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# United Nations Inter-Agency Network on Women and Gender Equality

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Report of the Nineteenth Annual Session of the Inter-Agency Network on Women and Gender Equality

Virtual, 18-20 May 2021

The 19th annual session of the United Nations Inter-Agency Network on Women and Gender Equality (IANWGE) was held on 18-20 May 2021 virtually. Discussions focused on the Secretary-General's priorities and vision for gender equality; thematic and emerging issues of system-wide relevance; the Generation Equality Forum; rethinking gender mainstreaming in the UN system; and IANWGE working groups for the year 2021-2022. The session also featured a wide-ranging interactive dialogue with the outgoing Chair of the Network, Ms. Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, Under-Secretary-General and Executive Director, UN Women, and a dialogue with Ms. Anita Bhatia, Deputy Executive Director, UN Women, on financing for gender equality.

### **Opening session**

The United Nations Inter-Agency Network on Women and Gender Equality (IANWGE) held its nineteenth annual session in a virtual format on 18-20 May 2021. The agenda of the meeting and the list of participants are contained in annexes I and II, respectively, to the present report. The annual meeting focused on issues of system-wide relevance, such as the Secretary-General's priorities for gender equality, the Generation Equality Forum, financing for gender equality and re-thinking gender mainstreaming.

Ms. Aparna Mehrotra, Secretary of IANWGE and Director, UN System Coordination Division, UN Women, welcomed members and expressed appreciation to the Network for their work on the IANWGE Beijing+25 review report as well as the IANWGE COVID-19 minimum requirements checklist and the IANWGE compendium on integrating gender considerations in COVID-19 response. She encouraged the Network to continue to develop common approaches for use across the UN and inform national responses on key issues, including COVID-19 response and recovery.

### Session I: The Secretary-General's priorities and vision for gender equality

Ms. Nahla Valji, Senior Adviser on Gender, Executive Office of the Secretary-General presented the Secretary-General's priorities and vision for gender equality. She stated that the Secretary-General viewed gender equality as one of two main drivers for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the other being climate change. The Secretary-General has committed to reform the UN to ensure that the organization is fit for purpose. Some notable commitments and achievements vis-à-vis gender equality included:

- The historical first of attaining gender parity at senior levels of leadership across the UN System, ahead of schedule in January 2020.
- Recorded progress toward gender parity at all levels in each entity, to be achieved by 2028.
- An equal number of men and women appointed at the Under-Secretary-General level.
- Greater gender parity and geographic diversity amongst Resident Coordinators.
- The highest percentage of women heads and deputy heads of peacekeeping missions, which stands at 41%.
- The first woman appointed as head of the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs.

• Upending assumptions and placing women on the entire senior leadership team – for example, the Iraq team.

Ms. Valji further noted that the Secretary-General is on track to achieving parity in entities at the headquarters level, though challenges persist in field offices, particularly peace operations where the gaps are the largest from the P to D levels. Furthermore, as part of the high-level prioritization of gender equality, the Secretary-General has:

- Created a working group on emergency measures to achieve gender parity in peace operations.
- Adopted special measures to enhance the UN's credibility with Member States.
- Established a High-Level Task Force on Financing for Gender Equality that has developed
  a set of recommendations for the Executive Committee to ensure consistent gender targets
  and earmarking.
- Advocated with Member States to secure systematic funding for gender equality.
- Undertaken monitoring across every entity to ensure adequate financing toward gender equality.
- Issued a memo to senior leadership encouraging them to serve as International Gender Champions and make commitments in line with this mandate.
- Requested that all Secretary-General's reports and briefings speak to gender equality and include robust gender analysis.
- Prioritized meeting with women leaders and women-led civil society organizations in his
  missions as well as ensuring that gender considerations are mainstreamed in all briefings.

The Secretary-General has highlighted gender equality in his policy speeches and in important platforms. During the last Commission on the Status of Women (CSW), the Secretary-General mentioned five core priorities related to gender equality and the empowerment of women which must be prioritized, particularly in the aftermath of the pandemic. These priorities include women's equal participation and leadership, equal representation of women in all public and private institutions, women's economic inclusion, ending violence against women and girls and supporting young women leaders.

