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The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development: A new roadmap to achieve gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls

Summary

At the United Nations summit for the adoption of the post-2015 development agenda, which took place in New York from 25 to 27 September 2015, world leaders adopted a new agenda for development entitled “Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development”, which constitutes a major milestone in the struggle towards gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls.

This paper provides background information about the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, with an emphasis on gender-related objectives in the Sustainable Development Goals. It also elaborates on the key role of national women’s machineries, offering policy recommendations in support of the implementation of these new ambitious Goals.

CONTENTS

| | <i>Paragraphs</i> | <i>Page</i> |
|--|-------------------|-------------|
| Introduction | 1-8 | 3 |
| <i>Chapter</i> | | |
| I. THE 2030 AGENDA, A NEW MODEL COMBINING VARIOUS APPROACHES TO GENDER EQUALITY AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT | 9-18 | 4 |
| A. An actionable framework of goals and targets | 10-13 | 4 |
| B. A vision for the world in 2030, grounded in universal values and human rights | 14-18 | 5 |
| II. OVERVIEW OF GENDER-RELATED OBJECTIVES IN THE SDGs | 19-25 | 6 |
| III. THE KEY ROLE OF NATIONAL WOMEN'S MACHINERIES IN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE 2030 AGENDA | 26-45 | 7 |
| A. Aligning international targets to national priorities | 29-32 | 8 |
| B. Elaborating gender-sensitive national development plans consistent with the 2030 Agenda | 33-36 | 9 |
| C. Supporting the adoption of gender-sensitive national indicators and the collection of sex-disaggregated data | 37-38 | 10 |
| D. Creating synergies with other international and regional commitments | 39-40 | 10 |
| E. Monitoring progress towards the SDG targets and contributing to national, regional and global follow-up and review mechanisms | 41-45 | 11 |
| IV. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS..... | 46-50 | 11 |
| <i>Annex.</i> | | 14 |

Introduction

1. As the target date (end of 2015) set for the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) was approaching, world leaders met in New York from 25 to 27 September 2015 to participate in the United Nations summit for the adoption of the post-2015 development agenda, a high-level plenary meeting of the General Assembly at its seventieth session. They adopted a new development agenda in support of ‘people, planet, prosperity and peace’, entitled “Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development”¹ (which will be referred to as the 2030 Agenda throughout the present document).

2. The 2030 Agenda represents a roadmap and key reference in the field of development for the next fifteen years, which was prepared following wide-ranging consultations including a large number of governmental and non-governmental entities. It contains 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and 169 related targets, which are designed to be universal and applicable to developed and developing countries alike. The SDGs cover a variety of areas, including poverty eradication, healthy lives at all ages, quality education, food security and improved nutrition, gender equality, inclusive economic growth and industrialization, and sustainable energy, water and sanitation for all.

3. The 2030 Agenda tackles some of the MDGs’ ‘unfinished business’ by reiterating some of their key objectives, such as achieving full and productive employment and decent work for all, including women and young people. It lays the basis for a different and more ambitious approach to development, including high-reaching targets pertaining to gender equality.² The 2030 Agenda also builds on prior United Nations conferences and summits in the economic, social and environmental spheres. In particular, it emphasizes commitments made in the Beijing Platform for Action, the main reference for policies to promote gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls, and clarifies that it will support and act in synergy with related forums.

4. In recognition of the diversity of national circumstances, and in support of States’ efforts to achieve sustainable development despite limited resources, the 2030 Agenda also includes details about the prerequisites and conditions for its realization. Key means of implementation are listed under each SDG. In addition, SDG 17 is entirely dedicated to revitalizing the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development, and strengthening related means of implementation, including finance, technology, capacity-building and trade. It also emphasizes the importance of policy and institutional coherence, multi-stakeholder partnerships, and high-quality and disaggregated data to monitor progress in the achievement of sustainable development.

5. Financial aspects feature prominently in this new framework for sustainable development, with multiple references to the Addis Ababa Action Agenda on Financing for Development³ as an integral part of the 2030 Agenda. The Addis Ababa Action Agenda includes detailed proposals for resource mobilisation in order to address pressing economic, social and environmental issues.

6. Gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls lie at the core of the 2030 Agenda. They are addressed both in SDG 5 on achieving gender equality and empowering all women and girls, and through

¹ General Assembly resolution 70/1 of 25 September 2015. Available under the symbol A/RES/70/1 from <http://documents.un.org>.

² The MDGs, which emanated from the Millennium Declaration (General Assembly resolution 55/2 of 8 September 2000), consisted of eight goals to meet by 2015. They included a specific goal on the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of women (MDG 3), as well as gender-related targets under other goals, in particular Goal 1, target B (achieve full and productive employment and decent work for all, including women and young people), Goal 2, target A (ensure that, by 2015, children everywhere, boys and girls alike, will be able to complete a full course of primary schooling) and Goal 5 (improve maternal health).

