

CSW63 Multi-Stakeholder Forum
Friday, 1 February 2019, 3 – 6 pm
UN Headquarters in New York, Conference Room 1

Panel 4: Ensuring synergies and addressing intersecting inequalities for enhanced results

Good afternoon, excellencies, ladies and gentlemen.

It is a delight to be part of today's panel, and also to hear about the well designed, gender sensitive policies and programs from so many of our panelists today.

The achievement of gender equality will require financial, moral and intellectual resources on a scale not yet seen. It will involve the efforts of the masses of humanity, the fearless commitment of men alongside women, unprecedented collaboration at all levels of governance, the insights of religion as well as science, and an understanding that the advancement of women is the advancement of all.

Likewise, we must consider the rightful the role that young people will play in this enterprise. Every generation of youth has an opportunity to make a unique contribution to the fortunes of humanity. To the present generation of young people, the long-cherished aim of achieving gender equality, never more within reach than it is today, beckons their passionate and united energies and contributions. How are governments and civil society alike, enabling our youth to bolster the progress of gender equality around the world?

I want to share a few high level considerations in engaging young people and on ensuring synergies and addressing intersecting inequalities - especially for young women and girls who face multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination.

To address the first question posed to this panel around coordinated and integrated action, I would like to share a few thoughts around developing a vision. The way aspirations are framed goes hand in hand with the way policies are formulated and the way stakeholders are mobilized into action. There is a difference between a vision of what is to be built, constructed, and proactively brought about, and a vision of what is to be reduced, eradicated, and alleviated. Distinctions between vision in the positive and vision in the negative can seem somewhat abstract. However, their practical consequences, can be serious.

A creative vision of what is to come is central to achieving truly transformative change. Clearly articulating the highest conditions of the world we aspire to bring about, requires widespread consultation across many demographics - including women and including young people, on the specificities of their daily lives.

In the work of the Baha'i Community, which is engaging with local populations in over 180 countries around the world, what has been notable at the grassroots, has been the transformative impact on the rising generations who are engaging in service-oriented efforts.

Young people tend to be more flexible in their perceptions of what society could and should be, and frequently it has been among this population that oppressive cultural assumptions about

gender roles become susceptible to change.

Similarly, the power of moral example that young people can bring to bear, the influence they can exert on other members of their community through selfless and sustained acts of service, should not be underestimated.

Many of these young people are learning how to effectively mobilize communities, to address issues around inadequate social protections, public services and sustainable infrastructure - Governments will gain a lot from integrating the vision and experience of young people in their decision making processes. But this also requires Governments to devise policy frameworks that empower and allow young people to flourish, and to contribute actively to the development and upliftment of their own communities.

Another dimension of a coordinated and integrated response is that women and girls face unique challenges over the course of their lifecycle. Very often the trajectory of policy and program implementation and reform, can be sporadic - with political agendas, governmental priorities and financial support fluctuating.

The complexity of issues such as early and forced child marriage and gender based violence - require both legislative and structural change, but they also require shifts in culture and normative behaviour, which require long term efforts.

How can we have a vigorous, thoughtful and systematic approach to refine policies and programs over the long term - despite the political and governmental changes over the short term?

At the heart of every development endeavour is consistent, systematic action. When efforts are carried out with consistency and in a learning mode — characterized by constant action, reflection and consultation—visions and strategies are re-examined time and again. As tasks are accomplished, obstacles removed, resources multiplied, and lessons learned, modifications can be made in goals and methods, to ensure efficacy over time.

To realize true equality of the genders, would be to witness a civilization the world has never seen before. The magnitude of that work calls for new ways of understanding individual human beings and society as a whole. It also demands from us the creation of new and just systems - from our global economic order, to our governmental, legal and educational systems - to fully understand how gender equality will and should find full expression. In this light, then, the mighty enterprise of achieving gender equality can be understood as an urgently-needed global learning process. We need to learn how to draw on and channel the vast intellectual, material, and moral resources of our diverse populations. Together, young people can help us to transcend the obstacles currently standing between our generation and the generation that lives in a world where gender equality is an entrenched feature of human life.