In closing, Ms. Valji flagged two processes that are currently underway to mobilize the UN system on gender equality:

- The Secretary-General's call to action on human rights was launched in 2020 with a
  dedicated pillar on gender equality. Gender equality is also integrated into the other pillars.
  Furthermore, the Secretary-General has established two dedicated inter-agency task teams
  on gender equality, one on the repeal of discriminatory laws and another on temporary
  special measures.
- 2. Member States requested information on women's equal participation and leadership in the context of inclusive multilateralism as part of the Secretary-General's report on the common agenda and future of multilateralism. Member States are also encouraged to similarly prioritize these issues.

### Session II: Thematic and Emerging Issues of System-Wide Relevance

a) Review of Progress on Mainstreaming Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women and Girls into the Humanitarian, Development, and Peace Nexus Agenda

Mr. Tony Beck, Consultant, provided information on the evaluation of gender mainstreaming in the humanitarian, development, and peace, or the triple nexus process. As part of the Inter-Agency Humanitarian Evaluation Steering Group's work, a review on gender mainstreaming in the triple nexus process was commissioned which serves as the first systematic analysis of gender mainstreaming in this process.

The review focused on two main issues: (a) the key policy, governance, resources, or other constraints that need to be overcome in order to integrate gender equality considerations into the nexus agenda, and, (b) some of the immediate and medium-term practical measures that the Inter-Agency Standing Committee can undertake to address these constraints.

Three country level consultations on the review were held in Somalia, DRC, and Sudan which suggested the following:

• Triple nexus documents and processes contain limited discussion of gender issues.

- While gender issues are key in humanitarian, development, and peace agendas, they seem not to have been systematically integrated in the nexus process.
- UN HQ and country inter-agency coordination structures do not adequately promote gender mainstreaming in the triple nexus process.
- The UN System must promote gender mainstreaming in the nexus processes.
- A lack of strategic planning, accountability, leadership, resources, and capacity cause gender related gaps in the nexus processes.

As next steps, the review suggested setting up a two-year IANWGE Working Group to:

- Develop a strategic vision and overarching strategic plan for gender mainstreaming in the triple nexus process.
- Ensue consistent coordination and information flow across the various triple nexus mechanisms.
- Strengthen and ensure implementation of existing guidance in strategic planning documents.
- o Determine how to strengthen accountability for gender mainstreaming.

Action: Table the above proposal for an IANWGE Working Group on Gender Mainstreaming in the Triple Nexus Process during the session on the constitution of new working groups on Day 2 of the annual meeting.

### b) The Intersectional Gap: Addressing Challenges of Gender and Disability Inclusion

In his opening, Mr. A. H. Monjurul Kabir, UN Coordination Adviser, UN Women observed that much of the UN System is engaged in intersectionality work. Premised on the idea that people live with multiple and layered identities, intersectionality accounts for all conditions that create distinct life experience based on varying factors. Further, people who are members of more than one group/community can simultaneously experience oppression and privilege. A true intersectional approach reveals meaningful distinction and similarities among groups to promote more effective policy solutions.

Mr. Kabir highlighted the importance of a consistently applied intersectional approach, especially in the context of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the SDGs. In terms of disability inclusion specifically, gender inequality and disability are mutually reinforcing. Greater

disability inclusion and accessibility creates more conditions for gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls.

However, significant investment in terms of financial resources, knowledge generation, political will, and attitudinal change, among other factors is required to realize disability inclusion. Operational challenges in undertaking system-wide intersectional disability work include:

- Knowledge gaps: A lack of understanding of multiple layers of discriminatory factors and intersecting identities.
- Capacity gaps: The lack of UN system-wide narratives on Leaving No One Behind
  (LNOB) hampers the UN's work. For example, the understanding of reasonable
  accommodation in the UN system is limited as accessibility audits reveal. Another example
  of the capacity gap was the lack of understanding of the specific needs of women with
  disabilities in conflict or humanitarian settings.
- Collaboration gaps: There remains a gap between women's movement/groups and disability movements/groups.
- Optimisation gaps: Gender Marker, UNDIS entity level reporting and country level Scorecard, and related accountability tools should be established and implemented to monitor disability inclusion.

