

Statement by H.E. Mr. Geir O. Pedersen PR of Norway, UN Women's Stakeholders Forum, Panel 4

Gender equality is a goal in itself as well as a right.

But it is also smart economics.

At the beginning of the last century, Norway was among the poorest countries in Europe. It was the economic crisis in the 1930s that triggered increased cooperation and collective solutions, of which women's empowerment and gender equality is a major part.

Investment in gender equality accelerates development and economic growth. And we speak from experience.

Norwegian women's participation in the workforce has increased from 50 % in 1970 to over 75 % today. This is 16 % more than the average in industrialized countries in the OECD. If Norwegian women's participation equaled the average of the OECD countries, we would have lost values equivalent to the Norwegian oil fund, which is over 800 billion US Dollars.

The advancements we have made in Norway are the results of political will, a vigilant civil society and long term investments. Women's empowerment and gender equality does not happen by itself.

In the 70s, women's freedom to work after having children was very limited. Over the next couple of decades, welfare schemes were established that enabled women to combine work and care for children. These quickly gained broad political support and happened parallel to what has been called the 'equality-revolution' in higher education.

Among the advances that enable women to "have it all" are one year parental leave, where some weeks are reserved for the father; the right to leave of absence when children are sick, reduced work hours for breast-feeding, full coverage of subsidized day care and pre-schools as well as care for elderly. A quota law that requires companies to have at least 40 per cent women on their boards has strengthened women's participation in the private sector. And improved the performance of Norwegian companies.

There is a strong correlation between a country's gender gap and its national competitiveness, income and development. In healthcare and education, the gap is closing. However, the gap between women and men in terms of economic participation and political empowerment remains wide. There is a long way to go before the gender gap is closed world-wide.

In our development cooperation, gender equality therefore continues to be among our top priorities. Good intentions must be followed up with financial support. In addition to funding targeted programmes, we also promote gender mainstreaming in our development cooperation, and use a gender marker to track our funding in this respect. In several instances, we require partners to report on the effect their project has on gender equality.

We believe there is a clear link between gender equality and the eradication of poverty. Therefore women must be at the center of accelerating the achievement of the MDGs.

The current goals do not effectively address the underlying structural causes of gender inequality. Therefore, we need a stand-alone goal on gender equality in the Post 2015 framework. Gender equality also needs to be integrated into the targets and indicators for all the goals in the new development framework.

Girls' education is also an important driver of other development goals, particularly girls' secondary education. Equal access to education for girls will be a key goal in our development policy going forward. This is clearly reflected in the amendment to the national budget for 2014.

Like the other Nordic countries, Norway has taken deliberate steps to promote gender equality. Equal opportunity has been furthered by means of substantial public investments. And the investments have paid off. Giving everyone equal opportunities results in an efficiency gain because more people work and pay taxes, and because tasks are carried out by the best qualified people, regardless of gender, age, family situation or social status.