



THE PRESIDENT  
OF THE  
GENERAL ASSEMBLY

30 March 2015

Excellency,

I have the honour to transmit herewith a Summary of the key messages, initiatives and proposals from the High-Level Thematic Debate on Advancing Gender Equality and Empowerment of Women and Girls for a Transformative Post-2015 Development Agenda, which I convened on 6 March 2015.

As I indicated in opening Statement during the thematic debate, the proposals contained in the Summary could be considered in the ongoing negotiations on the post-2015 development agenda and the Third Conference on Financing for Development.

Please accept, Excellency, the assurances of my highest consideration.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Sam K. Kutesa', with a checkmark to the right.

Sam K. Kutesa

All Permanent Representatives and  
Permanent Observers to the United Nations  
New York

High-level Thematic Debate  
“*Advancing Gender Equality and Empowerment of Women and Girls for a Transformative  
Post-2015 Development Agenda*”

6 March 2015  
United Nations, NY

**President’s Summary**

The President of the General Assembly convened a High-level Thematic Debate on Advancing Gender Equality and Empowerment of Women and Girls for a Transformative Post-2015 Development Agenda on 6 March 2015. The following is a summary of the key messages, initiatives and recommendations from the Debate.

**Opening Session – 2015 Observance of International Women’s Day**

The Opening Session marked the United Nations’ global observance of International Women’s Day, which was convened jointly by the Office of the President of the General Assembly and the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women).

During the session it was noted that since the Fourth World Conference on Women, many countries have adopted policies to advance gender equality and women’s participation in political life has increased. It was observed that 20 years post Beijing, some progress had been made, as exemplified by the two female Heads of State participating in the Thematic Debate. However, disparities still exist and greater efforts were still needed to increase the representation of women in national parliaments and cabinets or executive arms of government, among other leadership positions.

It was further noted that some prevailing attitudes in societies, particularly those of men, in all regions, continue to hamper the advancement of women and the pace of transformation has been too slow. In this regard, it was emphasized that men and boys must be fully engaged as strategic partners and allies for gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls. It was stressed that a renewed commitment to the goals of Beijing and taking concrete actions to implement them is critical, in order to go beyond the rhetoric of speeches, international meetings, communiqués and declarations. Moreover, it was underscored that Governments have the primary responsibility, as “duty bearers”, to end the wrongs against women by, *inter alia*, repealing discriminatory laws, ensuring access to credit, productive resources and reproductive health and rights, as well as ending impunity for perpetrators of gender-based violence.

All speakers in the Opening Session stressed the need to accelerate implementation of the commitments made at Beijing and urged the realisation of the gender-specific Millennium Development Goals. The formulation of the Post-2015 Development Agenda, with the Sustainable Development Goals, as its main component, was viewed as a unique opportunity to accelerate efforts to empower women and girls. Beyond a stand-alone goal, the need to integrate the gender perspective as a crosscutting issue in all dimensions of the new development agenda was also highlighted.

It was emphasised that gender equality and empowerment of women must be central in the intergovernmental processes and their outcomes leading to the September 2015 Summit on Sustainable Development, including the UN World Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction and the Third International Conference on Financing for Development. It was asserted that if the 20 years of experience with the Beijing agenda is combined with substantive action in the near future, it is possible to reach the goal of gender equality within the timeframe of the post-2015 agenda.

Furthermore, Member States and other stakeholders were encouraged to invest ambitiously in education and training opportunities for women and girls and to put in place the monitoring and accountability mechanisms necessary to motivate countries to action in order to achieve additional results by 2030.

**Interactive Panel 1: Women’s economic and political empowerment, including access to and control over economic and productive resources and active participation in governance and decision-making**