³ The Addis Ababa Action Agenda on Financing for Development was adopted by the Third International Conference on Financing for Development (Addis Ababa, 13-16 July 2015) and endorsed by the General Assembly in its resolution 69/313 of 27 July 2015. Available under the symbol A/RES/69/313 from <http://documents.un.org>.

the mainstreaming of gender into other goals and targets. This approach signals that gender equality is seen as an objective in itself, as well as a requirement for achieving all development goals. Contemporary research has given ample evidence of the links between gender and development, particularly in relation to health, education, economic development and the management of resources. According to paragraph 20 of the 2030 Agenda, “realizing gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls will make a crucial contribution to progress across all the Goals and targets. The achievement of full human potential and of sustainable development is not possible if one half of humanity continues to be denied its full human rights and opportunities”.

7. Given the centrality of gender in the SDGs, it is essential that national institutions, in particular national women’s machineries, in their capacity as national focal points for gender equality and the empowerment of women, acquire in-depth knowledge of this new framework. Indeed, the 2030 Agenda will constitute the main basis for development programming and review for the years to come. National institutions will have a key role to play in the identification of national priorities and the design of policies to implement this far-reaching strategy until 2030. At the same time, the adoption of the SDGs represents a major renewed opportunity to place gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls front and centre of development policies for the next 15 years.

8. The objective of the present background paper is to provide governmental institutions in the Arab region with background information and analysis on the SDGs in their relation to gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls. It seeks to trigger discussion on the role of national governments, in particular national women’s machineries, in leading implementation of the 2030 Agenda. First, the paper discusses the specificity of this new framework and summarizes key steps taken in the process towards the adoption of the 2030 Agenda. Then it provides a synopsis of SDG 5 on gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls, as well as a summary of gender-related targets under other Goals. Finally, the paper outlines various options for future involvement of Arab national women’s machineries in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

I. THE 2030 AGENDA, A NEW MODEL COMBINING VARIOUS APPROACHES TO GENDER EQUALITY AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

9. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development combines a vision for the world and references to human rights principles together with an actionable framework of goals and measurable targets. The hybrid nature of the document can be attributed to the wide range of actors involved in its elaboration, and the numerous and diverse contributions that they made.

A. AN ACTIONABLE FRAMEWORK OF GOALS AND TARGETS

10. As the concluding years of the MDGs approached, the international community initiated a debate on its successor framework. The MDGs’ had been widely acknowledged for their simplicity and ability to focus global, regional and national efforts on the implementation of a few measurable and time-bound targets.⁴ Therefore, the Rio+20 Conference on Sustainable Development called for an intergovernmental process to discuss and formalize new Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) which, in the spirit of the MDGs, were to be “action-oriented, concise and easy to communicate, limited in number, aspirational, global in nature and universally applicable to all countries, while taking into account different national realities, capacities and levels of development and respecting national policies and priorities”.⁵

⁴ United Nations System Task Team on the Post-2015 United Nations Development Agenda (2012). Review of the contributions of the MDG Agenda to foster development: Lessons for the post-2015 UN development agenda. Discussion Note (March). Available from http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/pdf/mdg_assessment_Aug.pdf.

⁵ United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20). The Future We Want (A/RES/66/288), para. 247.

11. To ensure the largest possible participation in the elaboration of the SDGs, an Open Working Group of 30 Member States or groups of Member States was established. The Working Group, which included a number of Arab States (Algeria, Egypt, Morocco, Tunisia, the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia) remained open to observers. It drew on the contributions of nine major groups and other stakeholders, including women, children and youth, and non-governmental organizations. Its deliberations were complemented by a series of conferences and thematic debates at the global, regional and national levels.

12. In the field of gender equality and women's empowerment, the elaboration of the SDGs coincided with the 2015 review of implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, which provided an opportunity to Arab Governments and civil society to analyse current political, economic and social issues and to discuss priorities for the years to come.⁶ Arab States further reaffirmed their commitment to gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls in the Cairo Declaration on the Post-2015 Development Agenda for Women.⁷

13. These consultative processes resulted in the establishment of 17 Sustainable Development Goals, which are all written as policy objectives that can be systematically monitored and reviewed. They typically refrain from using a rights-based terminology, though they refer to general human rights concepts, including universality, indivisibility and interdependence.

B. A VISION FOR THE WORLD IN 2030, GROUNDED IN UNIVERSAL VALUES AND HUMAN RIGHTS

14. A common point of criticism of the MDGs was that, by focusing on a set of limited, measurable and time-bound targets, their methodology lacked a deeply transformative dimension and ignored the root causes of poverty and inequality.⁸ For instance, MDG 3 on the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of women relied on merely four indicators when it came to measuring progress, namely the ratio of girls to boys in primary, secondary and tertiary education; the ratio of literate women to men, 15-24 years old; the share of women in wage employment in the non-agricultural sector; and the proportion of seats held by women in national parliaments. Those indicators alone could not fully reflect the various dimensions of gender equality and the true extent of the process of empowering women, but only pointed at some possible manifestations of gender inequalities. Likewise, the targets-based approach of the MDGs was decried by many as a departure from the human rights' paradigm,⁹ which relied on the notions of State obligations, judicial enforcement and treaty monitoring mechanisms, rather than policy objectives and evaluation tools.

