



President's Newsletter

CSW62

A. Summary of points of discussion in Ministerial Round Tables/Interactive dialogues/Expert Panels

4th of June 2018

More than 4300 representatives from over 600 civil society organizations and 170 Member States attended the 2018 Commission session. These figures represent a steady increase from previous year participation showing a growing strength and unity of women's voices around the world. The UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres said progress for women and girls meant changing the equal power dynamics that underpin discrimination and violence. Since his appointment as Secretary General, gender parity in the UN Senior Management Group has been met for the first time, a zero tolerance policy on sexual harassment has been established and an initiative was addressing sexual exploitation and abuse by those serving the UN.

The Executive Director of the UN Women said that it has never been so urgent to hold leaders accountable for their promises for accelerating progress on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development Objectives. The President of the ECOSOC said that the Commission focus this year on rural women and girls was both timely and well aligned with the 2030 Agenda and the Council's work. The Chair of CSW62 Geraldine Byrne Nason (Ireland) said that members had a moral obligation to do more and do better. The President of the General Assembly said that women must be taken into account in all actions from access to water to closing the pay gap. Empowering rural women would benefit all. The Executive Director of UN women said that the #Metoo and Time's up movement had demonstrated that change can happen fast. Rural women need the Commission to unite around the common cause, urging it to make it a moment of real acceleration, change and accountability.

Ministerial Round Tables 1 and 2 on “good practices in the empowerment of rural women and girls, including access to education, infrastructure, technology and nutrition”

The Minister for Culture of Estonia asked Ministers participating in the Round Tables to highlight steps taken by their governments to ensure affordable quality for rural women and girls' education, the investments they are making to ensure sustainable energy, transport, water and sanitation, initiatives they have undertaken to ensure that ICT technologies benefited rural women and girls, national policies they have implemented that helped rural women and girls gain access to quality food and nutrition.

The Minister for Women of Australia said that national broadband and mobile “black spot” networks were being rolled out in her country with the aim of closing the digital gap in rural areas.

Participants called for increasing budgetary allocations to build new schools: they also described measures to improve sanitation in schools, provide free sanitary pads, improve teacher's training as well as access to ICT technology as a key tool for empowering women and girls in rural areas.

They also called for increased investments in rural roads to enhance the ability of women to travel and perform activities related to the household production and income generation as well as access to services including health care services.

Participants also highlighted land ownership and rights as well as access to financial services, agricultural inputs and processing and information market and business development as key for increasing the agricultural productivity of rural women and ensuring food security.

Ministerial Round Tables 3 and 4 on “good practices in the empowerment of rural women and girls, including through prevention of gender-based violence and through access to justice, social services and health care”

The Presidential Councilor for Gender Equality of Colombia asked speakers to consider what measures had achieved proven results in the provision of affordable and accessible health care for rural women and girls and how Governments had ensured that social protection and gender-responsive social services reached all rural women and girls. Also, to provide examples of effective national laws, policies and services to prevent gender based violence.

The Presidential Councilor for Gender Equality of Colombia said that the phenomenon of violence remained widespread and evidence revealed a rural prevalence of such harmful practices as child, early and forced marriage and female genital mutilation. These conditions were exacerbated by the lack of effective legal, juridical and institutional remedies enjoyed by rural women and girls.

The Minister for Family Affairs and Social Services of Finland noted that women from indigenous and minority communities, as well as migrants and those with disabilities, often faced multiple and intersecting forms of violence and discrimination. In response the Government collaborated in providing legal assistance and shelter and substance abuse support to the victims. It was also testing a new behavior-change programme that targeted male perpetrators.

Many speakers also underscored the need to couple women's personal empowerment with efforts to bolster their political participation.

Participants put an emphasis on national policy and legislative frameworks to prevent gender-based violence and ensure effective responses for women and girl survivors. They outlined efforts at enhancing coordination across institutions in particular between health service providers and judicial authorities. The lack of adequate disaggregated data for rural areas created challenges in designating effective measures to support the empowerment of rural women. Some traditional and cultural beliefs were among the root causes of gender-based violence and constituted barriers for women in reporting violence.

