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## THE ISSUE OF GENDER EQUALITY AND WOMEN EMPOWERMENT: A QUEST FOR SUSTAINABLE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

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**Abstract:** Inequalities are the major obstacle to sustainable development. Inequalities are increasing in the world and will continue to challenge social cohesion, poverty eradication efforts and sustainable growth. Multidimensional inequalities, such as gender, disability, urban/ rural, wealth or group identity are mutually reinforcing and often intersect with each other.

Gender-based discrimination and gender inequality are the most pervasive forms of inequality around the world and severe human rights violations. The future framework should be based on existing international human rights instruments and commitments on the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women. In this paper, we propose to study how by empowering women and girls we can overcome gender inequality. We believe that by empowering women, we can empower whole community. Women hold the key to educating their children, the next generation who will go on to shape the future of our world. We can ensure that the next generation's future is secured and we are providing a better quality of life for everyone in this world.

Thus, gender equality is an essential component for sustainable economic development and empowering women is vital to enabling them to improve their livelihoods and fight against the inequality.

**Keywords:** Discrimination, human rights violations, multidimensional inequalities, sustainable development.

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Inequalities are the major obstacle to sustainable development. Inequalities unfold within and between countries and regions, from the global level to households and individuals, affecting high, middle and low income countries. Inclusive Sustainable Development requires tackling structural causes of inequalities according to the human rights principles of universality, indivisibility, equality, non-discrimination, participation and accountability. As we have heard today, inequalities are increasing in the world and will continue to challenge social cohesion, poverty eradication efforts and sustainable growth.

Multidimensional inequalities, such as gender, disability, urban / rural, wealth or group identity are mutually reinforcing and often intersect with each other. Unequal social, economic and political opportunities lead to uneven access to services and poor outcomes which in turn undermine future opportunities, confirming and reproducing exclusion between groups and contributing to the intergenerational-transmission of poverty. Tackling social exclusion and discrimination as well as promoting social equity in line with human rights obligations aims at breaking this vicious circle and addressing structural factors.

Current patterns of production and consumption are leading to inequity among generations, irreversible degradation of ecosystems and the extinction of species. Inclusive and sustainable economic policies are needed to create decent work and wages including for disadvantaged groups both in the formal and informal sector.

The future framework should provide incentives for policymakers to prioritize most disadvantaged groups through setting tailored targets and disaggregating data by income, gender, disability, age, location, ethnicity, social origin and other factors. This will also contribute to ensuring the full, active and meaningful participation of disadvantaged groups in the process of monitoring exclusion and discrimination. Decision makers should thus be made more accountable of the extent to which human rights standards and inclusiveness of development processes are being met. Accountability needs to be ensured through a robust monitoring framework. This framework will need to contain indicators that go beyond average numbers and simple benchmarks, but that instead are able to capture the complex impacts of inequalities that intersect and reinforce each other.

The implementation of the future framework should not be taken as one-size-fits-all solution, or be applied in a purely top-down way but be re-designed according to national and local standards and realities in an inclusive, participatory, empowering way, ensuring ownership, transparency, accountability and dialogue.

A future framework should thus be based on principles including justice, equality, good governance and sustainability to address disparities and encourage transformative policies and measures that tackle both the manifestations of inequalities and their structural drivers. Thus, we support a strong focus on eradicating poverty combined with promoting equal opportunities for all and building inclusive and equitable societies.

Gender-based discrimination and gender inequality are the most pervasive forms of inequality around the world and severe human rights violations. The future framework should be based on existing international human rights instruments and commitments such as the Convention on the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women (CEDAW) and the Beijing Platform for Action. It will also be important to ensure that the new framework builds on the lessons-learned from the past experience, which did not address gender inequality in its multiple dimensions.