15. To remedy these shortcomings, the 2030 Agenda goes beyond the MDG model and draws a far-reaching vision of the world in fifteen years, reflecting ideas presented under the auspices of the United Nation Secretary-General and recommendations emanating from a range of bodies, including a High-level Panel of Eminent Persons and the United Nations System Task Team on the Post-2015 Development Agenda. It also echoes the outcomes of consultations conducted by the United Nations Development Group,

⁶ ESCWA (2015). *Arab Regional Synthesis Report on the Implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action Twenty Years Later*. Available in Arabic from <https://www.unescwa.org/publications/publications-list>.

⁷ The Cairo Declaration on the Post-2015 Development Agenda was adopted on 23 February 2014 by the High Level Meeting on Implementing the Millennium Development Goals for Women and Girls, Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women in the Arab Region, which was organized by the League of Arab States, UN-Women and ESCWA. Available from <http://www.unwomen.org/~media/headquarters/attachments/sections/csw/58/csw58-declaration-cairo-en%20pdf.ashx?v=1&d=20141013T121953>.

⁸ ESCWA (2013). *Arab Women and Gender Equality in the Post-2015 Development Agenda* (paper prepared as part of the documentation of the sixth session of the ESCWA Committee on Women, which was held in Kuwait, 4-5 December 2013); and Taarup Nordlund, A. (2014). *Gender Equality: Benefits and Costs of the Gender Equality Targets for the Post-2015 Development Agenda*. Gender Equality Viewpoint Paper. Copenhagen Consensus Center.

⁹ Nelson, P.J. (2007). Human Rights, the Millennium Development Goals, and the Future of Development Cooperation. *World Development*, vol. 35, No. 12, pp. 2041-2055; and ESCWA (2013).

a coalition of United Nations departments, programmes and agencies, which surveyed over 7.3 million people online, and conducted national consultations in 88 countries, including Algeria, Djibouti, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, the Sudan and Yemen.

16. The 2030 Agenda therefore expressly “seeks to realize the human rights of all and to achieve gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls”, and recognizes the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and international human rights treaties as a basis for a new development agenda. In paragraph 8 of the Agenda, heads of State and Government and high representatives “envisage a world of universal respect for human rights and human dignity, the rule of law, justice, equality and non-discrimination; of respect for race, ethnicity and cultural diversity; and of equal opportunity permitting the full realization of human potential and contributing to shared prosperity. 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”.

17. These global aspirations are translated into broad targets in the 2030 Agenda’s component on the Sustainable Development Goals, including target 5.1 on ending “all forms of discrimination against all women and girls everywhere”. They are also reflected in the many references to the need for structural transformation in society in order to achieve sustainable development. Some good examples pertaining to gender are target 2.3 and means of implementation 5.a, 5.b and 5.c, which establish the need to adopt and strengthen sound policies and enforceable legislation, and equal representation as well as equal rights to economic resources, access to ownership, finance and technology as preconditions to achieve gender equality and sustainable development.

18. The ambitious nature and broad thematic coverage of the 2030 Agenda, together with its inclusiveness and the extent of time and resources invested in its elaboration, illustrate the importance of this new framework as a reference for development for the years to come. The next section examines in more detail how the SDGs address gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls.

II. OVERVIEW OF GENDER-RELATED OBJECTIVES IN THE SDGS

19. The SDGs represent the main operative framework of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Their approach to gender essentially follows two complementary tracks, in accordance with the recommendations of most experts and conferences, including the Commission on the Status of Women and the High-Level Panel of Eminent Persons on the Post-2015 Development Agenda.

20. As a first crucial step, a Goal solely dedicated to gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls, namely SDG 5, was established. It contains six important targets with the aim to achieve the following: (5.1) end all forms of discrimination; (5.2) eliminate violence against women; (5.3) eradicate harmful practices such as child and forced marriage, and female genital mutilation; (5.4) recognize unpaid care and domestic work; (5.5) secure women’s full and effective participation in decision-making; and (5.6) ensure universal access to sexual and reproductive health. Table 1 in the annex provides an exhaustive list of these targets, together with their related means of implementation.

21. Existing international legal and policy instruments shed more light on the concepts and targets used in the 2030 Agenda. The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) defines various forms of discrimination against women, as well as the measures necessary to ensure gender equality and the full realization of women’s rights. The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), together with other instruments, such as the Convention on Consent to Marriage, Minimum Age for Marriage and Registration of Marriages, specifically addresses the rights of girls. Moreover, detailed guidance on women’s representation and participation in decision-making is provided in the Beijing Platform for Action, while the United Nations Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women offers an internationally-agreed definition of violence against women and the ways and means to address it. In the field of sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights, the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development represents a blueprint for national policies and programmes which is expressly acknowledged in the 2030 Agenda.

22. The gender dimension is also present in numerous other goals and targets of the 2030 Agenda beyond SDG 5, in particular in the fields of poverty eradication, agriculture, nutrition, health, education, sanitation, employment, sustainable consumption and production, climate change, transport systems, and green and public spaces. Similar to SDG 5, these targets reflect objectives and commitments established through various international processes. Table 2 of the annex summarizes the main references to women and girls or gender equality in the remaining SDGs.

