

Expert Group Meeting on
'Women's empowerment and its link to sustainable development'
UN Women
New York, USA
1-4 November 2015

CONCEPT NOTE

EGM/SDG/INF.1
October 2015
ENGLISH only

I. Background and objectives

1. The 60th session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) in 2016 will have as its priority theme, ‘Women’s empowerment and its link to sustainable development’ in the context of the twentieth anniversary commemoration and global review of the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (E/CN.6/2015/3), the Third International Conference on Financing for Development (FfD), and the post-2015 agenda and sustainable development goals document, *Transforming our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* (the 2030 Agenda).¹
2. The Political Declaration on the occasion of the twentieth anniversary of the Fourth World Conference on Women (Beijing+20), adopted at CSW 59, urged Member States to accelerate its full and effective implementation, with monitoring and accountability, and set the deadline of 2030 for achieving gender equality and women’s empowerment. Now as the international community considers the post-2015 framework of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the 60th session of the CSW will provide an important opportunity to generate momentum to implement the 2030 Agenda and SDGs towards achieving gender equality and women’s rights and empowerment.
3. In order to take stock of current research and assist the Commission in its deliberations, UN Women will convene an expert group meeting (EGM) on the means of implementation of the 2030 Agenda for realizing substantive gender equality, women’s rights and empowerment, from 1-4 November 2015 in New York. In the context of Beijing+20, the EGM will:
 - Examine the interlinkages among the SDGs in terms of social, economic, and environmental sustainability and the gender-responsiveness of the 2030 Agenda in terms of the challenges for implementation;
 - Identify the key areas required to achieve gender equality and women’s empowerment through the 2030 Agenda and SDG framework; and
 - Develop action-oriented recommendations and help drive gender-sensitive implementation of the 2030 Agenda based on the commitment to achieve gender equality and the realization of women’s and girls’ human rights by 2030.
4. The EGM will focus on the means of implementation required to achieve gender equality and women’s empowerment through the 2030 Agenda by assessing key issues such as:²
 - Enabling policy and legal environments
 - Leadership and participation, including institutional mechanisms
 - Financing and investment mechanisms
 - Data and statistics (including monitoring and evaluation)
 - Accountability mechanisms (for states, civil society, private sector, and other stakeholders)

¹ United Nations. *Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*.

<https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/post2015/transformingourworld>

² Please see the “Political declaration on the occasion of the twentieth anniversary of the Fourth World Conference on Women,” E/CN.6/2015/L.1*, especially paragraph 6.

II. Global legal and policy framework

5. The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) is an international bill of rights for women's equality that defines what constitutes discrimination against women and sets up an agenda for national action to end such discrimination. It calls on State Parties to take in all fields, in particular in the political, social, economic and cultural fields, all appropriate measures, including legislation, to ensure the full development and advancement of women, for the purpose of guaranteeing them the exercise and enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms on a basis of equality with men.³ The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) also establish a set of rights that State Parties must respect, protect and fulfill to ensure that the rights within each covenant are enjoyed without discrimination on the basis of sex.
6. The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, adopted by 189 Member States in 1995, is a global agenda for women's human rights, gender equality and the empowerment of women. The Platform for Action (BPfA) covers 12 critical areas of concern: poverty; education and training; health; violence; armed conflict; economy; power and decision-making; institutional mechanisms; human rights; media; environment; and the girl child. For each critical area of concern, strategic objectives are identified, as well as a detailed catalogue of related actions to be taken by Governments and relevant stakeholders, at national, regional and international level. At the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly in June 2000, Governments reviewed the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and agreed on further actions to accelerate the implementation of the Platform for Action and to ensure that commitments for gender equality, development and peace are fully realized.
7. At the 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development in Rio de Janeiro (the Earth Summit), the Rio Declaration and Agenda 21 laid out a global framework for addressing the challenges facing the global community in the three central dimensions of sustainable development. Principle 20 of the Rio Declaration affirmed women's vital role in environmental management and development and that their full participation is therefore essential to achieve sustainable development. Further, Chapter 24 of Agenda 21 recommended national governments develop strategies to "eliminate constitutional, legal, administrative, cultural, behavioural, social and economic obstacles to women's full participation in sustainable development and in public life."⁴
8. In the 1994 International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) in Cairo, Governments reached a consensus that gender equality and empowerment of women is a global priority. It highlights a number of critical areas for advancing gender equality and empowering women, including universal access to family planning and sexual and reproductive health services and reproductive rights; equal access to education for girls;

³ United Nations, *Treaty Series*, vol. 1249, No. 20378, Article 3. See <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/>.