1. It was underscored that a range of constraints continue to impede women’s access to and control over economic and productive resources as well as their participation in governance and decision-making processes. It was stressed that empowerment of women both economically and politically necessitated the lifting of many barriers that constrain them, including discriminatory social norms, customs and practices as well as hindrances in accessing justice. To overcome this challenge, it was proposed that engagement of all stakeholders is critical to ensure that legal frameworks, which safeguard women’s right to participate in political life, and guarantee equal access to property, inheritance and other assets are put in place. Secondly, it is essential to ensure that the legal frameworks are fully implemented to protect women’s rights against discriminatory practices, customs and social norms.
2. Speakers highlighted that disproportionate care work, the responsibilities of child care, and other household chores have exacerbated the marginalization of rural women, including by limiting their participation in political, social, cultural and economic spheres. They noted, however, that beyond women living in rural areas, women generally work longer hours than men especially when they also participate in the paid labour market. In addition, they stressed that gender stereotypes often prevented men from sharing the burden of care work. They also noted that the time factor associated with care work, and the burden of such work leads to gender gaps in wages and earnings.
3. It was highlighted that globally, women’s participation in the labour market has stagnated over the years. According to many speakers, investments in child care and maternity and paternity leave are critical to ensuring that women can enter the labour market on an “equal footing” with men and that they can rise to the highest levels. It was noted in this regard that expansion of decent work wage employment for women will mean that women can avail themselves of better employment opportunities. It was noted further that research has demonstrated that economies with a high percentage of women in the labour force do well in terms of utilization of their capacities and in meeting their development aspirations.
4. It was underscored that small- and medium-sized enterprises provide important opportunities for women, as they inter alia help stimulate greater demand for goods and

services and uplift the economy as a whole. The need to focus on connecting women with markets through infrastructure and mobile technology that can also increase their employment opportunities was emphasized.

5. It was noted that of the 1.6 billion people still lacking access to basic energy services, 70 per cent are women. Many women, especially those in rural areas, in particular, spend long hours away from their homes in search of firewood, whose use for cooking is hazardous to their health. It was underscored that limited access to clean energy assets also inhibits their participation in income generation activities. It was underlined that owing to their education background and other factors, women are underrepresented in the energy sector, including the oil and gas industry. Gender diversity was highlighted as being among the ways in which this gap could be bridged.
6. In order to respond to the challenge of women's marginalization, including in political processes, several Member States have prepared national action plans, based on the Beijing Platform for Action, to support women's political participation through, *inter alia*, targeted interventions and special temporary measures. It was noted that feminist organizations play an important role in increasing women's political participation, knowledge and education of their rights.
7. It was emphasized that women suffer inordinately in emergency and conflict situations, but they are less involved in peace-making, post-conflict recovery, reconstruction, and peacebuilding efforts. It was thus stressed that women need to be central in discussions and decisions at these critical times as well as in developing strategies for conflict prevention, management and resolution.

### **Recommendations and Initiatives**

- i. The post-2015 development agenda should include a target on "unpaid care work" and an indicator on "living wage".
- ii. Parliaments need to ensure that gender issues are incorporated into planning and budgeting processes for concrete changes.
- iii. Equal pay for work of equal value is a principle which must be upheld. Investments in child care and maternity and paternity leave are critical to ensuring that women can enter the labour market on "equal footing" with men and that they can close the pay gap and rise to the highest levels.
- iv. Access to affordable credit by women-owned micro, small- and medium-sized enterprises should be enhanced.
- v. There is a need to focus on connecting women with markets through infrastructure and mobile technology that can also increase employment opportunities.
- vi. Additional reforms are needed to empower women with inheritance rights and access to productive resources such as land and property.
- vii. Governments should support and sensitize women to know and understand their rights, particularly during the entire law-making process. Laws should be continually monitored and reviewed from a gender perspective.
- viii. National energy policies should recognize the impact of energy poverty on women. Gender mainstreaming must be incorporated into the energy sector, including the oil and gas industry and technology and innovation utilized to improve women's capacity to work in this sector.

- ix. In their States Party reports for the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) Governments should go beyond targeted interventions and special temporary measures and embrace, inter alia, “certificates of compliance”, to ensure that all actors are advancing on gender equality, implementation of national action plans and addressing women’s marginalization in political participation and decision-making.
- x. Implement initiatives such as the G-20’s effort, Women-20 (W-20) Outreach Group, to achieve inclusive growth and raise the profile of gender issues.