High-Level Interactive Dialogue 1 on “Building alliances to achieve gender equality and empower rural women and girls”.

The Minister for Equality, Integration and Immigration of Ireland invited participants to share examples of good practices, planned initiatives and other efforts to build and

strengthen alliances among gender equality leaders and advocates across all sectors. He asked about the key trends in rural development that were affecting rural women and girls' livelihoods and for examples of effective multistakeholder collaboration among governmental authorities and rural women's organizations, cooperatives and enterprises.

Ministers and high level officials offered their perspectives, challenges and achievements. Many agreed that cross-cutting gender issues must seek out partnerships in other sectors to achieve concrete progress on common goals, including the objectives of the 2030 Development Agenda. Ministers from developing countries described obstacles and solutions to accomplishing those objectives and their counterparts from developed nations demonstrated how their Governments were supporting related efforts at home and abroad.

The Minister for Health, Solidarity, Social Protection and Advancement of Women of Rwanda referred to strong public-private sector partnerships, digital literacy across genders and inclusive labor market participation which had proven to be a key driver for change, triggering gender equality.

The Minister for Women and Child Affairs of Sri Lanka said close cooperation between the Ministry and police was helping to built capacities to address gender based violence. Women's bureaus at police stations were being set up nationwide and training programme for officers had been offered since 2017.

Jordan's Minister for Social Development said a national Commission for women was helping to ensure that gender issues were being considered across all sectors.

Many participants stressed the fact that alliance building and broad-based collaboration have been effective in bringing about actions in areas such as gender-based violence, food security, education, land rights, economic empowerment and infrastructure development.

Joint efforts had been deployed to address gender stereotypes and discriminatory social norms. Participants also stressed the need to support and strengthen organizations for rural women and the need to create safe and inclusive spaces for their voices to be heard.

High-Level Interactive Dialogue 2 on “Accelerating implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and achieving concrete results by 2020”.

Commission Vice-Chair from Kenya asked all speakers to focus on concrete examples and share insights in responding to several guiding questions.

Which key actions and investments would governments undertake to achieve results for women and girls by 2020? How such progress would be measured? How would they strengthen collaboration and partnership to overcome specific persistent challenges and accelerate the realization of gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls? How governments had demonstrated leadership and undertaken good practices in prioritizing the realization of gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls?

Throughout the discussion, many speakers underlined the importance of accelerating women's economic empowerment and enhancing their participation in labor markets describing those as critical strategies that could help deliver concrete results.

The Minister for Justice and Human Rights of Ecuador said that his government was using the provision of housing as a key driver to speed up Ecuadorian women's empowerment and self-reliance, noting that the country had managed to drive poverty

down at a faster rate than any other in the region. The Minister for Administrative Development, labour and Social Affairs of Qatar said that the country's institutions had achieved gender parity and that the country was currently working to ensure women's universal access to health care. The representative of FAO said that it was working to end discriminatory inheritance and property laws. Also a major project was aimed at building women's leadership capacities in their households, their communities and at the policy level.

Participants confirmed that working with a wide range of stakeholders including grassroots organizations was a key component in successful implementation strategies. Participants outlined laws, policies, national strategies and action plans that are being leveraged and developed to accelerate the implementation of gender equality commitments.

Interactive Expert Panel 1 on “The role of rural women’s land rights and land tenure security in reaching the Sustainable Development Goals”.

Commission Vice-Chair of Bangladesh encouraged participants to examine how different stakeholders could ensure rural women's rights to land and tenure security, provide examples of national efforts and show evidence of how those issues contributed to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals.

Participants in the discussion emphasized that a low percentage of agricultural land was owned by women, while a high percentage of rural women made up the world's agricultural labor force. Countries said that policies should be elaborated to address gender disparities of land ownership, access to credit, and participating in political decision-making bodies. Reducing the gap between law and implementation was another way to trigger progress, as was leveraging the Sustainable Development Goals' land indicators. Land is a key resource for rural women. Out of more than 200 indicators involved for the 2030 Agenda, some exclusively targeted rural women for the first time, including their land rights. Until now, such indicators had not been broadly monitored leaving policies mismatched with investments based on scant information..

