

Comments regarding the co-chairs proposal dated March 19, 2014

Tuesday 1 April

Cluster 2: Gender equality and women's empowerment, education, Employment and decent work for all, Health and population dynamics"

Gender equality and women's empowerment

- Gender equality is absolutely critical for sustainable development. Every country should take all necessary actions to eliminate all forms of gender inequalities, which is the **most widespread form of discrimination**. The agreed conclusions of the 58th session of the CSW would provide us a good basis for our reflection.
- We promote a **holistic approach** with **both a goal** aimed at the empowerment of women, and gender equality, and human rights of women and girls, as well as a **cross-cutting integration** of gender in all components of the SDGs. **Underlying causes** of inequalities and discrimination, including gender stereotypes and rights violations, should be addressed. We recall the Joint Statements made in June 2013 and February 2014 in this respect.
- We highly appreciate the co-chairs proposals which are fully in line with this vision. The issues listed are all very important. We would suggest pooling them in 4 to 5 priority targets:
 - (1) First of all, the co-chairs document rightly stresses that it is imperative to prevent, respond to and **eliminate all forms of violence** against women and girls, which includes, in our view, **harmful traditional practices, including child, early and forced marriage**.
 - (2) We support a target dedicated to guaranteeing universal access to **sexual and reproductive health and rights**.
 - (3) Another target could aim at ensuring women's **equal access to, control and ownership of assets and natural and other productive resources** including access to land, water, inheritance and property rights, financing and banking services, **and equal access to economic opportunities**, as well as **equal employment** opportunities and **equal pay for equal work**, while valuing, **reducing and redistributing more equitably the burden of unpaid care work**;
 - (4) We strongly support a target for ensuring women's **equal participation and leadership** to all spheres and all levels of decision-making (political, economic, cultural, public and private life).
- Several issues proposed under this focus area may also be addressed by integrating **inter-linkages** with other focus areas. We notably emphasise the importance of equal access to education at all levels, and health services, personal safety for women and girls, amelioration of food security and adequate nutrition through the empowerment of women, eradication of harmful traditional practices against women and girls, including female genital mutilation, and the principle of non-discrimination supported by access to justice and the rule of law, the elimination of disproportionate effects by desertification, deforestation, natural disasters, climate change and a lack of appropriate water and sanitation facilities, hygiene, and the provision of basic infrastructure
- **Sex disaggregated data and the use of gender responsive indicators** are essential for tracking the progress of all the SDGs and their targets.

Focus area 4. Education

- We believe that education is a **human right**, a global public good and a major lever for reducing inequalities and poverty as well as a prerequisite for sustainable development. Despite major progress achieved during the past ten years, **school failure, quality of learning, equal opportunities and access for youth to decent jobs remain challenges for all our countries, at any development level.**
- The co-chairs proposals provide, again, an excellent basis for our reflection. We would like to insist on **three universal objectives** which should be pursued to implement the right to education and ensuring training for sustainable social, cultural, environmental, economic and political development:
 - 1) **Strengthen equity in availability, accessibility, acceptability and adaptability of education**, skills and knowledge development for all, at all levels and ages, with focus on the most marginalized, including girls, indigenous peoples, ethnic minorities, persons with disabilities, persons living in rural areas, and migrants. Education policies should be inclusive – especially for vulnerable populations and girls – and free compulsory basic education should be generalized.
 - 2) **Improve the quality of education and learning outcomes.** Ensuring good curricula, disaster resilient infrastructure, improving the professional training and status of teachers, acceptable teacher/pupils ratio and gender equality are prerequisites for quality education that responds to the people's needs.
 - 3) **Recognize and foster the diversity of lifelong educational and training paths**, from pre-primary to higher education. An educational continuum should be assured, including interfaces between non-formal and formal education and bridges between academic and vocational curricula.
- **We have identified 4 main targets along these lines:**
 - 1) Guarantee every child completes a **basic education** (10 years from pre-primary to lower secondary) with recognized and measurable learning outcomes, especially with regards to read, write and count;
 - 2) Ensure **educational continuum** (formal, non-formal and informal, academic and vocational) and increased transition to **quality post-basic, tertiary and life-long education for all youth and adults** to acquire relevant **knowledge and skills for life and decent work.**
 - 3) Improve **quality of teaching & learning** (Curriculums, infrastructure, training & teacher status, pupil-teacher ratios) and reduce inequalities with relevant and inclusive education programs, especially for girls.
 - 4) Integrate at all levels into education, training curricula and awareness-rising : sustainable development, including wise use of natural resources, climate change, health and nutrition-related issues, human rights including gender equality
- Education is also a **powerful driver of other sustainable development goals**, notably one of the strongest instruments to contribute to improving health, nutrition, economic growth, gender equality, protection of the environment, natural resources preservation, peace and citizenship.
- **[Mol] To achieve this goal, key challenges should be addressed.** For education to play its full role as a driver for sustainable development, it is of the utmost importance to secure its financing in innovative and sustainable ways. A new balance has to be found between the economic related dimensions of skills development (education-training-work transition), the role of education for the protection of the environment and the social, cultural and humanist objectives of education (reduction of inequalities, empowerment, preparing citizenship...). New partnerships should reinforce the accountability of all stakeholders (States, local authorities, civil socie-

ty, private sector, parents, pupils) in designing and implementing quality education policies. Relevant data supported by capacity development should enable the measurement of progress in quality, access, equity, gender equality, learning outcomes, empowerment, and access to work through quantitative and qualitative indicators.