Notably, UN Women's recent work in disability inclusion with collaboration from partner entities is building the capacity of UNCTs to address disability issues. In addition, the disability inclusion team at UN Women has produced a multitude of knowledge products, including in the context of COVID-19. An intersectionality toolkit is also being designed with the aim to provide conceptual clarity, practical guidance, and case studies.

<u>Action</u>: Facilitate collaboration between IANWGE and UN Women's Disability Inclusion team through workshops/webinars and other targeted interactions; and identify opportunities for peer review of key deliverables on disability inclusion.

# Session III: Generation Equality Forum: Implementation of the Action Coalitions/ Women, Peace and Security and Humanitarian Action Compact and UN System Engagement

Ms. Sarah Hendricks, Director, Policy, Programme and Intergovernmental Division, UN Women, noted that the GEF aims to accelerate progress on gender equality through its six Action Coalitions,

namely Gender Based Violence, Bodily Autonomy and Sexual & Reproductive Health Rights, Feminist Action for Climate Justice, Feminist Movements and Leadership, Technology and Innovation for Gender Equality, Economic Justice and Rights.

These Action Coalitions are multi-stakeholder mechanisms that aim to create impact by driving forward a roadmap for gender equality. This roadmap, known as the Global Acceleration Plan on Gender Equality, has been advanced through the active engagement of 11 entities who also sit on the leadership structures of the Action Coalitions.

Interested stakeholders could make commitments to these Action Coalitions. However, any commitments made should be game-changing, measurable, and designed with other stakeholders as well as reflect the principles of the Action Coalitions for intersectional and feminist leadership. Furthermore, a strong commitment is defined by five criteria:

- 1. Potential for Impact: a strong commitment aims to achieve transformative change in women and girls' lives as well as within organizations', governments', and companies' internal structures.
- 2. Funding: a strong commitment is resourced by new and scaled funds (clearly expressed and integrated into budgets).
- 3. Level of endorsement: a strong commitment is endorsed at the highest level (including high-level representation in Paris).
- 4. Collective nature: a strong commitment is collectively designed by multiple stakeholders.
- 5. SMART: a 'strong' commitment is Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant and Timebound.

Three catalytic commitments announced at the Mexico City GEF were highlighted including a \$25 million joint commitment from the Ford Foundation, the Equality Fund, and the Government of Canada; a \$100 million commitment from Women Moving Millions and a policy commitment from Mexico's National Institute for Women in partnership with UN Women to address women's care burden.

With reference to the Paris Forum, planned for 30 June to 2 July, the opening segment on 30 June would be hosted by French President Emmanuel Macron. High-level sessions on each of the Action Coalitions would be held at the head of state, head of government and head of UN entity

level on 1 July and 2 July. The program also would include approximately 100 other events of interest. At the Mexico Forum, 13,000 participants attended the sessions, featuring 250 speakers from 85 countries, with a disproportionate representation from young people under the ages of 30.

Participants also brought attention to the Women, Peace and Security and Humanitarian Action (WPS-HA) Compact as an additional tool for accelerating commitments on gender equality within fragile and conflict settings. In closing Ms. Hendriks expressed appreciation to all entities for partnering in this effort in a meaningful and tangible way.

<u>Action:</u> Encourage entities to commit to any of the above Action Coalitions and send their commitment proposals to the Action Coalition Secretariat.

#### Session IV: Priority issues and working groups of IANWGE

Ms. Leslie Groves Williams, External Facilitator, stated that no new IANWGE Working Groups were constituted in 2020 as the annual session was postponed due to the pandemic. This session would therefore focus on identifying priority issues and setting up new IANWGE Working Groups for 2021-22.

Five possible themes for new IANWGE Working Groups were identified as follows: (i) climate change, (ii) intersectionality, (iii) moving beyond the binary, (iv) disability inclusion and (v) gender mainstreaming in the humanitarian, development, and peace nexus.

Following the identification of the above mentioned 5 priority areas, breakout groups were created for discussion on possible Terms of Reference which are to be finalized after the annual session.