23. In addition to SDG 5 and those other targets that specifically mention gender equality, national institutions, researchers and other specialists will likely find that numerous targets and means of implementation of the 2030 Agenda are relevant to women and girls, although the gender dimension is not made explicit in their formulation. This is the case with many targets under SDG 16 on peaceful and inclusive societies, including target 16.3 on the rule of law and equal access to justice for all, and target 16.10 on fundamental freedoms, as well as means of implementation 16.a on strengthening national institutions to prevent violence and 16.b on non-discriminatory laws.

24. A detailed list of global indicators to monitor implementation of the SDGs is still under preparation, and is planned for submission to the United Nations Statistical Commission in March 2016.¹⁰ It is expected to feature gender prominently, with already fourteen indicators tentatively agreed upon to measure progress in relation to the targets of SDG 5 on gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls. Moreover, a large number of indicators under other goals will be relevant to the analysis of the conditions of women and girls. For instance, gender-related indicators have been proposed in connection to target 16.7 on inclusive and representative decision-making. With respect to poverty eradication, two preliminary-agreed indicators will examine the proportion of the population below international and national poverty lines disaggregated by sex, age group and employment status. Moreover, an indicator on social protection floors, which includes maternity benefits, is foreseen under target 1.3. All indicators will need to be disaggregated by sex, as well as by age and other characteristics whenever possible and in accordance with the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics.¹¹

25. In this connection, it is worth noting that target 17.18 calls to “enhance capacity-building support to developing countries (...) to increase significantly the availability of high-quality, timely and reliable data disaggregated by income, gender, age, race, ethnicity, migratory status, disability, geographic location and other characteristics relevant in national contexts”. Such endeavour to strengthen national capacities to collect, disseminate and use statistical data will be essential in the Arab region, where the lack of sex-disaggregated data is often highlighted as a key impediment to the development and evaluation of policies and programmes for the advancement of women and girls.¹²

III. THE KEY ROLE OF NATIONAL WOMEN’S MACHINERIES IN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE 2030 AGENDA

26. The 2030 Agenda places significant emphasis on national ownership, and leaves ample space for national Governments to decide on the most effective ways and means of reaching this bold new vision. National institutions will therefore have a key role to play in adapting the new development framework to local contexts. They will also be the main bodies responsible for the design and implementation of adequate and responsive development policies.

¹⁰ More details on the Sustainable Development Goals indicators are available on the United Nations Statistics Division’s website <http://unstats.un.org/sdgs/>.

¹¹ Economic and Social Council resolution 2013/21 of 28 October 2013; and General Assembly resolution 68/261 of 29 January 2014.

¹² ESCWA (2015).

27. According to paragraph 55 of the 2030 Agenda, each Government decides “how these aspirational and global targets should be incorporated into national planning processes, policies and strategies”. Paragraph 63 further provides that “cohesive nationally owned sustainable development strategies, supported by integrated national financing frameworks, will be at the heart of our efforts. We reiterate that each country has primary responsibility for its own economic and social development and that the role of national policies and development strategies cannot be overemphasized. We will respect each country’s policy space and leadership to implement policies for poverty eradication and sustainable development, while remaining consistent with relevant international rules and commitments”.

28. National women’s machineries exist in most of Member States in the form of a ministry or commission. These machineries are expected to deliver substantive and policy advice on the gender dimension of development. Their mandate, along with their programmatic and advocacy work, provides them with significant and up-to-date knowledge on the status of women and girls. In their capacity as focal points for gender strategies and gender mainstreaming within national Governments, their responsibilities include having a strategic overview of the wide range of national and sub-national policies and initiatives for the empowerment of women.¹³ National women’s machineries will, therefore, be instrumental for the successful implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

A. ALIGNING INTERNATIONAL TARGETS TO NATIONAL PRIORITIES

29. The first step towards the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, for any country, will consist in reviewing the list of SDGs, and determining those targets that will be most critical to sustainable development at the national level, in accordance with paragraph 55 of the 2030 Agenda cited above. This may require undertaking, or updating, national situation analyses with the participation of relevant stakeholders, possibly through a multi-stakeholder national dialogue. National women’s machineries will play a key role in this process. Their involvement will be essential to the identification of development priorities in general, and of gender-related objectives in particular.

30. Aligning the SDGs to national contexts will be particularly important for those targets which are only broadly defined. This applies to most items under SDG 5, the goal dedicated to gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls, as well as to targets related to gender issues under different SDGs. Target 5.1 on “ending all forms of discrimination against all women and girls everywhere” is an example of an objective without a clear numerical target. For this type of objective, United Nations entities and committees will be providing detailed guidance on key areas of attention. In addition, Governments will certainly require technical inputs from national women’s machineries when establishing their national development priorities. For instance, many Arab States may find that they have already reached the global target of a maternal mortality ratio of less than 70 per 100,000 live births, and that they should concentrate on other gender-related targets.

31. As many Arab countries are facing unprecedented challenges caused by armed conflicts and political instability, it will be important that they consider the consequences of war on women and girls in their strategies towards the 2030 Agenda as relevant. This does not only apply to conflict-stricken countries, but also to those which have been hosting a large number of refugees. In this respect, it is worth noting that the SDGs do not explicitly refer to the topic of armed conflict or displacement, but rather emphasize peaceful and inclusive societies (SDG 16). The preceding Declaration also acknowledges that “sustainable development cannot be realized without peace and security; and peace and security will be at risk without sustainable development”. It clearly mentions Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security, and refers to refugees as a vulnerable group of people which should be protected.