In order to address the root causes of discrimination against women and girls and overcome structural impediments, we strongly support that gender equality and women's and girls' empowerment should be a universal priority. It should focus on the following four issues:

1. Promoting equal participation and leadership: Women still have less voice than men in decision-making, allocation of public resources, the economy, their societies, and within their households. Large gender gaps remain in political participation, both for women's representation in political bodies and as voters. Underscoring women's vital role in achieving sustainable development, commitments and targeted measures to ensure women's equal rights, access and opportunities for participation and leadership in all spheres of decision-making is essential.
2. Promoting equal economic opportunities: Currently, women are the primary victims of poverty, with 33 million of girls not being given the opportunity to go to school. In addition, women work primarily in the informal sector, in which they are more likely to have poorly paid or unpaid and insecure jobs. Women need to gain the full access to opportunities to generate income, have access to decent and quality employment, including entrepreneurship, access to land tenure rights, access and control of productive assets and income, financial and natural resources as well as social protection. Moreover, access to quality education at all levels and life-long learning opportunities for women and girls must be ensured.
3. Eliminating and preventing all forms of violence against women and girls: Violence against women and girls is a worldwide pandemic and requires a global response. Over one third of all women and girls worldwide experience physical or sexual violence – and much of this violence remains with impunity. Women and girls facing multiple forms of inequalities are at particularly high risk of violence. Apart from having negative consequences for women's and girls' physical, sexual and mental health, violence prevents

women from full participation in public and economic life. To end violence against women and girls, challenging root causes such as gender stereotypes and discriminatory social norms and attitudes, comprehensive support services as well as access to justice and ending impunity, are critical.

4. Ensuring the effective realization and enforcement of women's and girls human rights. In order to achieve this, firstly, we should ensure equal rights under the law and equal access to justice for women and girls. Women still face substantial discrimination in the justice sector. Enacting and enforcing laws, regulations and policies that prohibit all forms of discrimination against women and girls, in particular concerning access to land and property rights, minimum age of marriage and family laws, as well as ensuring equal access to justice is a prerequisite to achieve gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls. Secondly, Sexual and reproductive

**Health and Rights:** An approximate number of 220 million of women in developing countries don't have access to modern contraceptives, which result in 80 million unintended pregnancies and 20 million unsafe abortions being carried out each year. Women and girls like men and boys must have full and affordable access to sexual and reproductive health information, services and supplies, comprehensive sexuality information and education and be able to freely and responsibly decide on matters related to their sexuality free of coercion, discrimination and violence. Sexual and reproductive health and rights are human rights. They have to be implemented in the future framework and must in our view also be addressed in the context of health.

Finally, we have to ensure the implementation of these measures:

Firstly, for a robust monitoring framework, we will need strong sex-aggregated indicators – quantitative as well as qualitative – that are able to capture these complex changes in women's, girls', men's and boys' lives. Where this data is not available, further research may be needed.

Secondly, commitments to gender equality and women's and girls' empowerment can only be effectively realized if sufficient resources are allocated to implement the relevant policies and measures, including ensuring that national institutions build capacity to support their implementation.

The past three decades have witnessed a steadily increasing awareness of the need to empower women through measures to increase social, economic and political equity, and broader access to fundamental human rights, improvements in nutrition, basic health and education. Along with awareness of the subordinate status of women has come the concept of

gender as an overarching socio-cultural variable, seen in relation to other factors, such as race, class, age and ethnicity. Gender is not synonymous with women, nor is it a zero-sum game implying loss for men; rather, it refers to both women and men, and to their status, relative to each other. Gender equality refers to that stage of human social development at which “the rights, responsibilities and opportunities of individuals will not be determined by the fact of being born male or female,” in other words, a stage when both men and women realize their full potential.

In recognition of the importance of establishing gender equality around the world, the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) was established as a separate fund within the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) in 1984. At that time, the General Assembly instructed it to “ensure women’s involvement with mainstream activities.” The Platform of Action resulting from the 1995 Beijing World Conference on Women expanded this concept, calling it “gender mainstreaming”—i.e.

the application of gender perspectives to all legal and social norms and standards, to all policy development, research, planning, advocacy, development, implementation and monitoring—as a mandate for all member states. In this way, the gender factor is no longer to be only a supplement to development but central to the practice of development. As a result of the Beijing conference—and the many years of work leading up to it—more than 100 countries announced new initiatives to improve the status of women. In 2000, the follow-up Beijing +5 conference further strengthened the application of the mainstreaming concept, and used it to highlight the need for more progress in reaching equality worldwide.

Achieving gender equality, however, is a grindingly slow process, since it challenges one of the most deeply entrenched of all human attitudes. Despite the intense efforts of many agencies and organizations, and numerous inspiring successes, the picture is still disheartening, as it takes far more than changes in law or stated policy to change practices in the home.

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