<u>Action:</u> Finalize the establishment of the new IANWGE Working Groups for 2021-22 after the annual session.

#### Session V: Re-thinking gender mainstreaming in the UN system

In her opening remarks, Ms. Raquel Lagunas, Director, Gender Team, UNDP, emphasized that the UN system must rethink its current approach to gender mainstreaming to effectively drive gender equality results in the future. The COVID-19 pandemic has shown the urgent need to do things differently. It was therefore necessary for the UN system to leverage this moment to reformulate its approach to gender mainstreaming.

To set the stage for the discussion that followed, Ms. Aruna Rao, Co-Founder, Gender At Work, shared reflections on how the world has changed significantly from 1995, the year when gender mainstreaming emerged as a new approach for attaining gender equality. Ms. Joanne Sandler, Co-Founder, Gender At Work, guided participants through a visual exercise to reflect on their organization's approach to gender mainstreaming.

Ms. Rao and Ms. Sandler's reflections underscored that after 26 years of operational experience, gender mainstreaming has not worked as effectively as promised. Moreover, the multiple crises of the pandemic, climate change, rising nationalism, unprecedented economic inequality, erosion of women's rights and backlash against feminism have negatively impacted progress towards gender equality and women's rights. As a response to the fraught global landscape, new social movements such as #MeToo and Black Lives Matter have emerged that challenge governmental authority and state power to demand structural change.

In this context, gender transformation is the new, overarching goal which aims to promote deeprooted and sustainable change. Gender transformative change requires critically examining gender roles and norms; strengthening gender norms that support equality; improving the status of women and girls who are excluded; eliminating underlying discriminatory attitudes that perpetuate inequality; and adopting multi-sectoral interventions that work to fundamentally shift unequal power relations.

In the UN system, several entities have adopted an intersectional lens and are working to break gender binaries to promote gender transformative change. However, the overall system-wide gender transformation agenda remained unclear. IANWGE must therefore use its expertise to promote conceptual clarity on what gender transformation means and more broadly, support gender transformative approaches in the UN system.

As a network of gender focal points, IANWGE has the power to facilitate gender transformative approaches which means working systematically to transform underlying power dynamics and structural barriers to women's voices, choices, participation, and influence. IANWGE members were also encouraged to influence broader policies on topics such as trade, security, financing, and climate change to ensure alignment with gender equality commitments. In the discussion that followed, participants were asked to identify key wide-ranging actions that would revolutionize system-wide gender equality approaches as follows:

- Strategic Planning Designate gender equality as a high-level result in each entity's strategic plan.
- Financing Make it compulsory for all organizations to assign 10 percent of funds to gender equality.
- *Gender Expertise* Ensure all staff, from senior management to junior professionals, possess gender expertise, knowledge and competence as a core competency.
- Capacity Building Make capacity building on gender equality issues, including gender mainstreaming mandatory.
- *Accountability* Strengthen system-wide accountability to address the lack of prioritization of gender equality issues.
- Performance Appraisals Engage women beneficiaries to review performance of UN representatives, senior leaders, and staff. Further, ensure gender equality goals are part of performance appraisals.
- Gender Focal Points Ensure all entities have full-time Gender Focal Points.
- Recruitment for Senior Management Promote the appointment of qualified female candidates to high level positions.
- Gender Analysis Prioritize high quality gender analysis at all levels.
- *Gender-Responsive Budgeting* Make gender-responsive budgeting mandatory across the UN system.
- *Intersectionality* Promote the application of an intersectional lens across the work of the UN system.
- *Country Level Work* Promote the implementation of key international frameworks at the national level. Ensure that there are staff who play the role of "translators" or "connectors" to navigate the global agreements into national actions.
- *Male Allies* Identify good practices in engaging male allies to help transform organizational culture.

Key recommendations to advance a comprehensive theory of change for promoting gendertransformative change was also shared as follows:

• Embed feminist knowledge, analyses, and practice in all visions for change, strategies, and partnerships.

- Center women's grassroots and feminist organizing in all strategies, decision-making, and partnerships.
- Exponentially increase financial investment, transparency, and accountability for gender equality.
- Place care issues at the heart of policy development and economic models, which displaces economic growth from the center and instead focuses more strongly on care and wellbeing.