Ownership rights had broad development impact. Problems arose between formal and informal legal systems whereby overlapping rights, contradictory rules and competing authorities threatened women's land rights.

The representative of FAO said that Governments should hold corporations accountable outside their countries while host countries should act to prevent exploitation

Participants stressed the fact that global normative frameworks provide a strong basis for addressing challenges faced by rural women in the enjoyment of their land rights. Securing the rights of women to land is instrumental in reducing poverty and enhancing productivity, food security, and the health of communities. Collaborative land ownership and land holding systems are important pathways for rural women to acquire formal land rights. CSOs play a prominent role in raising awareness on women's land rights. Women must have full and informed knowledge of their rights, in particular land rights.

Interactive Expert Panel 2 on “Innovative data approaches for measuring progress on gender equality and women’s empowerment”.

Panelists were asked to assess lessons learned and actions needed to improve the production, analysis and dissemination of gender data in the context of monitoring and implementing the 2030 Agenda; identify best practices for using ICTs in monitoring the implementation of global regional and national commitments around gender equality and women's empowerment and examine how data governance in the digital age could be strengthened to empower women and girls everywhere.

Participants said that data remained unavailable for many of the 232 indicators selected to monitor the implementation of the SDGs. This gap also existed in the case of big data which emerged for almost every facet of modern life from the use of credit cards, cellular phones, GPS to online shopping. Many new challenges were emerging in the governance and use of data, new norms and standards had yet to be enshrined, more thought should be given to ethical and privacy issues.

In many developing countries, limited resources and generally weak institutional capacity often threatened the collection of quality data.

Participants questioned how to integrate big data and gender equality objectives which often fell under the auspices of National Ministries. Emphasis was put on today's data explosion which was a result of Internet. Nevertheless, the divide between those who had Internet access and those who did not was deepening inequalities and posing serious global threats. Fifty percent of the world's population still lack access, most of them women.

Participants underscored the potential of big data to provide high-quality, timely and reliable data to complement official statistics in an effort to better address data gaps relating to gender. Participants also underscored the need for existing data principles governing the production and use of statistics to be adapted in light of the increasing use of non traditional data sources. Participants emphasized the strengthening of data governance in the digital age in support of gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls, and that it was important to protect their human rights in particular their right to privacy.

Participants underscored the need for strategic partnerships among state and non state actors to create an enabling environment for the integration and use of new and traditional sources of data.

Interactive Dialogue on “Participation in and access of women to the media, and information and communications technologies and their impact on and use as an instrument for the advancement and empowerment of women”

In many of the presenting countries, the integration of gender perspectives in national ICT strategies and policies including many e-governmental initiatives provided a solid basis to respond to challenges women and girls are faced in the digital age.

Participants stressed that the digital age and the widespread use of ICT posed challenges relating to the perpetuation of gender stereotypes and negative social norms and created new threats to girls and women's safety and privacy. Several participants highlighted the widening of a gender digital divide reflected in the lower enrollment and retention of girls and women in the fields of science, technology, engineering, mathematics, and computer sciences.

A similar trend was observed in the media sector where women journalists remain vastly outnumbered by men journalists in particular in top positions.

There was agreement that comprehensive partnerships among governments, CSOs, the media and the private sector including public-private partnerships were a key strategy for enhancing women and girls access to and use of ICT.

Many presentations demonstrated how ICT technologies had broadened economic opportunities and access to services with particular achievements for women including those living in rural areas. A number of presentations demonstrated ways to increase the representation of women in the media, in Germany they use quota. In Belgium and Slovakia they use roster and database of women with expertise in different fields.

Resolutions

Resolution adopted on “the situation of and assistance to Palestinian women” - E/CN.6/2018/L.3

Adopted by a recorded vote of 13 in favor to 4 against, with 11 abstentions. By its terms, the Commission recommends that ECOSOC calls upon the international community to continue to provide urgently needed assistance to Palestinian women and girls facing a humanitarian crisis under Israeli occupation.

