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Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA)

2017 Arab Forum for Sustainable Development

Special Session: Concept Note

**Special Session - Gender Responsive Implementation
of the 2030 Agenda: Gender Dimensions
of Poverty and Prosperity**



**United Nations
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The Special Session on “Gender Responsive Implementation of the 2030 Agenda: Gender Dimensions of Poverty and Prosperity” is organised by UN Women and the UN Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA).

Introduction

The 2030 Agenda, centred on 17 sustainable development goals (SDGs), is a global action plan to end poverty, protect the planet, and ensure prosperity for all. Based on consultations at local, national, regional and international levels, it sets out the main expected outcomes over the next 15 years. The SDGs seek to realize the human rights of all and to achieve gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls. The prioritization of gender equality and women’s rights is reflected in a cross-cutting manner throughout the 2030 Agenda and is not limited to the standalone Goal on Gender Equality and Empowerment of All Women and Girls (GEEWG) - (SDG5); GEEWG is included in the declaration, goals, targets and indicators, means of implementation, and follow-up and review. Central to the 2030 Agenda is the commitment of States “to leave no one behind”, to “reach the furthest behind first” and to address inequalities, inequities and discrimination, both within and between states.

UN Women with its partners, particularly ESCWA, are working together to leverage their universal and regional mandate to link normative and technical advances at the global level to the regional and national levels; their regional presence will allow for a greater cross-fertilization of experiences and complementarity of activities.

As an inclusive regional intergovernmental forum, Arab Forum for Sustainable Development (AFSD) 2017 will engage Member States, United Nations and other institutions, and major groups and other stakeholders in dialogue notably on the regional perspective on the implementation, follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, including an in depth review of the cluster of goals to be discussed by the High-Level Political Forum on sustainable development (HLPF)¹ in 2017 - 1 (Poverty), 2 (Hunger), 3 (Health), 5 (Gender Equality and Women’s and Girls’ Empowerment), 9 (Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure) and 14 (Life below Water) and 17 (Partnership). The forum’s overall objective will be to identify the key messages and recommendations linked to prosperity for all to be presented to the HLPF in July 2017. The theme will be "Eradicating poverty and promoting prosperity in a changing world".

Background

Men and women, girls and boys are affected by poverty, limiting their ability to make meaningful choices. For women, poverty is largely determined not only by their ability and fair access to opportunities that generate decent income, but also by the level of access and control over resources. As suggested in the Arab Millennium Development Goals Report: Facing Challenges and Looking Beyond 2015, to accelerate sustainable development and to improve the lives for all, women need to participate at all levels of policymaking, including in economics, poverty alleviation plans and in other development issues (...).² The Arab Region remains marked by a significant gap in power between men and women, including influence access to and control over resources. In the last Gender Gap Index (2016), the Middle East and North Africa region ranked last in closing the gender gap with nearly 40 per cent.³ Conflicts and transitional situations have compounded the socio-economic and political landscape. The low rate of women’s labour participation – and especially young women’s participation - in the formal economy, both in terms of employment and involvement in businesses, continues to be a significant impediment to the region’s development. A recent study estimates that gender gaps in employment and entrepreneurship amount to a total income loss for the

¹ The High-level Political Forum is the United Nations central platform for follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Sustainable Development Goals.

² UNDP/LAS (2015). ‘The Arab Millennium Development Goals Report: Facing Challenges and Looking Beyond 2015’, p. 68.

³ Gender Gap Index 2016.

region of 35 per cent in the short-term and 38 per cent in the long-run.⁴ To close the gender gap and eliminate inequalities and discriminations, the 60th Session of the Commission on the Status of Women – CSW60 (March 2016) Agreed Conclusions provide a roadmap for gender-responsive implementation of the 2030 Agenda, delineated by five areas for actions:

- Strengthening normative, legal and policy frameworks;
- Fostering enabling environments for financing gender equality and women’s and girls’ empowerment;
- Strengthening women’s leadership and women’s full and equal participation in decision-making in all areas of sustainable development;
- Strengthening gender-responsive data collection and follow-up and review processes;
- Enhancing national institutional arrangements.

