



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

**Panel Discussion
Changing social norms to achieve gender equality: expectations and opportunities**

**Monday, 16 March 2015
3.00 pm to 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 panel discussion titled: *Changing social norms to achieve gender equality: expectations and opportunities*, in order to consider the various aspects of social norms and stereotypes which condone and perpetuate gender inequality and discrimination. The panel will also review expectations and opportunities for facilitating progress towards gender equality through positive action and changing social norms. The panel will result in a Chair's summary with recommendations that should contribute to the accelerated implementation of the Platform for Action in the current context.

2. Elements for discussion

A. Background

The Beijing Platform for Action as well as other numerous legal and policy United Nations instruments concerned with the empowerment of women and the human rights of women and girls have regularly named social norms and stereotypes that perpetuate gender inequality as areas requiring attention and action.

Social norms are part of every social interaction and institution. They can be found, for example, in the way women and men are portrayed in mass media; in education systems and curricula; in explicit statements about men and women in laws; in the unwritten but powerful rules about hiring and promotion in workplaces; in the everyday practices of legislatures; and in the layout of urban space among others. Gender inequality and discrimination are interwoven with issues

of wealth and poverty, race and ethnic inequalities, disability and social inclusion or exclusion. The histories of women and girls, men and boys, differ in these different social contexts.

As the review and appraisal of the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action shows (E/CN.6/2015/3), discriminatory social norms and gender stereotypes remain pervasive across formal and informal institutions and continue to hold back progress towards gender equality. For example, discriminatory social norms and stereotypes that are embedded in labour markets, such as the unequal division of both paid and unpaid work and stereotypes regarding men as breadwinners, limit women's enjoyment of social and economic rights. Discriminatory social norms and practices that underlie women's unequal access to education and land and other productive resources limit women's enjoyment of the right to an adequate standard of living. Social norms that condone violence against women and girls prevent them from full and equal participation in social, economic and political life. These entrenched social norms and structural challenges, at all levels, prevent the transformation of gender power relations that is necessary to realize the vision of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action.

Social norms are not static, and are not automatically reproduced; they are actively produced and disseminated, and they are often actively contested. There is abundant evidence that social norms are not singular and monolithic in any society; rather they are multidimensional, diverse, and sometimes clashing. There are both persistent stereotypes and social norms, but also new and emerging norms.

In the last decade, rapid developments in technology have taken place which at times reinforce traditional power dynamics and gender inequality. Technology, particularly ICT, also potentially provides an increasingly important frontier for challenging gender stereotypes and social norms, for providing alternative narratives and more gender responsive content and services and for promoting women's participation in non-traditional sectors.

It is important to recognize that some social norms support gender equality. In thinking about how to change discriminatory social norms, it is important to build on traditions that support more gender equitable laws, policies and practices.

B. Questions for discussion during the dialogue

The following issues could be considered:

- How do prevailing social norms and stereotypes impact on the realization of gender equality? What are effective approaches and strategies to address social norms and stereotypes that perpetuate inequality and discrimination against women and girls?
- What lessons can be learned from the social change work to end harmful practices against women and girls, for example female genital mutilation?
- How can education reinforce girls' empowerment and gender equality?
- How can media, as well as the film and advertising industries, be change agents and shape social norms that support gender equality?
- How can ICT and technological innovation be used to address social norms and gender stereotypes that perpetuate inequality and discrimination? What is the role of grass roots women's organizations?

3. Format

The panel will be chaired by Ms Pille Kesler, Vice-Chair of the Commission on the Status of Women (Estonia). A moderator will facilitate the interactive discussion. The panellists will provide responses to the Moderator's opening questions (5 – 7minutes each). An interactive discussion, facilitated by the Moderator, will follow with representatives from Member States, entities of the United Nations system and non-governmental organizations.

Moderator:

Ms Anita Nayar, Director Regions ReFocus 2015, Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation

Panellists:

Ms Stephanie Seguino, Professor of Economics, University of Vermont (USA)

Ms Nafissatou J. Diop, Senior Adviser, Coordinator UNFPA-UNICEF Joint Programme on FGM/C: Accelerating Change (UNFPA)

Ms Olena Suslova, Founding Director and Board Chair of the Women's Information Consultative Center and Gender Mainstreaming of the Ukrainian Parliamentary Development Project (Ukraine)

Ms Elisa Salinas, CEO, The Women's Project (Mexico)

Ms Chi Yvonne Leina, World Pulse (Cameroon)