¹³ According to paragraph 201 of the Beijing Platform for Action, “A national machinery for the advancement of women is the central policy-coordinating unit inside government. Its main task is to support government-wide mainstreaming of a gender-equality perspective in all policy areas”.

32. National institutions will be responsible for the further elaboration of those aspects as needed, always bearing in mind the connection between development and humanitarian issues. This will be coherent with commitments under various human rights instruments and policy frameworks, including the Cairo Declaration on the Post-2015 Development Agenda for Women, which calls for the protection of refugee women and girls from all forms of violence and exploitation.

B. ELABORATING GENDER-SENSITIVE NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT
PLANS CONSISTENT WITH THE 2030 AGENDA

33. Upon completion of the initial review of goals, targets and indicators by relevant national institutions, Governments will need to formalize their strategies for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. There are many ways to achieve this, including the design of dedicated national action plans, or the amendment of existing policies, consistent with the new sustainable development framework. The Agenda encourages, in paragraph 78, “all Member States to develop as soon as practicable ambitious national responses to the overall implementation of this Agenda. These can support the transition to the Sustainable Development Goals and build on existing planning instruments, such as national development and sustainable development strategies, as appropriate”.

34. The contributions of national women’s machineries to the preparation of national development plans will be essential. In particular, they will have the responsibility to advocate the full mainstreaming of gender into new national development frameworks and to provide the related technical assistance to national stakeholders. This step will be crucial to the realization of the entire 2030 Agenda, because a failure to integrate gender considerations will have far reaching consequences on all goals. Moreover, the adoption of national strategies for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda will call for increased gender-responsive budgeting, a necessary and extremely valuable tool for the empowerment of women and girls that remains largely underutilized in the Arab region.¹⁴ It will also require the establishment of systems to systematically track and publish information about public spending on gender equality, a measure that is expected to be monitored through a specific indicator pertaining to the “percentage of countries with systems to track and make public allocations for gender equality and women’s empowerment”.¹⁵

35. The active involvement of national women’s machineries will be all the more important as national development strategies will be closely linked to financing mechanisms and the allocation of resources. In this connection, it will be critical that sufficient resources are assigned to the promotion of gender-related goals and targets. Through the 2030 Agenda, Member States will actually commit to significantly increasing investments to close the gender gap and strengthen support for institutions working towards gender equality and the empowerment of women. In paragraph 20 of the 2030 Agenda, heads of State and Government and high representatives pledge to “work for a significant increase in investments to close the gender gap and strengthen support for institutions in relation to gender equality and the empowerment of women at the global, regional and national levels”.

36. In view of the cross-cutting nature of gender issues and their importance to all fields of government intervention, from health policy to security sector reform, national women’s machineries will be instrumental in drafting any national strategy or action plan dedicated to implementing the SDGs. Such efforts will be particularly opportune since the adoption of the 2030 Agenda coincides with the study of the MDGs that could not be reached, and the completion of review cycles of the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security.

¹⁴ ESCWA (2015).

¹⁵ United Nations Statistics Division (2015). *Results of the list of indicators reviewed at the second Inter-agency and Expert Group on Sustainable Development Goals Indicators*, indicator pertaining to means of implementation 5.c.

C. SUPPORTING THE ADOPTION OF GENDER-SENSITIVE NATIONAL INDICATORS
AND THE COLLECTION OF SEX-DISAGGREGATED DATA

37. The elaboration of national policies for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda will go hand in hand with the selection of relevant statistical indicators and the establishment of national baselines and targets. In this connection, paragraph 75 of the 2030 Agenda clarifies that the implementation of SDGs and related targets will be reviewed by means of global indicators, complemented by regional and national indicators to be developed by Member States.

38. The process will certainly create a demand for statistical data. In this respect, SDG 17 on strengthening the means of implementation highlights the importance of the availability of reliable data, including data disaggregated by sex. It echoes the call of the Cairo Declaration on the Post-2015 Development Agenda for Women that Arab Governments adopt gender-responsive indicators and strengthen mechanisms for the collection of sex-disaggregated data. The momentum created by the launch of SDGs will constitute an excellent occasion for national women's machineries to engage with national statistical offices and to ensure that sex-disaggregated and gender-related data is regularly collected and analyzed. Such approach is consistent with paragraph 48 of the 2030 Agenda, which stresses the importance of "quality, accessible, timely and reliable disaggregated data to help with the measurement process and to ensure that no one is left behind".

D. CREATING SYNERGIES WITH OTHER INTERNATIONAL
AND REGIONAL COMMITMENTS

39. One of the core functions of national women's machineries is to ensure quality and timely reporting on the implementation of various international and regional conventions and commitments pertaining to women's human rights. In order to ensure coherence and best use of resources, it will be important that those national institutions concerned with gender equality use a map systematically linking SDGs with other instruments, including CEDAW and the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. This is consistent with the 2030 Agenda, which stresses in paragraphs 48 and 74(f) that "data and information from existing reporting mechanisms should be used where possible" and that follow-up and review processes at all levels should "build on existing platforms and processes, where these exist, (and) avoid duplication".