Focus area 11. Employment and decent work for all

- Providing **employment and decent work** for all is also a big challenge **relevant for all countries**. Decent work is essential for life in dignity as well as for inclusive and stable societies. We should absolutely strengthen our efforts to give better job prospects to **youth**. As you know, this issue is also a top priority for most of the European countries, which face unbearable youth unemployment rates with the crisis.
- The co-chairs have already captured a lot of key issues related to decent job creation. We would support **stronger reference to fundamental principle and rights at work and to social dialogue**, which are key component of the ILO Decent Work Agenda. We also would like to insist on the **inter-linkages between employment, decent work and social protection floors**.
- Providing decent work implies quality and appropriate education and training as well as adequate regulation to favour job creation, ensure decent work conditions and promote corporate social responsibility. We also think our economies structures should be much more inclusive. That's why we propose to **prominently integrate decent work into a goal dedicated to sustainable and inclusive growth, while taking it into consideration in other goals or targets related to education, gender equality and the empowerment of women, agriculture or migration**.
- Therefore, we propose the following **targets** on the issue of decent jobs :
 - The SDGs do need a target dedicated to promoting **full employment and decent work for all**, while **reducing underemployment, job informality, and** bridging the gap between women and men, urban and rural areas regarding jobs and wages, in line with the ILO Decent Work agenda; *as well as acknowledging the importance of decent work as a factor of peaceful societies*. Such a target implies to foster job creation and entrepreneurship, with appropriate support policies, and to address the specific needs of **vulnerable population young, women and of ethnic minorities, migrants, disabled people and rural populations**. The reconciliation of work and family life should also be ensured.
 - Another target should put emphasis on the implementation of **social and labour rights** and full respect of fundamental principles and rights at work, and **social dialogue**.
 - We should also include **a target driving political attention on youth unemployment**. For instance, we could aim at decreasing the number of young people not in employment or training by x% i.e. by promoting education, vocational training, productive skills and employability.
 - A target for promoting **green jobs**, which are currently defined by ILO and UNEP, would also be essential to accelerate the transition towards sustainable development.

Focus area 3. Health and population dynamics

- In order to realize the human right to the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health, a comprehensive approach is required, which incorporates the underlying determinants of health, is people-centred and equity-focused.
- In the focus area 3, different and overlapping issues are listed, such as **universal health coverage** besides very specific concerns over certain diseases, key populations or specific risk-factors. As rightly stated by the Rio+20 declaration, "achieving universal health coverage is crit-

ical to enhancing healthy life expectancy, social cohesion and sustainable human and economic development” (§139).

- Therefore and without prejudice to a future health goal, achieving Universal Health Coverage is crucial. Universal Health Coverage aims at ensuring that all people have access, without discrimination and without risking impoverishment, to quality essential medicines and basic health services. Universal Health Coverage is therefore totally in line with the Rio+20 declaration, as it deals with both social and economic dimensions of sustainable development and puts the fight against poverty at the heart of the health agenda.
 - The two targets proposed by the World Bank and WHO regarding access to **essential quality services for all as well as coverage from financial risk should be incorporated under this focus areas**.
 - Furthermore a specific target to eliminate **maternal and child mortality** should be maintained beyond 2015.
 - Special emphasis on **sexual and reproductive health and rights** also deserves a single target under the gender or the health related focus areas, as it impacts favorably both child and adolescent health as well as women’s and girls’ empowerment.
 - Similarly, our efforts to prevent and control **communicable diseases**, including HIV/Aids, malaria, tuberculosis , neglected tropical diseases and water related diseases.
 - as well as **non communicable diseases** and neglected tropical diseases, should also be dealt through specific targets as laid out in the global action plan for the prevention and control of non-communicable diseases 2013-2020 of the WHO. Pursuing sustainable health advancements in these areas will require strengthening health systems for the delivery of quality essential health services to all, without discrimination and without risking impoverishment, through the overarching goal of Universal Health Coverage.

- Finally, we would like to recall the **inter-linkages of health with many other socio-economic and environmental determinants**. Climate change, population growth and poor land use planning induces higher risks of natural hazards and wider dissemination of infectious vectors. Water, air, land pollutions as well as exposure to and inadequate use of chemicals and toxic waste are also major threats to global health. Production, trade, and marketing of addictive substances and unhealthy food, together with urban lifestyles encouraging physical inactivity, are closely linked to the growing burden of non-communicable diseases. It is therefore imperative to address the social, economic and environmental determinants of health, through other focus areas.