Resolution on “women, the girl child and HIV and AIDS”- E/CN.6/2018/L.5 Adopted without a vote

By its terms, the Commission welcomes a report of the SG on that topic urging member states to accelerate their implementation efforts. The Commission requires the SG to submit an additional progress report on the matter during its 64th Session in 2020.

Resolution “25th anniversary of the Fourth World Conference on Women” – E/CN.6/2018/L.7 Adopted without a vote.

By its terms, the Commission asks ECOSOC to recommend that the General Assembly convene a one-day high level commemorative meeting on the margins of the general debate of its seventy-fifth session, aimed at accelerating the realization of gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls.

Resolution containing the Provisional Agenda and the documentation for its 63rd Session E/CN/2018/L.2 Adopted without a vote

Resolution on “Future organization and methods of work of the Commission on the status of Women” E/CN.6/2018/L.6 Adopted without a vote

B. Evaluation of the Agreed Conclusions of CSW62

This year the language of Agreed Conclusions was more progressive than the one of last year. The stronger outcome of this year is a result of the advocacy by women's, human rights and young people organizations and by progressive states. However, the Conclusions will mean nothing if they are not implemented, so that governments are accountable for the commitments made at the Commission.

What in our view is very important and has been the practice in many Commission sessions is that there are no questions asked about some of the root causes of gender inequalities. In the case of CSW62, the focus was rural women. There was no question asked whether change can occur for women and girls living in rural areas as long as neoliberal policies continue to dominate our world. Where subsidies are cut for rural and marginalized groups in rural areas, where development funding for social services especially the expansion of the health and education services is cut, when governments in turn privatize such social services and the private sector has no motives to go to areas that are not profitable there is no questioning if neoliberal approaches to development policies can bring about change. There is no questioning as well of the economic empowerment of women which is advocated by all governments. Numerous evidence based on research and UN reports demonstrates how markets themselves seem to be structured to perpetuate and exploit economic inequality. For example, in many developing countries, work and employment involve women doing jobs for long hours with very little pay, without social protection, in unsafe working conditions and at risk of sexual harassment.

How can this process represent empowerment for rural women?

The discussion by many governments around women's access to land and land rights did not recognize their own policies enabling land grabs by big corporations at country level. The same is the case with the discussion about enabling women's access to markets through ICT without recognizing the inequalities women face in the workplace. So there is a lot of hypocrisy by governments which try to mask their indifference concerning rural women's improvement of their standards of life.

There are also increasing challenges that exacerbate the disadvantages and inequalities that rural women and girls face as a result of humanitarian emergencies and armed conflict as well as the adverse impact of climate change.

Without doing something about these challenges, how can we talk about the empowerment of rural women and girls?

Moreover, the rural is diverse; it is not homogenous and backward as we commonly assumed because of our urban mindsets. The same is the case with women and girls living in rural areas. They are diverse. They also possess knowledge which is valuable, mainly indigenous knowledge. We need to change the lens with which we view them. Without this change of approach, how can we bring change for rural women and girls?

These questions are pertinent and should be answered. The development model should be changed and not reflect neoliberal policies. Member states should listen to CSOs in particular of rural women if they are seriously committed to achieving any development goals.

Another problem that has to do with the shrinking space of civil society for rural women is the denial of visas for many young women to participate in the CSW on the grounds of not being married and not having enough experience abroad represented by the lack of stamps in their passports.

This represents a loss of experience in terms of women having their voices heard in a forum that really matters. How can we empower rural women and girls if we do not give them the space to speak up.

Gains in the Agreed Conclusions

The outcome of the negotiations of the Agreed conclusions of CSW62 was more satisfactory than in the past. One of the big accomplishments is the removal of sovereignty clauses which will set a precedent for future sessions of the Commission (Agreed Conclusions 23 March 2018).

There is a strong emphasis on rural women's participation at all levels of decision making. (Para 35) The conclusions also make reference to women's and girls' voice, agency and leadership. They recognize the critical role played by rural women CSOs, trade unions, enterprises and cooperatives in supporting rural women in all spheres. (Para s) The Commission also recognizes women's contribution in agriculture, it shows commitment to strengthen and support the critical role and contributions of rural women, including women farmers, and fishers and farm workers, to enhancing sustainable agricultural and rural development, eradicating poverty, achieving food security and improved nutrition and the economic well-being of their families and communities.

