



**Commission on the Status of Women
Fifty-ninth session**

**National mechanisms for gender equality:
advocates for action and accountability, catalysts for change
Round table**

**Wednesday 11 March 2015
3.00 – 6.00 pm**

ISSUES PAPER

1. Introduction

In its resolution 2013/18, the Economic and Social Council decided that at its fifty-ninth session, in 2015, the Commission of the Status of Women (CSW) will undertake a review and appraisal of the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the outcomes of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly, including current challenges that affect the implementation of the Platform for Action and the achievement of gender equality and the empowerment of women, as well as opportunities for strengthening gender equality and the empowerment of women in the post-2015 development agenda through the integration of a gender perspective.

As part of the review and appraisal at its fifty-ninth session, the Commission will hold a roundtable entitled “National mechanisms for gender equality: advocates for action and accountability, catalysts for change”. The round table will consider strategies for effective partnerships among the increasingly diverse range of institutional mechanisms that exist at national level to advocate and mobilize for gender equality and the empowerment of women. The round table will result in a Chair’s summary that should contribute to the accelerated implementation of the Platform for Action in the current context.

2. Elements for discussion

A. Background

The 20-year review and appraisal of the Beijing Platform for Action concludes that institutional mechanisms remain critical drivers for the promotion of gender equality.¹ The understanding of what comprises national mechanisms for gender equality has broadened over the past 20 years to include, in addition to the national machinery for the advancement of women within government (e.g. a ministry,

¹ Report of the Secretary-General on the review and appraisal of the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the outcomes of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly (E/CN.6/2015/3), Critical Area H: Institutional Mechanisms for the Advancement of Women.

department, or office - see paragraph 201 of the Beijing Platform for Action), a range of other formal institutions, including focal points or working groups in sectoral ministries; inter-departmental, ministerial or multi-sectoral bodies; decentralized mechanisms in state, municipal and local governments; accountability institutions; and advisory/consultative councils. Mechanisms are increasingly decentralized, ensuring that all tiers of government share responsibility for promoting gender equality. In addition, institutional mechanisms for the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of women are being increasingly established in the legislative branch, through gender equality caucuses or standing committees that assess the gender equality impact of proposed legislation and initiate and lobby for legislation to eliminate discrimination against women. Civil society and non-governmental organizations are also key stakeholders in these efforts.

In tandem with their increasing range, the roles and functions of these gender equality mechanisms are also growing. National mechanisms for gender equality have come to play a critical role in monitoring and oversight of implementation of gender equality commitments. In particular, they play an important role in the development, implementation and monitoring of gender equality policies, strategies and actions plans. Active participation, voice and influence of gender equality mechanisms in policy- and decision-making lead to better outcomes for women and girls through increased accountability of government, and compliance with existing law and regulations by other stakeholders (such as the private sector).

While reportedly all countries have a national machinery, and most countries reported on the existence of institutional mechanisms for the promotion of gender equality, the Beijing+20 review confirmed persistent challenges in their capacity to be effective and decisive advocates for gender equality and the empowerment of women. Several regional studies found a lack of adequate financial resources and, in some contexts, an increased dependency on donor funding to sustain activities; low levels of technical capacity, decision-making power and visibility within the government and a lack of political will to prioritize gender mainstreaming across all government policies and programmes.

Successive reviews of the Beijing Platform for Action and research on the functioning of national mechanisms have suggested that a key determinant of the effectiveness and impact of the broad range of institutional mechanisms is their capacity to collaborate and work together by building partnerships, instituting collaborative processes, sharing information and strategizing towards specific objectives. Cooperation and collaboration are key *modus operandi* for national mechanisms for gender equality and the empowerment of women.

The full, effective and accelerated implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action is essential for the full realization of the Millennium Development Goals as well as to the post-2015 development agenda and achievement of the future goals. There is a critical need to strengthen accountability for commitments made to gender equality 20 years ago. The full range of national gender equality mechanisms, national human rights institutions and regulatory bodies must have mandates and institutional set-ups that enable them to be effective advocates and catalysts for change. They need to be properly resourced so that they can be responsive to the needs of women and girls, and they must have the power and capacity to ensure compliance with obligations.

This round table will provide an opportunity to discuss how national mechanisms for gender equality have been successful advocates for gender equality, the empowerment of women and the human rights of women and girls. Ministers for Gender Equality and representatives of the diverse range of gender equality mechanisms will discuss ways in which such national mechanisms have effectively promoted accountability and monitored progress towards gender equality, especially through alliance building and

partnerships. Specifically, the round table will focus on the advocacy and catalytic role of national mechanisms for gender equality in six outcome areas critical to the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action: legislative change and accountability for gender equality; increased resources and enhanced service delivery for gender equality; and advocacy, awareness raising and women's participation and leadership.

B. Questions for discussion

Legislative change and accountability

- How has government machinery worked with parliamentary bodies such as women's caucuses to develop, and ensure the passage of, legislation on gender equality issues and reform discriminatory legislation?
- What have been effective strategies for monitoring, and holding governments accountable for their commitments to gender equality and the empowerment of women?
- How have national mechanisms for gender equality worked in partnership with international mechanisms for better results for women and girls?

Increased resources and service delivery

- How have government machinery and women's civil society organizations leveraged their influence to bring about increased budgetary allocations to gender equality issues?
- How have national mechanisms and gender focal points across government departments worked with civil society to ensure gender-sensitive service delivery? What lessons have been learned in networking across government and partnering with different stakeholders outside government?

Advocacy and awareness raising and women's participation and leadership

- How have national advisory councils on gender equality contributed to awareness raising and increasing women's leadership? What kind of institutional frameworks have facilitated partnerships and collaboration among government mechanisms and advisory bodies?
- How can partnerships between the national machinery within government and other institutional mechanisms be further strengthened to increase women's representation in all areas of decision-making, at all levels?
- How have national mechanisms worked successfully with international organizations in advocacy and awareness raising?

3. Format

The round table will be chaired by H.E. Mr Ruben Zamora, Vice-Chair of the Commission on the Status of Women (El Salvador), and will be moderated by Mr. Ivan Šimonović, Assistant Secretary-General for Human Rights, Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights.

The round table will be organized into three segments, of one hour each, with each one focusing on two of the outcome areas. Ministers and representatives of a specific form of mechanism will speak for 5 minutes each. Their presentations will be followed by a discussion with representatives of Member States, the United Nations system and non-governmental organizations on the specific theme and questions of each segment.