40. The need to establish linkages with such major international instruments as the CEDAW Convention and the Beijing Platform for Action is also justified from the substantive point of view. The 2030 Agenda is far less detailed than those other reference frameworks and often does not mention any details on how to reach certain policy objectives, for instance eliminating all forms of violence against women and girls (target 5.2). In fact, the SDGs often merely reaffirm agreements reached in previous conferences, as shown in target 5.6 on sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights. Nonetheless, national women's machineries may find new guiding messages in the 2030 Agenda. For instance, target 4.2 creates objectives with respect to pre-primary education, a critical issue that was not covered by the Beijing Platform for Action, yet was identified as a major area of concern by the most recent Education for All regional review.¹⁶ The question of the affordability and availability of high-quality early childhood programmes is also closely tied to women's ability to engage in formal employment. It will be particularly relevant in the Arab region, where the average female labour force participation rate is just 23 per cent.¹⁷

¹⁶ United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) (2015). *Arab States: Education for All 2015 Regional Review – Final Synthesis Report*, pp. 28-30. Available from <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0023/002329/232941e.pdf>.

¹⁷ World Bank Development Indicators website, based on data from the International Labour Organization Key Indicators of the Labour Market Database: 'Labour force participation rate, female (% of female population ages15+) modeled ILO estimate', 2013.

E. MONITORING PROGRESS TOWARDS THE SDG TARGETS AND CONTRIBUTING TO NATIONAL,
REGIONAL AND GLOBAL FOLLOW-UP AND REVIEW MECHANISMS

41. In accordance with their function as the main government focal points for gender strategies, national women's machineries will play a prominent role in the monitoring of government policies for gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls. They will be called to interpret and clarify certain objectives of the 2030 Agenda. They will also be responsible for compiling relevant information and calling for prompt attention to areas in which implementation might be lagging.

42. Once the exact modalities of global, regional and national review mechanisms are determined, national women's machineries will assume a major role in the assessment of national efforts to implement the 2030 Agenda. Not only will they be responsible for analysing progress from a gender perspective, as foreseen by paragraph 74(e) of the Agenda which establishes gender sensitivity as one of the nine guiding principles for follow-up and review, but they will also act as conveners of consultations with civil society and women's organizations in the context of national and subnational reviews that are expected to be inclusive and reflect all perspectives (paragraph 79 of the 2030 Agenda).

43. At the regional level, ESCWA will continue to be the voice of the region by strengthening regional platforms for deliberations and consensus building that will feed global fora. Therefore, reviews of overall progress achieved in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda will take place under the auspices of the Arab High Level Forum on Sustainable Development. Regional reviews are expected to be undertaken in cooperation with regional commissions, as stipulated by paragraph 80 of the 2030 Agenda. In this connection, ESCWA will assume its role as the think tank of the region by undertaking innovative research and supporting quality data collection and analysis for the production of evidence-based policy. This will be conducted through the preparation of Arab sustainable development reports on a regular basis, as well as thematic reports on the implementation of SDG 5 and other gender-related targets in the Arab region. ESCWA will prepare these regular reports in coordination with UN Women and the League of Arab States with input from other regional organizations.

44. The Committee on Women will continue to serve as the main body to discuss gender policies. Technical aspects of gender-related statistics and indicators, as well as related needs for capacity-building will be addressed by the Statistical Committee, which consists of the heads of Central Statistics Offices or their representatives in ESCWA member States. This will also include the design of methodologies for measuring SDGs targets and indicators as well as the creation of a regional data bank on regional indicators and trends.

45. At the global level, these processes will feed into a high-level political forum and the preparation of an annual report by the United Nations Secretary General. National women's machineries will be called to contribute to these initiatives by coordinating the preparation of national reports. ESCWA will provide capacity building and technical assistance to member States to identify solutions and good practices that could be relevant at the global and regional levels, in accordance with paragraph 74(c).

IV. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

46. The adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development represents a major milestone that places gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls at the centre of sustainable development policies for the years to come. A major strength of this new Agenda lies in its universal nature, because it applies to both developing and developed countries alike, and is grounded in values shared by humanity. Fighting inequalities lies at the heart of this bold vision, which pledges that "no one will be left behind", and reaffirms core human rights principles such as dignity, equality and non-discrimination.

47. Within the new Agenda, gender equality is addressed both in SDG 5 on achieving gender equality and empowering all women and girls, and through the mainstreaming of gender into other actionable goals and

targets. The 2030 Agenda will thus help reinforce the objectives of major instruments for the advancement of women, such as CEDAW and the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, while instilling a new dynamic in national development and gender policies. National women's machineries will be instrumental to the success of this ambitious global endeavour. Their strategic and technical contributions will be critical in the elaboration, implementation and review of national policies to achieve the SDGs.

