

Multi-stakeholder Forum in preparation for the sixty-third session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW63)

Priority theme: Social protection systems, access to public services and sustainable infrastructure for gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls

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

Topic introduction by Ms. Christine Brautigam, Director, Intergovernmental Support Division, UN Women

Social protection, public services and sustainable infrastructure are closely interlinked. Institutionalized coordination across sectors and levels of government, as well as with private for-profit and not-for-profit providers, is therefore crucial to ensure that social protection, public services and infrastructure policies complement each other in their objectives, functions and financing.

An integrated and systemic approach is particularly important from a gender perspective. Without affordable childcare services, for example, women often struggle to remain in the labour market and secure social protection entitlements through employment. Education is widely considered a public service, but it cannot function without adequate physical infrastructure, including school buildings with safe sanitation facilities for girls. Electricity, water and sanitation systems are infrastructure-heavy sectors; but they also operate as public services and often require social protection measures, such as connection fee waivers or subsidies, to be affordable for all.

There has been significant progress in terms of women's and girls' access to social protection, public services and sustainable infrastructure. However, gender gaps remain, and, in many contexts, progress has been uneven. Women and girls who face multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination are particularly affected by exclusion and marginalization. Across countries, those from poor households, rural areas and specific ethnic groups experience clustered deprivations, from lower access to education, healthcare and decent housing, to clean energy, water and sanitation. Removing discrimination in health-care settings and ensuring women and adolescent girls are aware of their rights and can demand gender-responsive and stigma-free services, is fundamental.

Closing these gaps and ensuring that no one is left behind will require a significant injection of resources alongside targeted measures to expand access, improve quality and strengthen policy coherence between the three areas, including through greater coordination across sectors, levels of government and with for-profit and not-for-profit providers.

Ensuring the meaningful participation of women and girls in the development, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies is equally indispensable for furthering progress and sustaining it over time. Social accountability mechanisms, such as gender audits, can be used to

gather the experiences and grievances of women beneficiaries and users and improve the gender-responsive implementation of social protection, public services and sustainable infrastructure projects.

Means-tested social protection interventions can contribute to stigmatization by singling out specific disadvantaged social groups. Fear of facing discriminatory attitudes may discourage women from accessing transfers even when they are entitled to them. The risk of stigmatization is greatest where gender-based discrimination is compounded by inequalities based on age, income, geographical location, race, ethnicity, health or migration status, disability, sexual orientation and gender identity, among others. Universal schemes are least prone to exclusion errors and stigmatization. Targeting approaches that cover an entire area (geographical targeting), or an entire age cohort (categorical targeting), such as children or older persons, can help reduce stigmatization and exclusion and are less complex to administer than means-tested programmes.

PROPOSED QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION :

- What are good practice in the coordinated and integrated provision of social protection, access to public services and sustainable infrastructure for gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls?
- What legislative and policy actions are necessary and effective to ensure that social protection systems, sustainable infrastructure and public services address the needs and rights of women and girls facing multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination and that no one is left behind?
- What are good practices and lessons learned in preventing cutbacks in social protection systems, sustainable infrastructure and public services that benefit women and girls, and strengthen human development, social cohesion and resilience to shocks?