The Special Session will discuss progress to date in positioning gender equality, women’s rights and women’s empowerment at the centre of the regional 2030 Agenda in the framework of the gender dimensions of poverty and prosperity. It will reflect on the extent to which the five areas identified in the CSW60 have guided the work. Given the goal of ‘leaving no one behind’, looking at both the multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination, (i.e., based on ethnicity, age, location, abilities, etc.) and violence against women in the private and public spheres in the region, which hinders women’s economic empowerment, will be central to the discussions. The session will present some of the current priorities on gender equality and women’s and girls’ empowerment (GEWGE) for the Arab States region, identifying challenges and obstacles as well as opportunities and potential solutions. The session will identify means of spurring on concrete actions to deliver on the gender equality and women’s empowerment commitments of the 2030 Agenda. It is a space to share good practices and lessons learned, and to address challenges in SDGs’ implementation, while uncovering main regional trends in promoting prosperity for women, men, girls and boys. The session will hopefully lead to the identification of key recommendations in advancing the implementation of SDG5 and its interlinkages with other goals in the region.⁵

Session Objectives

To take stock of how Goal 5 (GEWGE) and its interlinkages are being implemented and leveraged in achieving the 2030 Agenda in the Arab States region, with specific focus on "eradicating poverty and promoting prosperity in a changing world".

To identify main gaps to be addressed towards accelerating a gender-responsive implementation of the 2030 Agenda in the region.

To highlight ESCWA and UN Women’s efforts in supporting member States in fulfilling their commitments towards SDGs through the establishment of a sub-committee on gender and SDGs that is led by ESCWA in partnership with UN Women and LAS.

Proposed Agenda

⁴ Cited in UN Women, The Business Case for Women’s Economic Empowerment in the Arab States Region, 2016, page 16.

⁵ For instance, women’s full participation in the economic and political life (target 5.5) can support productivity increases (target 8.2), decent jobs creation (8.3). At the same time, women’s access to quality education (target 4.5) can support women’s full participation in the economic life (target 5.5).

The session aims to identify and agree on key operational recommendations to accelerate the implementation of SDG5 in the region and to set the timeframe for their implementation. Six speakers will present on the SDG5, each bringing his/her own stakeholder's perspective on the 2030 Agenda's implementation.

Minister Bassima Hakkaoui, Minister of Solidarity, Women, Family and Social Development, will present some of the principal learning from the implementation of Goal 5 in Morocco and how the implementation process can be accelerated.

Ambassador Mervat Tallawi, Director-General of the Arab Women Organization (AWO), will highlight how regional organizations support the SDG5 implementation in the Arab region, which has been one of the key lessons learned in moving forward with the 2030 Agenda.

Ms Inas Mekkawy, Head of the Women Family and Childhood Department – League of Arab States, will address how regional inter-governmental bodies support the acceleration of the implementation of the SDG5. She will also address some of the means that can be used to encourage the delivery of greater concrete actions on the gender equality and women's empowerment commitments of the 2030 Agenda.

Following these presentations, Dr Salma El Nims from the Jordanian National Commission for Women (JNCW) will address some of the main gaps and obstacles that must be tackled at this stage in order implement a gender-responsive 2030 Agenda.

Ms Guenena, Expert, will present on how the Goal 5 and its interlinkages are being implemented and leveraged in achieving the 2030 Agenda in the Arab region. More specifically, she will focus, given the goal of leaving no one behind, on how actors are looking at both the multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination, (i.e., based on ethnicity, age, location, disability, etc.).

Lastly, Dr Mehrnaz El Awad, Director of the Women Centre at ESCWA, will highlight ESCWA and UN Women's efforts in supporting member States in fulfilling their commitments towards SDGs through the establishment of a sub-committee on gender and SDGs that is led by ESCWA in partnership with UN Women and LAS.

The session will be moderated by Mr Mohammad Naciri, UN Women Regional Director for Arab States.

Participants:

The Special Session will bring together governments from the Arab States, the League of Arab States, Arab Women Organization (AWO), members of parliament, the United Nations System, financial Institutions and Development Banks, civil society, the private sector and academia.