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**Talking Points**

**Panel on Gender matters: Gender Mainstreaming in International  
Organisations: Best Practices and Impact on National Policies and Strategies**

**European Commission Conference of the Gender Equality Commission**

**Introduction**

- I thank the Council of Europe for their kind invitation to participate in this important panel.
- **From the outset let me state that gender equality matters and gender mainstreaming is no longer an option; it is an imperative.**
- Over the years we have seen increasing recognition that gender equality is central to sustainable development. Gender mainstreaming therefore remains the primary strategy for achieving substantive gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls.
- Furthermore, as the United Nations system seeks to support Member States in the accelerated implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action, localization and implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, gender mainstreaming is increasingly critical for implementing existing and new normative commitments on gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls by 2030.

- I commend the Council of Europe on its Gender strategy for 2014-2017 and note especially that gender mainstreaming is one of its strategic objectives. The Council is on the same trajectory as UN Women. We are mandated and committed to supporting Member States in achieving gender equality, including through systematic gender mainstreaming.
- Allow me to share a brief background on gender mainstreaming in the UN system with you.

### **Background on gender mainstreaming in the UN system**

- Since its endorsement in 1995, gender mainstreaming strategy has become both better understood, and increasingly accepted as a strategy to advance gender equality at the global, regional and country levels.
- For example, we have seen a significant increase in political will and commitment to gender mainstreaming with established institutional arrangements, such as national machineries for gender equality, gender units and gender focal point systems.
- Initiatives are undertaken to develop the capacity to identify and address relevant gender perspectives in all areas of work, at both normative/policy and operational/programme levels.
- Gender perspectives are being incorporated into planning, budgeting and reporting processes and in general within all phases of policies and programmes.

- Considerable support is given to capacity development, including thorough training. Also guidelines and other capacity development materials to support staff continue to be developed to ensure gender perspectives are taken into consideration in data collection and research, analysis, support to legislative change, policy and programme development and monitoring and evaluation.
- International organizations continue to support Governments, at their request, to develop gender-sensitive policies and strategies and to take gender perspectives into consideration in planning, implementing and monitoring development interventions in all areas of collaboration.
- Non-governmental organizations and groups and networks in civil society are also supported to play critical advocacy roles in relation to gender mainstreaming and to monitor the adherence to all gender equality international commitments made by their respective Governments.
- Efforts are also being taken to involve more men and boys in the implementation of gender equality initiatives especially at the national level.

**Nonetheless, in recent years, gender mainstreaming has received some criticism**

- Some evaluations and studies have painted a less than stellar picture of gender mainstreaming.
- It is seen as too complex and not easily understood by both policymakers and development practitioners.

- It is also frequently framed as not an effective means to achieve development results for women and girls.
- There is also the belief that gender mainstreaming has been marred by lack of sustained gender mainstreaming procedures and practices, leadership, financial and human resources, and accountability structures.

**Organizations like UN Women and yours have a key role to play to reinvigorate the gender mainstreaming strategy**

- UN Women in particular is mandated to support Member States and the UN system with gender mainstreaming efforts, and to strengthen coherence, coordination and accountability for the work on gender equality and the empowerment of women.
- I would like to draw your attention to where we see progress on gender mainstreaming in the UN system at the institutional / corporate and country level:
- **At the institutional level**, we have found that gender policies constitute a key driver of institutional change at the United Nations and are prerequisites for ensuring that gender is fully mainstreamed into all areas of work of an organization.
- In recent years, we have seen that UN entities with gender policies in place have made great progress on gender mainstreaming. They tend to outperform those agencies that do not have gender policies.

- **At the regional level**, UN Women leads and co-chairs the Regional Working Group on Gender to provide support to inter-agency Gender Theme Groups at the country level. UN Women is also a member of Regional UN Development Group (Regional UNDG) and Regional Coordination Mechanism (RCM) to address key gender issues and gaps at the Regional Directors' level and to better support UN Country Teams in their gender mainstreaming efforts.
- **At the country level**, progress is being made on gender mainstreaming. UN Women works with the Resident Coordinator System and UN country teams to mainstream gender perspectives in the operational activities of the UN development system, primarily through common country planning instruments, such as the United Nations Development Assistance Framework and inter-agency coordination mechanisms, namely Gender Theme Groups.
- Today, 97 gender theme groups and inter-agency groups ensure an integrated focus on gender and human rights by promoting joint and coordinated approaches on gender equality.
- The United Nations Development Assistance Frameworks (UNDAFs) show an important increased focus on gender equality both as a priority area as well as an area mainstreamed across other UNDAF outcome areas.
- This achievement was possible through the application of twin-track approach of gender, having both gender mainstreaming and gender focus at the outcome, output, indicator, activity and budget levels.
- In line with the 2030 Agenda, the new UNDAF interim guidance from the United Nations Development Group places a much stronger emphasis on

human rights and equality perspective with specific reference to *leaving no one behind* and the use of sex-disaggregated data. This guidance also suggests 15 per cent of resources to be allocated to gender. UN Women co-chairs the UNDG's Programme Working Group on this UNDAF guidance.