⁴ United Nations, *Agenda 21*, United Nations Conference on Environment & Development, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, June 1992. <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/Agenda21.pdf>

equal sharing of responsibilities for care and housework between women and men; individual, social and economic impact of urbanization and migration; and sustainable development and environmental issues associated with population changes.

9. Adopted at the Millennium Summit on 8 September 2000, the Millennium Declaration built upon the outcomes of the major summits and world conferences of the 1990s. Governments also confirmed their resolve to promote gender equality and the empowerment of women as effective ways to combat poverty, hunger and disease and to promote sustainable development. The importance of ensuring equal human rights of women and men, combatting all forms of violence against women and the implementation of CEDAW were also highlighted in the Declaration. Inspired by the Millennium Declaration, the eight Millennium Development Goals were introduced, accompanied by a set of time-bound targets due to expire in 2015.
10. Twenty years after the landmark 1992 United Nations Conference on the Environment and Development, Heads of State and Government at the 2012 United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, or Rio+20, appraised implementation progress and gaps of agreements struck in the intervening two decades, including Agenda 21 and the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation, and made a renewed call for sustainable development. The twin objectives of gender equality and sustainable development were set forth in the outcome document, *The Future We Want* (A/RES/66/288, paras 31, 45): “We recognize that gender equality and women’s empowerment are important for sustainable development and our common future. We reaffirm our commitments to ensure women’s equal rights, access and opportunities for participation and leadership in the economy, society and political decision-making... We underscore that women have a vital role to play in achieving sustainable development. We recognize the leadership role of women, and we resolve to promote gender equality and women’s empowerment and to ensure their full and effective participation in sustainable development policies, programmes and decision-making at all levels.”
11. The Third International Conference on Financing for Development (FfD) held in Addis Ababa from 13 - 17 July 2015, and its outcome document, the Addis Ababa Action Agenda (AAAA)⁵, is the first in a series of agreements to set and resource a universal agenda for sustainable development and international development cooperation to 2030. It aspires to deliver decisively for poverty eradication and prosperity, the realization of human rights for all, and sustainability of the planet. The AAAA is imbued with a strong commitment to making gender equality and the empowerment of women a reality. It does so in the course of mapping out the financial policy dimensions of international and national development for the next fifteen years that would support the realization of sustainable development. AAAA serves as a crucial benchmarking global compact that unequivocally prioritizes realizing gender equality and women’s empowerment and rights for its vital role as enabler and beneficiary of sustainable development.⁶

⁵ United Nations. *Addis Ababa Action Agenda on the Third International Conference on Financing for Development* http://www.un.org/esa/ffd/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/AAAA_Outcome.pdf

⁶ Ibid.

12. As mandated in the outcome document of the 2012 United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development and following extensive intergovernmental negotiations, the *Transforming our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* (the 2030 Agenda) - the successor framework to the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) – was formally adopted by the United Nations General Assembly on 25 September 2015. It states that: “Realizing gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls will make a crucial contribution to progress.” Gender equality and women’s rights and empowerment are reflected in a cross-cutting manner throughout the 2030 Agenda. In addition to the targets in Goal 5, “Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls,” the targets in the other goals cover a comprehensive set of issues, including the gender dimensions of poverty, hunger, health, education, water and sanitation, employment, safe cities and peace and security.⁷

III. Background on meeting and key issues

13. Twenty years have now passed since the Fourth World Conference on Women which set out an expansive vision and set of commitments for achieving gender equality in the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (BPfA). This vision has informed and complimented the normative frameworks that followed, although as highlighted in the 20-year review of BPfA, progress on these commitments remain uneven across and within countries. While the past 20 years have witnessed an increase in States’ legal commitment to women’s rights and an increasing rhetoric around the importance of gender equality by a broad range of actors, this progress has often not translated into implementation.⁸ Achieving gender equality and women’s empowerment in the post-2015 context will require transforming economies and societies to reduce inequalities and vulnerabilities and realize the human rights of all.

