and girls living with HIV and AIDS, women and girls of African descent, migrant women and girls, older women, and women and girls belonging to national or ethnic, religious and linguistic minorities.

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

In its consideration of the priority theme, the Commission emphasized that social protection systems, public services and sustainable infrastructure are interlinked and mutually reinforcing, and stressed the need for coordinated approaches, financing and policy coherence at all levels to ensure that policies on these three key gender equality issues complement one another. It recognized the progress made in women's and girls' access to social protection, public services and sustainable infrastructure, particularly in the areas of health and education. The Commission, however, also recognized that significant challenges and gender gaps remain, and that, in some contexts, progress could be undermined by budget cuts and austerity measures. In this regard, it stressed the importance of not reversing the levels of protection previously achieved and of addressing the remaining gaps that constrain equal access for women and girls to social protection systems, public services and sustainable infrastructure.

The Commission was concerned that, despite gains in providing access to education, girls are still more likely than boys to remain excluded from education. It identified gender-specific barriers to girls' equal enjoyment of their right to education including feminization of poverty, child labour undertaken by girls, child, early and forced marriage, female genital mutilation, early and repeat pregnancies, all forms of gender-based violence, the lack of safe and adequate sanitation facilities, the disproportionate share of unpaid care and domestic work performed by girls, and gender stereotypes and negative social norms.

The continuing significant gender gaps in labour force participation and leadership, overrepresentation of women public service workers in front-line service delivery roles, and the disproportionate share of unpaid care and domestic work undertaken by women and girls were also among the challenges identified. As a consequence, the Commission called for appropriate measures to recognize, reduce and redistribute women's and girls' disproportionate share of unpaid care and domestic work and for the elimination of occupational segregation. It stressed the urgency of eliminating those structural barriers in order to realize gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls.

The Commission drew linkages between the challenges posed by climate change to poverty eradication, social protection, public services and sustainable infrastructure and the achievement of sustainable development, and gender inequality. In particular, owing to such inequalities, women and girls, especially in developing countries, including small island developing states, are often disproportionately affected by the adverse impacts of climate change, extreme weather events and natural disasters and other environmental issues. Provision of essential infrastructure, services, appropriate financing, technology, and social protection, humanitarian relief, forecast and early warning systems, and decent work for women are among the measures needed to address these challenges.

Furthermore, among its many action recommendations, the Commission called for increasing investments to close resource gaps for achieving gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls, as well as for investing in affordable and accessible quality public health-care systems; more effective, socially accountable, motivated, appropriately equipped and well trained health workforce; public education systems and infrastructure; improved public services and infrastructure such as transportation and sanitation facilities; and, equitable, inclusive, quality, accessible and affordable early childhood education and care services that enable women to enter and remain in the labour market.

3. Valuable successful experiences and lessons learned on empowering people and ensuring inclusiveness and equality

The Commission highlighted the central role of universal access to social protection in reducing inequality, eradicating poverty in all its forms and dimensions, and promoting inclusive growth. Concerned that coverage gaps remain, especially for women and girls, it recognized that social protection systems can make a critical contribution to the fulfilment of human rights for all, in particular for those who are trapped in poverty and those who are marginalized or in vulnerable situations and subject to discrimination.

It stressed the need for integrated approaches to the design, implementation and evaluation of social protection systems, public services and sustainable infrastructure that respond to the needs of women and girls and recognize and value unpaid care and domestic work, enable the mobility of women and girls, strengthen women's participation in public and political life as well as their economic opportunities, in particular their full and productive employment and decent work and equal pay for equal work or work of equal value.

The importance of strengthening the voice, agency, participation and leadership of women and girls as users and beneficiaries of social protection systems, public services and sustainable infrastructure was emphasized. The Commission also called for the full engagement of men and boys as agents and beneficiaries of change, and as strategic partners and allies in the promotion of women's and girls' access to social protection systems, public services and sustainable infrastructure and in the achievement of gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls.

4. Emerging issues likely to affect inclusiveness and equality at various levels

The Agreed Conclusions of the sixty-third session highlighted a number of continuing and emerging issues that are likely to affect the implementation of the 2030 Agenda as well as the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals for women and girls. These include, inter alia, feminization of poverty, gender gaps in education, limited focus on the interlinkages between social, economic and environmental dimensions of sustainable development, violence against women and girls, unequal sharing of unpaid care and domestic work, as well as conflicts and humanitarian emergencies, climate change, resource gaps, and lack of gender-responsive data collection.

The Commission has been consistent in calling for the elimination of all forms of discrimination against all women and girls, and the implementation of targeted measures to address, inter alia, the multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination they face.

5. Areas where political guidance by the High-level Political Forum is required

The Commission once again emphasized the critical importance of addressing and integrating gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls throughout national, regional and global reviews of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and to ensure synergies between the follow-up to the Beijing Platform for Action and the gender-responsive follow-up to the 2030 Agenda. While emphasizing the interlinkages and mutually reinforcing relationship among social protection systems, public services and sustainable infrastructure, the Commission also underlined the need for coordinated approaches, financing and policy coherence at all levels so as to ensure their complementarity.

6. Policy recommendations on ways to accelerate progress in empowering people, ensuring inclusiveness and equality, and achieving SDGs

The Commission highlighted policies and actions to be undertaken by governments and other actors in the following five major areas:

- Strengthening normative, legal and policy frameworks
- Strengthening women's and girls' access to social protection
- Strengthening access to public services for women and girls
- Making infrastructure work for women and girls
- Mobilizing resources, strengthening women's participation and improving evidence