48. In order to effectively contribute to the realization of the 2030 Agenda, and in particular its aspects pertaining to gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls as detailed in SDG 5 and gender-related targets under other SDGs, Arab national women's machineries are recommended to:

(a) Undertake national situation analyses and research, with a view to identifying the most critical targets for sustainable development and gender equality and providing a baseline for the review of any future efforts; such situation analyses should: take into consideration, as specified in the 2030 Agenda, the perspectives of various stakeholders, especially civil society, women's organizations and the private sector, possibly through the organization of multi-stakeholder national consultations; benefit from various methodologies, including the elaboration of a risk matrix and a 'problem tree'; contribute to evaluating present challenges, as well as anticipating any factor that could undermine gender equality in the future; propose solutions; and highlight how unlocking women's potential and promoting gender equality can effectively support sustainable development and the realization of the 2030 Agenda as a whole;

(b) Actively contribute to national efforts to elaborate a national development plan, or update the existing one, in order to reflect the objectives of the 2030 Agenda; in this connection, Arab national women's machineries will need to: sensitize the government entity that will lead this exercise; provide decision makers with information about gender-related goals and targets throughout the 2030 Agenda; communicate that gender equality will be a key to the success of all policies in the economic, social and environmental fields; and provide advice and technical assistance to other ministries and government entities in order to mainstream a gender perspective into various components of the national development plan and related strategies;

(c) Take the lead in elaborating a component on gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls in the national development plan, in accordance with SDG 5 and other gender-related targets as relevant and in updating the national strategy or action plan for gender equality as necessary; this will require the Arab national women's machineries to: translate the targets and means of implementation of the 2030 Agenda into national objectives, based on an analysis of the national context and related needs; revise or update their work plans accordingly, bearing in mind national commitments under other instruments and processes, such as CEDAW, the Beijing Platform for Action and Security Council resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security; and build on the momentum created by the adoption of the 2030 Agenda to call for the allocation of sufficient resources to gender strategies and institutions working towards gender equality and the empowerment of women, in accordance with paragraph 20 of the Agenda;

(d) Ensure that the national development plan, as well as any related strategy with a component on gender equality and women's empowerment, entails a clear allocation of responsibilities among government agencies and a timeframe including milestones for implementation (keeping in mind that effective national development plans and strategies typically involve mechanisms for monitoring and evaluation of results at mid-term and at the end of the implementation phase, which are 2022 and 2030 for the 2030 Agenda); in this connection, Arab national women's machineries should: ensure that all gender-related targets and indicators are consistent with the objectives of the 2030 Agenda, as well as with related international indicators; draw the attention of decision makers to the fact that the 2030 Agenda establishes gender sensitivity as one of the nine guiding principles for follow-up and review; make plans to ensure that they will be able to regularly compile information from other government agencies on the implementation of all gender-related targets; and advocate for the adoption of gender-responsive budgets, recalling that information about public spending on gender equality will need to be collected for the purpose of reporting on the indicator pertaining to means of implementation 5 c;

(e) Liaise and establish regular lines of communication with national statistical offices to ensure that sex-disaggregated and gender-related data is regularly collected, analyzed and disseminated;

(f) Develop and implement advocacy and capacity-building programmes on the 2030 Agenda, with an emphasis on gender-related objectives and the linkages between gender equality and development.

49. ESCWA remains the key player in the Arab region by providing advisory services and technical support to member States, particularly in the elaboration and implementation of national development plans addressing sustainable development in all its dimensions. ESCWA will continue to strengthen knowledge and capacities in the field of development in the Arab region in general, and in relation to gender equality in particular. In accordance with its mandates, including paragraph 80 of the 2030 Agenda, it will convene inclusive regional review processes with a view to sharing good practices and discussing common targets under the auspices of the Arab High Level Forum on Sustainable Development, as well as in the context of its various committees, in particular the Committee on Women.

50. The Committee on Women, under the leadership of ESCWA, will continue to be a major forum to discuss the role of Arab national women's machineries in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. It will support the identification of priority needs to be addressed by the ESCWA Centre for Women. It will set the platform for the preparation of a regional situation analysis to constitute a baseline for future reporting on progress towards the implementation of the 2030 Agenda at the regional level, as foreseen by paragraphs 77 and 80 of the Agenda. It will facilitate the selection of a series of salient issues to be tackled by both ESCWA and member States in their work programmes.

AnnexTABLE 1. SDG 5, A GOAL ENTIRELY DEDICATED TO GENDER EQUALITY
AND THE EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN AND GIRLS

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| SDG 5: Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls |
| <i>Targets</i> |
| 5.1 End all forms of discrimination against all women and girls everywhere |
| 5.2 Eliminate all forms of violence against all women and girls in the public and private spheres, including trafficking and sexual and other types of exploitation |
| 5.3 Eliminate all harmful practices, such as child, early and forced marriage and female genital mutilation |
| 5.4 Recognize and value unpaid care and domestic work through the provision of public services, infrastructure and social protection policies and the promotion of shared responsibility within the household and the family as nationally appropriate |
| 5.5 Ensure women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic and public life |
| 5.6 Ensure universal access to sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights as agreed in accordance with the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development and the Beijing Platform for Action and the outcome documents of their review conferences |
| <i>Means of implementation</i> |
| 5.a Undertake reforms to give women equal rights to economic resources, as well as access to ownership and control over land and other forms of property, financial services, inheritance and natural resources, in accordance with national laws |
| 5.b Enhance the use of enabling technology, in particular information and communications technology, to promote the empowerment of women |
| 5.c Adopt and strengthen sound policies and enforceable legislation for the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls at all levels |