14. Sustainable development is not possible without substantive gender equality and full realization of women’s rights and empowerment. There are synergies between gender equality and women’s empowerment and economic, social and environmental sustainability as, for instance, women with greater voice and participation, are more likely to allocate public resources towards investments in human development priorities, including education, health, nutrition and access to decent employment.⁹ While ensuring women’s access to and control over land and productive resources is important for achieving food security and sustainable livelihoods, they are critical for women’s agency and empowerment.¹⁰ Women’s knowledge, agency and collective action are key to exploring and creating more economically, socially and environmentally sustainable

⁷ UN Women, *Monitoring Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women and Girls In the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development: Opportunities and Challenges*, New York, 2015.

⁸ EGM/B20/Report. UN Women. *Report of the Expert Group Meeting on Envisioning Women’s Rights in the post-2015 Context*. New York, NY 3-5 November, 2014. <http://az804972.vo.msecnd.net/~media/headquarters/attachments/sections/csw/59/csw59-egm-report-en.pdf?v=1&d=20141219T220253>

⁹ Chattopadhyay and Duflo, 2004 as retrieved from UN Women. *World Survey on the Role of Women in Development: Gender Equality and Sustainable Development*. New York, NY, 2014. http://www.unwomen.org/~media/headquarters/attachments/sections/library/publications/2014/unwomen_surveyreport_advance_16oct.pdf

¹⁰ Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, 2011 as retrieved from UN Women. *World Survey on the Role of Women in Development: Gender Equality and Sustainable Development*. New York, NY, 2014.

pathways to manage local landscapes; adapt to climate change; produce and access food; and secure sustainable water, sanitation and energy services.¹¹

15. Now, as the international community begins implementing the new universal agenda for sustainable development cooperation, it is imperative to focus on the means of implementation for realizing substantive gender equality, women's rights and empowerment. The 2030 Agenda provides a key opportunity to make critical investments in sustainable development, gender equality, and women's empowerment in transparent, accountable, and measurable ways. The scale and ambition of the new Agenda requires a revitalized global partnership and transformative financing to ensure its implementation – the full implementation of the Addis Ababa Action Agenda – necessary also for fulfillment of commitments and obligations to gender equality and women's empowerment and rights under CEDAW, BPfA, Rio+20, and other frameworks.
16. Goal 5 to “Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls” includes six substantive targets that go well beyond Millennium Development Goal 3, which only had one target to eliminate gender disparities in all levels of education by 2015. The economic empowerment agenda is framed as a crucial means of implementation of the goal itself and addresses structural inequalities in access to resources and asset ownership. The political empowerment agenda aspires to ensure women's full and effective participation, including equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic and public life. This takes the target beyond the parliamentary representation in MDG 3 to all aspects of participation and leadership of women in governance and decision-making — the executive, judiciary, law enforcement, public service and the corporate sector. Together with the targets on full and productive employment and decent work, and equal pay for work of equal value (Goal 8), and infrastructure (Goal 9), basic services (Goals 1 and 11), education and skills development (Goal 4), this represents a comprehensive and transformative agenda for women's empowerment.
17. For the means of implementation of Goal 5, in addition to dedicated Goal 17 to “Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development,” three particular avenues to achieve gender equality and women's empowerment in the context of the Agenda 2030 are identified: (a) undertake reforms to give women equal rights to economic resources, as well as access to ownership and control over land and other forms of property, financial services, inheritance and natural resources, in accordance with national laws; (b) enhance the use of enabling technology, in particular information and communications technology, to promote the empowerment of women; and (c) adopt and strengthen sound policies and enforceable legislation for the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls at all levels.
18. Sustainable development is not possible without substantive gender equality – situated in the context of multiple and intersecting inequalities – and full realization of women's rights and empowerment. The 2030 Agenda provides a once-in-a-generation opportunity

¹¹ UN Women. *World Survey on the Role of Women in Development: Gender Equality and Sustainable Development*. New York, NY, 2014.

to make investments in sustainable development and gender equality transparent, accountable, and measurable. However, it is imperative that the new processes and framework build on a broad assessment of lessons learned – as well as promising practices – in order to address and transform the structural causes of gender inequality.