In closing Ms. Sandler and Ms. Rao reiterated that for the UN system to be more effective in its gender equality work, the context of operations must be examined, and women's organizations must be enlisted as allies. This way emergent policies, incentives, and strategies can be designed to address ground realities. Organizational hierarchies must also be examined to ensure that the system is flexible and fit for purpose.

<u>Action</u>: Commission an evaluation or assessment of the various gender architecture models and policies to see how they may be improved to deliver better results.

# Session VI: Dialogue with Chair of IANWGE, Under-Secretary-General and Executive Director, UN Women Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka

The Chair expressed appreciation to the Network for the many years of collaboration on key issues of system-wide relevance. She reflected on her tenure, sharing that she had witnessed many advances on the shared agenda of gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls. Notably, progress on accountability, through implementation of the UN-SWAP and UNCT-SWAP was achieved; attention to gender perspectives in intergovernmental and inter-agency bodies and their outcomes has been considerably enhanced; and joint programmes for targeted actions on gender equality have also steadily grown.

Despite progress, patriarchy remains entrenched and has not been dismantled. Similarly, while a lot of good work has been achieved since the creation of UN Women, the Chair cautioned that it is not good enough. Gaps continue to persist, and the COVID-19 pandemic has further exposed the massive inequalities that women and girls face worldwide.

The Chair also shared the Secretary-General's concern about the UN system not having done enough to tackle gender inequality structurally. In this regard, the Secretary-General had requested UN Women's perspective on what could be done differently. The Chair therefore encouraged the

Network to develop far-reaching proposals of how the UN system's work on gender equality and gender mainstreaming may be strengthened.

The Chair also noted that while Member States have driven the gender equality agenda forward, the pushback against gender equality and women's rights remained strong. At the Commission on the Status of Women, it is not always possible to push for national-level implementation of the agreed conclusions. There is also a threat of rollback of prior gains. The watering down of intergovernmental language due to the backlash against gender equality is particularly damaging.

There is an urgent need to find new partners that can assist the UN to accelerate action despite the pushback. In this context, GEF is conceptualized as an extension of the multilateral system that offers a new mechanism where the private sector, civil society, and young people each have a voice that is equal to that of Member States. In many ways, "it is a coalition of the willing" for the acceleration of the work on gender equality and women's rights in a complex global environment. The Chair stressed that GE is an opportunity to break away from the norm by involving a much wider group of stakeholders to advance gender equality and women's rights.

Reflecting on the wider role of the UN, the Chair emphasized the importance of upholding public trust in the UN system and harnessing it to create change at the grassroots level. The UN must choose to promote groundbreaking actions that improve the lives of women and girls. The UN tends to have long processes that delay results. This style of work must be revamped, and a sense of urgency must drive the UN system's delivery.

On a personal note, the Chair noted that in all her work she has endeavored to carry the perspectives of women, particularly when she worked in male-dominated industries such as energy and mining. During her time as Deputy President of South Africa, her emphasis was on promoting women's leadership. She expressed concern about the continuing underrepresentation of women in public and private institutions. This area needs a lot of effort, and the GEF Action Coalition on Feminist Movement and Women's participation aims to address this issue.

<u>Action:</u> The Chair proposed a meeting between IANWGE and the Executive Office of the Secretary-General to discuss key issues pertaining to the gender equality mandate.

Session VII: Dialogue with Deputy Executive Director, UN Women Anita Bhatia on strengthening financing for gender equality

In her opening remarks, Ms. Coates observed that UN entities systemically under-finance gender equality work yet still demanded an increase in results. She added that these challenges were not unique to the UN system and parallel the approach of many national governments which allocate minimal financing for gender equality. She invited Ms. Bhatia to help IANWGE think through innovative and creative responses to the financing challenge.

Ms. Bhatia provided an overview of the importance of finance as a tool for the implementation of global goals, including those related to gender equality. She noted that when the Beijing Platform for Action was adopted in 1995, it was not costed. Noting that the financing gap persists, she stressed that implementation cannot be undertaken without commensurate resources.