### **Accountability for gender mainstreaming**

- **UN Women is mandated to lead, coordinate and promote the accountability of the UN system in its work on gender equality and women's empowerment.**
- While accountability is the operative word, we know from experience that the deeper importance of accountability frameworks lie in their ability to both propel and measure progress in a systematic and harmonized framework across entities irrespective of their mandates.
- In April 2012, the Chiefs Executive Board on Coordination of the United Nations endorsed a System-wide Action Plan for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (or the UN-SWAP) that was pioneered by UN Women. The UN-SWAP is a unified, accountability framework aimed at accelerating gender mainstreaming across the UN system. It establishes 15 minimum performance standards to which all entities must aspire and adhere by 2017.
- The UN-SWAP has catalyzed significant progress and improved institutional performance in the area of gender mainstreaming. It has harmonized,

revitalized and systematized the work on gender mainstreaming and built accountability for gender equality at the highest levels across the system.

- For three consecutive years, nearly the entire UN system has reported on the UN-SWAP and in 2016, we granted 90 per cent reporting from the UN system. These annual reports provide a systematic picture of progress, strengths, challenges and trends, including those of capacity, resources and direction required to achieve the defined performance standards by 2017.
- **One of the main outcomes of the UN-SWAP has been increased coherence and networking brought about by joint work on the UN-SWAP.** Through numerous inter-agency workshops during its development and implementation, the UN-SWAP has become a mechanism that has facilitated increased inter-agency coordination, co-operation and understanding of gender equality and the empowerment of women.
- **A strong, 300 + member network of UN-SWAP/gender focal points spread across the UN system** has also been behind the success of the implementation of the UN-SWAP. This network has generated a more active culture of systematic and broad engagement, substantive growth and solidarity for gender equality and the empowerment of women.
- The UN-SWAP has diffused responsibility for gender mainstreaming within agencies and for all staff, so that it is no longer the sole responsibility of under-resourced gender units and overworked focal points. **Gender mainstreaming, in other words, is everyone's responsibility.**

- **At present, UN Women is coordinating the next phase of the UN-SWAP, which will begin in 2018.**
- The second generation of UN-SWAP will support the overall achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals through a stronger focus on accountability for the inclusion of gender results in each entity's SDG-related strategic, planning and reporting processes and documents.
- I am sure that the Council of Europe and its membership can draw on the UN-SWAP as they seek to develop their accountability frameworks for gender mainstreaming.

### **The way forward (Conclusion)**

- From our experience, I would like to share with the Council of Europe the following highlights.
- While the UN system is making steady progress in the system-wide mainstreaming of gender, enhanced cooperation of international/intergovernmental organizations in the area, is critical.
- In line with the objectives of the discussion today, such cooperation, including through mutual learning and knowledge exchange, would enable the international community to collectively promote a whole of government / whole of society approach to implementing gender equality commitments and to address the critical gaps to ensure the gender-responsive implementation of

global commitments on gender equality and the Sustainable Development goals.

- **It is essential for us to know whether gender mainstreaming initiatives are transforming the lives of women and girls at the country level.** We must make every effort to underpin gender mainstreaming and gender-focus approaches and expected results with an explicit theory of change that can assist in identifying intermediary steps and the specific outputs that the programme can realistically anticipate for gender mainstreaming. If carried out in this manner, transformative gender equality outcomes could be more readily achieved and therefore, measuring impact would be possible.
- **In this regard, the Nordic countries could offer a point of reference.**
- The Nordics have been promoting gender equality in all areas of the Nordic societies for the past 40 years. Gender equality has been one of the prerequisites for the success of the Nordic model, and gender equality is the basic pillar upon which the modern Nordic welfare societies have been constructed.
- Presently, the Nordic Countries have a cooperation programme on gender equality for the period 2015–2018. They are engaged in exchanging of experiences in different forums, one of them being at the United Nations. UN Women works through its Liaison Office in Copenhagen with the Nordic governments in pushing the gender equality agenda forward.
- **But we are not there yet and much more needs to be done!!**

- At the country level attention must be paid to gender equality considerations not only at the design stage of the programme but **throughout the entire programme cycle**, including at the monitoring, reporting and evaluation stages.
- Greater attention must also be given to **gender analysis at the assessment and causal analysis stage**, which is often too generic and limited to a descriptive situation analysis that has little operational relevance. In addition, better and frequent use must be made of new tools that are instrumental to effective gender mainstreaming such as environmental scanning that analyzes the political climate and stakeholders' attitudes and practices.
- **We must sustain the political commitment and leadership for gender equality at the highest levels.**
- The commitment demonstrated in 2015 to reach and adopt the historic and landmark "Gender Equality Compact" in the 2030 Agenda, the Addis Ababa Action Agenda on Financing for Development, the Paris Climate Change Agreement and the outcome of the Global Study and Review of the United Nations' Security Council resolution 1325 has been pivotal in ensuring the centrality of gender equality and women's empowerment as a sustainable development goal as well as a prerequisite to the overall achievement of the 2030 Agenda.
- **Gender-responsive budgeting must be significantly increased in scale, quality and scope.** Significantly increased resources are critical not only to close the resource gap but also to implement new and existing commitments on gender

equality and the empowerment of women. Related to this, we must also enhance the use of the gender marker and track investments and expenditures for gender equality as well as monitor gender equality results on a regular basis.

- **Intensified technical and financial investments for the production of gender statistics** and a robust evidence base is also urgently needed especially for effective gender mainstreaming. Limited or lack of national capacity to generate and use data disaggregated by sex, ethnicity, age, disability and other factors constrains our ability to understand and monitor inequalities and to track and review progress on gender equality targets and goals within the context of the 2030 Agenda.
- **Finally, we must hold our institutions more accountable for delivering on gender equality results.** Systems of accountability and incentives are essential for communicating an organization's commitment to gender mainstreaming and for motivating staff performance on gender equality programming.
- I thank you!!