19. In terms of localization and regionalization of the 2030 Agenda, assessments need to be made and ways forward devised from gender equality and women’s empowerment and rights perspectives. Particular attention should be paid to legal, policy, institutional, financial, monitoring, and accountability arrangements and mechanisms at country level, as well as to resource and data challenges and gaps. The roles, responsibilities, and accountability of a diverse range of stakeholders and state and non-state actors also require assessment and definition in the new era, for example, civil society, the private sector, gender and women’s machineries, justice mechanisms and national human rights institutions. Finally, the question of how the United Nations system can support Member States to implement, monitor, and be accountable for commitments to the 2030 Agenda and accelerated implementation of the BfFA should be further considered and clarified.

IV. Profile of participants

20. The EGM will be attended by approximately 20 relevant experts appointed by the Under Secretary-General and Executive Director of UN Women. In selecting the experts, the criteria of geographical balance will be taken into consideration. Experts will include academics and practitioners from relevant fields, as well as representatives from networks and associations, in accordance with the objectives identified above. UN Women will provide travel and daily subsistence allowance to appointed experts.
21. Observers from the United Nations system, inter-governmental organizations, non-governmental organizations and academia are welcome to attend the EGM at their own expense.

V. Documentation

22. The documentation for the meeting will include:
 - Draft background papers commissioned by UN Women as follows:
 1. ‘What are the means of implementation required to achieve gender equality and women’s empowerment through the 2030 Agenda framework?’ authored by Stephanie Seguino, University of VermontThis paper will have three parts. The first will focus on macro-level policies that would support the financing and investment required to achieve gender equality and women’s empowerment through the 2030 Agenda framework. The primary focus would be on public investment targets as well as macro policies to promote household investment in gender equalizing expenditures (e.g., schooling, health care, and investments that reduce the care burden, etc.). The second part will focus on macro-level policies that would support public investment include those that expand financing options – to include fiscal policy, monetary policy, capital management techniques, and trade regulation. The third part will speak to the data required for effective monitoring.

2. 'A Means to Deliver Development Justice? Financing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development,' authored by Tessa Khan, Asia Pacific Forum on Women, Law and Development (APWLD)

This background paper will focus on the means of implementation required to achieve gender equality and promote women's human rights through the SDG framework. It will critically evaluate Goal 17 in the SDGs with a view to determining whether or not it supports the policy environment and financing, trade and investment architecture needed to implement the SDGs and support gender equality. In particular, it will focus on whether or not the means of implementation framework is enough to support women's decent work, access to land and natural resources, and to strengthen the developmental role of the State. In doing so, it will also reflect on lessons from implementation of the MDGs and the structural basis of gender inequality. In considering the role envisaged for the private sector in the post-2015 development agenda, including in the outcome of the Third International Conference on Financing for Development, it will interrogate role of public-private partnerships, private sector financing and the importance of a binding, global regulatory framework for corporations. Finally, the paper will consider alternative economic models supported by civil society that are capable of reducing inequalities and delivering development justice.

- Expert papers: Short written contributions prepared by experts on specific issues in line with their expertise

VI. Organization

23. The EGM will be convened by UN Women from 1-4 November in New York. The meeting will be held at Glen Cove Mansion.
24. The EGM will be conducted in English and all documentation will be in English.
25. The EGM will meet in plenary and in working groups. Presentations by the experts in plenary will create the framework for discussions. Experts will work in small working groups to discuss specific issues/themes and draft concrete policy and programme recommendations targeted at various stakeholders. The recommendations of working groups will be reviewed and finalized in plenary.
26. Two co-chairs will be appointed by the experts at the beginning of the EGM to oversee the meeting and the preparation of the EGM report.

VII. Expected outcome

27. The outcome of the EGM will be a report, containing a summary of the discussion and recommendations directed at Member States and other stakeholders. The report will be made available at the sixtieth session of the Commission on the Status of Women and on the website of UN Women.