



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

Realizing the rights of marginalized and disadvantaged women and girls

**Wednesday, 18 March 2015
10.00 am to 1.00 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 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. The review encompasses 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 on *realizing the rights of marginalized and disadvantaged women and girls*. The event will present policy options for preventing, and addressing the impacts of, discrimination and multiple dimensions of inequalities on women and girls. The panel will highlight how discrimination is aggravated by the intersection with other factors and characteristics and how advocacy and public policy can respond to those.

2. Elements for discussion

A. Background

The report of the Secretary-General on the review and appraisal of the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (E/CN.6/2015/3) finds that “Overall progress in the implementation of the Platform for Action has been particularly slow for women and girls who experience multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination. Stark gaps exist for poor women and girls living in rural areas and in poor urban settlements on several indicators, including enrolment in education, maternal mortality and access to such services as water and sanitation. Young women are at much greater risk of new HIV infections, compared to their male peers. Marginalized groups of women, such as women with disabilities, indigenous women, migrant women and lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender women are at particular risk of discrimination and violence.” The report illustrates the impacts and policy implications of the

intersection between gender inequality and other forms of inequalities across all 12 critical areas of concern.

The risks of poverty and exclusion are particularly high for the majority of women who face multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination. The report highlights steps taken by States to address the situation of marginalized and excluded women and girls through means such as the reform of gender discriminatory laws, increasing women's access to paid employment; enhancing women's income security, throughout the life cycle, through social protection; improving women's livelihoods through access to land, property and productive resources and increasing women's economic opportunities through access to financial services.

Rural women play an indispensable role in the growth and management of rural and national economies—as evident in their roles in the production and sale of food, managers of household energy and water and primary care providers of household members amongst others. The lack of gender-responsive rural development policies or their lack of implementation where they exist, have deepened women's poverty in many parts of the world. Rural women often lack adequate and consistent access to quality basic services such as education and health and are subject to patriarchal attitudes and practices which limit their productive capabilities. This is exacerbated by their compromised agency, poor access to infrastructure, markets, extension services, appropriate technology, child care and productive assets such as land and credit. As most rural women are predominantly small-scale farmers, their reliance on rain-fed agriculture tends to be hampered by the degrading natural environment and changes in climatic conditions. As such, policy interventions must include the reform and implementation of discriminatory property laws, participation in household decision-making, recognition of unpaid care work, gender responsive design and delivery of extension and social services (including social protection), representation in cooperatives and participation in local governance.

Indigenous and minority women are agents in their struggle for equality. Their experiences of discrimination are closely linked to their histories, poverty and exclusion of their wider communities, and characterized by intersections of race, ethnicity, disability, age, sex and location and mutually reinforcing forms of inequalities. These conditions determine that they do not have same opportunities as their non-indigenous counterparts to benefit from social services as well as to participate in the development of their communities. The 2014 World Conference on Indigenous Peoples and the 2014 United Nations Global Minorities Forum gave additional impetus to the formulation and implementation of policies and programmes designed to promote equality of rights and opportunities of indigenous and minority women.

As of 2013, women accounted for 52 per cent of all people living with HIV globally, and up to 59 per cent of all people living with HIV in sub-Saharan Africa. Young women account for 60 per cent of new infections, and particular risks are faced by adolescent girls and young women, who on average acquire HIV five to seven years earlier than men in sub-Saharan Africa. Unequal power relations between men and women are a major obstacle for women and girls in accessing prevention, treatment and care and support. Where women's rights and agency are denied, their ability to protect themselves is severely limited. They have less information about HIV and fewer resources to take preventive measures. They face barriers to negotiate safer sex and have limited decision-making power over their reproductive and sexual health. Many women living with HIV struggle with stigma and exclusion, aggravated by their lack of rights. Women widowed by AIDS or living with HIV may face property disputes with in-laws, complicated by limited access to justice to uphold their rights. This, in turn, can reduce prospects for education and employment (E/CN.6/2015/3).

Over 1 billion people, or approximately 15 percent of the world's population, have disabilities. Women and girls with disabilities often experience multiple-discrimination and face barriers to the full enjoyment of their rights, based on their sex and disability. Women with disabilities are recognized as particularly vulnerable to poverty as seen in specific challenges in accessing adequate and regular sources of income or working environments that are ill-adjusted to their needs. Girls with disabilities are less likely than boys in the same circumstances to receive care and food and are more likely to be left out of family interactions and activities. Girls and young women with disabilities are 'doubly disabled'. They confront not only the prejudice and inequities encountered by many persons with disabilities, but are also constrained by traditional gender roles and barriers. They are less likely to receive an education, vocational training or find employment, compared to boys and young men with disabilities or girls and young women without disabilities. Girls and young women with disabilities furthermore, endure particular abuses, and in many countries are subject to forced sterilization or abortion.¹

The panel provides an opportunity to assess how particular groups of marginalized women and girls are tackling multiple forms of discrimination and working towards structural and transformative change, through advocacy, awareness raising and programmatic interventions. It will discuss the role of government and effective ways for preventing and remedying multiple-discrimination.

B. Questions for discussion during the dialogue

- *How have women in situations of marginalization and multiple-discrimination strategized for action? What strategies have been effective and how can those be scaled up for greater impact?*
- *What alliances and partnerships have been built across different constituencies and how have those contributed to awareness raising and policy action?*
- *What strategies and policies have contributed to overcoming multiple-discrimination? What are good practice examples for tackling exclusion and marginalization? What are the enabling factors for their success and how can those be replicated in different settings?*

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 panel will consist of five panelists who will make introductory comments of 7 minutes, followed by an interactive discussion with representatives of Member States, United Nations and Non-Governmental Organizations. 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.

¹ UNICEF. State of the World's Children. Children With Disabilities. 2013, p41.