Similarly, while it is easy to claim that gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls is a policy priority, unless resources are allocated, these priorities remain an unfinished agenda. The allocation of resources also reveals subtle preferences, i.e. whether the preference is to spend on gender equality or something else entirely.

Ms. Bhatia further noted that the work of the IANWGE has helped to move the gender equality agenda forward in the UN system, including on the topic of financing. However, much work remains to be done on securing predictable and sustainable financing for gender equality work. For example, at present less than 3 percent of all investments made by the UN Development System are allocated towards gender equality. Similarly, countries continue to systematically under invest in gender equality. The current levels of financing for gender equality does not match the ambition of achieving a gender equal world.

However, Ms. Bhatia stressed the importance to exploring ways of securing financing, beyond the traditional approaches. For example, funding for gender equality was sought through the COVID-19 Multi Partner Trust Fund. When the Trust Fund launched its second call for proposals it included a 30 percent financial target related gender equality. Coupled with a comprehensive gender marker methodology to promote a monitoring and accountability framework, the second call for proposals saw 69 percent of projects with gender equality as a principal objective. This experience demonstrated that having clear targets makes a difference and systems to monitor and report on them are critical.

In the discussion that followed, Ms. Bhatia noted that a positive feedback loop is necessary to create long-term change. She believed that everybody wants to do the right thing, but tools, data, and information are needed to create accountability. In this regard, IANWGE has an important role to play in support of gender markers and the implementation of the recommendations of the High-Level Task Force on Financing for Gender Equality.

In closing, Ms. Bhatia noted that the Secretary-General has communicated the importance of securing financing and has reconvened an entire work stream on financing for development, led by the governments of Jamaica and Canada. The Secretary-General wants to see financing become a core part of the UN's work, whether at the UNCT level, entity level or system-wide as a whole.

### **Session VIII: Closing**

The Secretary of IANWGE thanked all members for participating in the annual meeting. She emphasized the importance of aligning IANWGE's future work to priorities identified at the highest level of the system. Speaking to a lack of a dedicated budget for IANWGE, the Secretary stressed that even without resources, the Network must find ways to contribute.

On the Chair's proposal regarding a possible meeting with the Secretary-General, the Secretary noted that the prior consultation with the Network on gender mainstreaming provides ideas on financing and the gender architecture which could possibly be brought to the attention of the Secretary-General.

In addition, the Secretary noted that the Generation Equality Forum constitutes a significant milestone as underlined by the Chair, and she encouraged IANWGE members to make commitments ahead of the Paris Forum.

With these final reflections, the Secretary brought the annual session to a close.

**Annex I: Annual Session Agenda** 

18-20 May

**Opening session** 

Aparna Mehrotra, Secretary, IANWGE and Leslie Groves, External Facilitator

Session I: The Secretary-General's priorities and vision for gender equality

Nahla Valji, Senior Adviser on Gender, Executive Office of the Secretary-General, UN

Session II: Thematic and Emerging Issues of System-Wide Relevance

a) Review of Progress on Mainstreaming Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women and Girls into the Humanitarian, Development, and Peace Nexus Agenda - Tony Beck, Consultant

b) The Intersectional Gap: Addressing Challenges of Gender and Disability Inclusion - A.H. Monjurul Kabir, UN Coordination Adviser, UN Women

Session III: Generation Equality Forum: Implementation of the Action Coalitions/ Women, Peace and Security and Humanitarian Action Compact and UN System Engagement

Sarah Hendriks, Director, Policy, Programme and Intergovernmental Division, UN Women

Session IV: Priority issues and working groups of IANWGE

Session V: Re-thinking gender mainstreaming in the UN system

Raquel Lagunas, Director, Gender Team, UNDP and Joanne Sandler and Aruna Rao, Gender At Work

Session VI: Dialogue with Chair of IANWGE, Under-Secretary-General and Executive Director, UN Women Ms. Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka

Session VII: Dialogue with Deputy Executive Director, UN Women Ms. Anita Bhatia on strengthening financing for gender equality

Session VIII: Wrap-up and close

**Annex II: List of Participants** 

IANWGE 19th Annual Session, Virtual, 18-20 May 2021				
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