TABLE 2. MAIN REFERENCES TO WOMEN AND GIRLS IN SDGs (OTHER THAN SDG 5)

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| SDG 1: End poverty in all its forms everywhere |
| <i>Targets</i> |
| 1.2 By 2030, reduce at least by half the proportion of men, women and children of all ages living in poverty in all its dimensions according to national definitions |
| 1.4 By 2030, ensure that all men and women, in particular the poor and the vulnerable, have equal rights to economic resources, as well as access to basic services, ownership and control over land and other forms of property, inheritance, natural resources, appropriate new technology and financial services, including microfinance |
| <i>Means of implementation</i> |
| 1.b Create sound policy frameworks at the national, regional and international levels, based on pro-poor and gender-sensitive development strategies, to support accelerated investment in poverty eradication actions |
| SDG 2: End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture |
| <i>Targets</i> |
| 2.2 By 2030, end all forms of malnutrition, including achieving, by 2025, the internationally agreed targets on stunting and wasting in children under 5 years of age, and address the nutritional needs of adolescent girls, pregnant and lactating women and older persons |
| 2.3 By 2030, double the agricultural productivity and incomes of small-scale food producers, in particular women, indigenous peoples, family farmers, pastoralists and fishers, including through secure and equal access to land, other productive resources and inputs, knowledge, financial services, markets and opportunities for value addition and non-farm employment |
| SDG 3: Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages |
| <i>Targets</i> |
| 3.1 By 2030, reduce the global maternal mortality ratio to less than 70 per 100,000 live births |
| 3.7 By 2030, ensure universal access to sexual and reproductive health-care services, including for family planning, information and education, and the integration of reproductive health into national strategies and programmes |
| SDG 4: Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all |
| <i>Targets</i> |
| 4.1 By 2030, ensure that all girls and boys complete free, equitable and quality primary and secondary education leading to relevant and effective learning outcomes |
| 4.2 By 2030, ensure that all girls and boys have access to quality early childhood development, care and pre-primary education so that they are ready for primary education |
| 4.3 By 2030, ensure equal access for all women and men to affordable and quality technical, vocational and tertiary education, including university |
| 4.5 By 2030, eliminate gender disparities in education and ensure equal access to all levels of education and vocational training for the vulnerable, including persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples and children in vulnerable situations |
| 4.6 By 2030, ensure that all youth and a substantial proportion of adults, both men and women, achieve literacy and numeracy |

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| 4.7 By 2030, ensure that all learners acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, including, among others, through education for sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence, global citizenship and appreciation of cultural diversity and of culture’s contribution to sustainable development |
| <i>Means of implementation</i> |
| 4.a Build and upgrade education facilities that are child, disability and gender sensitive and provide safe, non-violent, inclusive and effective learning environments for all |
| SDG 6: Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all |
| <i>Target</i> |
| 6.2 By 2030, achieve access to adequate and equitable sanitation and hygiene for all and end open defecation, paying special attention to the needs of women and girls and those in vulnerable situations |
| SDG 8: Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all |
| <i>Targets</i> |
| 8.5 By 2030, achieve full and productive employment and decent work for all women and men, including for young people and persons with disabilities, and equal pay for work of equal value |
| 8.8 Protect labour rights and promote safe and secure working environments for all workers, including migrant workers, in particular women migrants, and those in precarious employment |
| SDG 10: Reduce inequality within and among countries |
| <i>Target</i> |
| 10.2 By 2030, empower and promote the social, economic and political inclusion of all, irrespective of age, sex, disability, race, ethnicity, origin, religion or economic or other status |
| SDG 11: Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable |
| <i>Targets</i> |
| 11.2 By 2030, provide access to safe, affordable, accessible and sustainable transport systems for all, improving road safety, notably by expanding public transport, with special attention to the needs of those in vulnerable situations, women, children, persons with disabilities and older persons |
| 11.7 By 2030, provide universal access to safe, inclusive and accessible, green and public spaces, in particular for women and children, older persons and persons with disabilities |
| SDG 13: Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts |
| <i>Means of implementation</i> |
| 13.b Promote mechanisms for raising capacity for effective climate change-related planning and management in least developed countries and small island developing States, including focusing on women, youth and local and marginalized communities |
| SDG 16: Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels |
| <i>Targets</i> |
| 16.3 By 2030, promote the rule of law at the national and international levels and ensure equal access to justice for all |
| 16.7 By 2030, ensure responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making at all levels |
| <i>Means of implementation</i> |

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| 16.b Promote and enforce non-discriminatory laws and policies for sustainable development |
| SDG 17: Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development |
| <i>Data, monitoring and accountability</i> |
| 17.18 By 2020, enhance capacity-building support to developing countries, including for least developed countries and small island developing States, to increase significantly the availability of high-quality, timely and reliable data disaggregated by income, gender, age, race, ethnicity, migratory status, disability, geographic location and other characteristics relevant in national contexts. |