(Para uu) Despite strong push against SRHR by USA, Russia, the Holy See and other countries, the agreed language of SRHR in accordance with Beijing and ICPD is retained. In addition, the Commission reaffirms universal access to sexual and reproductive health services and recognizes that the human rights of women include the right to have control over and decide freely and responsibly on all matters related to their sexuality including sexual and reproductive health, free of coercion, discrimination and violence, as a contribution to the achievement of gender and the empowerment of women and the realization of their human rights.

(Para 25) All forms of violence against women and girls which is rooted in historical and structural inequality and unequal power relations between men and women is condemned. The Commission reiterates that violence against women and girls in all its forms and manifestations in public and private spheres, including sexual and gender-based violence, domestic violence and harmful practices such as child, early and forced marriage and female genital mutilation, are pervasive, under recognized and underreported, particularly at the community level. It expresses deep concern that women and girls in rural and remote areas may be particularly vulnerable to violence because of multidimensional poverty, limited or lack of access to justice, effective legal remedies and services, including protection, rehabilitation, reintegration and health care services. It reemphasizes that violence against women and girls is a major impediment to achievement of gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls, including those living in rural areas, and violates and impairs or nullifies their full enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms.

(Para mm) The Agreed Conclusions for the first time ensure that pregnant adolescents and young mothers as well as single mothers can continue and complete their education and in this regard, implement and where well applicable revise educational policies to allow them to remain in and return to school providing them with access to health care and social services and support including child care and breastfeeding facilities and crèches and to education programmes with accessible location, flexible schedules and distance education including e-learning and bearing in mind the

important role and responsibilities off and challenges faced by fathers including young fathers.

The Agreed Conclusions also ensure stronger language pertaining to comprehensive sexuality education for the first time. (Para 00) The Commission urges governments with the support of international organizations, civil society and NGOs to develop policies and programmes giving priority to formal, informal and non-formal education programmes, including scientifically accurate and age-appropriate comprehensive education, relevant to cultural contexts, that provides adolescent girls and boys and young women and men in and out of school, consistent with their evolving capacities, and with appropriate direction and guidance from parents and legal guardians, with the best interests of the child as their basic concern, information on sexual and reproductive health and HIV prevention, gender equality and women's empowerment, human rights, physical, psychological and pubertal development and power in relationships between women and men, to enable them to build self-esteem and informed decision-making, communication and risk reduction skills and to develop respectful relationships.

(Para ll) In addition, a strong language is added on promoting educational and health practices in order to foster a culture in which menstruation is recognized as healthy and natural and girls are not stigmatized on this basis recognizing that girls' attendance at school can be affected by negative perceptions of menstruation and lack of means to maintain safe personal hygiene, such as water, sanitation and hygiene facilities in schools that meet the needs of girls.

(Para rrr) Another important gain of the Agreed Conclusions is the recognition of the contribution of civil society actors in promoting and protecting human rights and fundamental freedoms of rural women. The Commission for the first time recognizes women human rights defenders and commits to creating a safe and enabling environment for the defence of human rights and to prevent violation and abuses against them in rural areas, inter alia threats, harassment and violence in particular on issues relating to labour rights, environment, land and natural resources and combat impunity by taking steps to ensure that violations or abuses are promptly and impartially investigated and those responsible are held accountable.

Concerns in the Agreed Conclusions

The Commission failed to recognize the diversity of women and girls concerning their sexual orientation, gender identities and expressions.

Different forms of families are once again deliberately excluded from the text.

The sexuality of women and girls living in rural areas was a topic that was not discussed. That women and girls living in rural areas include lesbians, transgender and intersex people was not mentioned at all in statements.

Even the ministerial round tables on access to education did not bring up the subject of comprehensive sexuality education which would enable girls and boys to speak up against proposed early marriages, prevent violence, and have more equal and respectful relationships.

Concerning sexual and reproductive health and rights, access to safe abortion services, disproportionate maternal mortality rates, no access to preventive screening for reproductive cancers were not discussed.