**Interactive Panel 2: Access to quality education and skills development as tools for empowerment of women and girls**

1. It was noted that 493 million people, nearly two-thirds of illiterate adults around the world, are women, and 31 million girls of primary school age do not attend school. Against this background, and at the current pace, it would take until 2084 for universal education to become a reality for all. Yet, access to quality education was recognized as central for women and girls to progress, fulfilling their personal aspirations, and contributing to a transformative development agenda in which no one is left behind. It was stressed further that while legislative changes in many countries ensure that primary education is free, normative changes are needed to address discriminatory customs and to develop a culture of respect for women’s human rights.
2. Underscoring the importance of targeting interventions at the most vulnerable populations, speakers noted that adolescent girls are exposed to a myriad of challenges, including extreme poverty, early or forced marriage, early pregnancy, sexually transmitted diseases and sexual violence. The following were identified as important areas for targeted attention: (1) separate WASH (water, sanitation and hygiene) facilities in school; (2) policy advocacy to ensure enough funding for girls’ education and legislation raising the minimum age of marriage; and (3) working with communities to change social norms and practices. It was underscored that focusing on the second decade of young girls’ lives in the transition period from primary to secondary schooling can help address their school attendance rates.
3. Speakers underscored the importance of ensuring safe and secure environments around schools, with a view to ensure that girls attend school free from fear. They mentioned the CEDAW Committee reports, which provided that 70 countries have experienced attacks against girls and supporters of girls education from 2009-2014, with year 2012 alone, comprising 360 separate attacks, which were mostly related to forced marriages and human trafficking. It was suggested therefore, that Member States should reinforce legal obligations in favour of girls’ education, ensure investigation of incidents of attacks and ensure full accountability for the perpetrators, in line with relevant laws.
4. Speakers underscored the importance of quality education, and a learning environment involving well-trained and highly motivated teachers and trainers; strong foundational (in both numeracy and literacy) as well as transferable (negotiation, analytical) skills, and teaching that transcends gender stereotyping. It was highlighted that gender segregated skills that do not match the needs of the labour market also do not translate into empowerment for women and girls.
5. It was observed that the low enrolment of female students in STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) subjects and an insufficient number of women who choose

a career in STEM are among the reasons why women find themselves below the glass ceiling. It was thus suggested that broad exposure to the science and business environment can be a comparative advantage as more women try to shatter the glass ceiling.

6. It was underscored that technical and vocational training, especially in new technologies, can be a powerful link between formal and non-formal education, and together with other skills is essential for enhancing the employment prospects and opportunities for women and girls. UNESCO and UN Women partnering for Mobile Learning Week 2015 was cited as an example of high-level attention given to the use of technology as a way to strengthen the quality and access to education for women and girls and support their transition to the labour market. Speakers showcased how technology is being used in this way in countries in Africa, Asia and Latin America.
7. It was stressed that better coordination of education and health policies is needed. A joint programme between UNESCO, UN Women, UNFPA and the World Bank on Empowering Adolescent Girls and Young Women through Education was cited as an example of the life cycle approach developed to promote girls' and young women's empowerment through education and learning beyond the classroom.
8. Provision of education on effective family planning and sexual and reproductive health was acknowledged as the best way of preventing unwanted pregnancies and helping girls to stay in school. Involvement of women and girls in the policy formulation and implementation processes concerning sexual and reproductive health was also emphasized.

### **Recommendations and Initiatives**

- i. Measures must be taken that allow women avenues into STEM sectors so that they can diversify into other areas, including research and operations in companies.
- ii. Life-long learning should be encouraged as it enables women to make up for education deficiencies and provides the skills needed to participate in markets.
- iii. Information and communication technology should be leveraged to support women and girls transition to the labour market.
- iv. Robust population analysis, with disaggregated data, is needed to ensure that women and girls are not left behind in the new development agenda.
- v. Enhanced partnership with the private sector, including through internships, can help to translate educational achievement into employment.
- vi. Creation of the International Day of the Girl Child
- vii. Develop targeted interventions, such as conditional education assistance for girls to receive scholarships at an increased rate.
- viii. Increase training for law enforcement, medical professionals, judiciary, religious representatives, media and other public employees and officials to raise awareness of the ways to prevent discrimination and violence against women and girls.

### Closing session

Speakers underscored that the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action remains as relevant today as it was two decades ago, especially in the light of the challenges still facing women and girls around the world. In this regard, they called for the further acceleration of its implementation.

In closing remarks, the President of the General Assembly, *inter alia*, reiterated that gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls are essential to the sustainable future of humankind. He also noted that in addition to having a stand-alone goal on gender equality, gender perspectives should be mainstreamed in all sustainable development goals, targets, indicators as well as the means of implementation for a transformative post-2015 development agenda.