

## **Transforming economies, realizing rights: A policy agenda to achieve substantive equality for women and realize sustainable development**

The Second Committee of the General Assembly will consider the biennial sub-item on “Women in development” (item 24 b of the provisional agenda) during its forthcoming session. The Committee will have before it a report of the Secretary-General (A/70/256) which focuses, among other matters, on the integration of a gender perspective into national development strategies. It will also have before it the report of the Secretary-General on the *World Survey on the Role of Women in Development (A/69/156)*, which focuses on gender equality and sustainable development.

This special event, featuring leading researchers and experts, will contribute new ideas and expert knowledge to inform the Committee’s deliberations and work. The event will **make the case for a transformative policy agenda** to achieve gender equality and sustainable development, as presented in the 2014 *World Survey on the Role of Women in Development* as well as UN-Women’s flagship report, *Progress of the World’s Women 2015-2016*, launched in April 2015. Such an agenda is of particular relevance as Member States move forward with the implementation of Agenda 2030 and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

### **Background**

Twenty years after the landmark Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing, at a time when the global community has defined the Sustainable Development Goals and is launching their implementation, particular attention is needed to make further progress on achieving gender equality and women’s rights.

The 2015 global review of implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (E/CN.6/2015/3, and E/2015/27) found progress in some key areas: an increasing number of laws that promote gender equality and address violence against women and girls; higher levels of girls’ enrolment in primary and secondary education; larger numbers of women participating in the labour force in some regions; a decline in maternal mortality and an increase in women’s access to contraception; and a doubling of women’s representation in national parliaments.

Yet, the overall picture is of slow and uneven progress, with serious stagnation and even regression in several areas. Women’s increasing educational attainment and rising participation in the labour force have not been matched with better conditions, prospects for advancement and equal pay, and women continue to shoulder a disproportionate share of unpaid care work. Deep-seated discriminatory norms, stereotypes and violence remain pervasive, while women’s sexual and reproductive health and rights remain to be achieved. As a result, the majority of women and girls are still denied substantive equality, in other words, they are still not able to enjoy their human rights in practice.

Progress has been particularly slow for the most marginalized women and girls who experience multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination; and new challenges, such as repeated and lingering economic crises, volatile food and energy prices, food insecurity and climate change, as well as rising extremism and backlash against women’s rights are putting fragile gains towards gender equality in jeopardy.

### Key issues

Against this backdrop, Member States have recognized the need for an ambitious new Agenda 2030, one which is grounded in human rights principles, is universal in scope, and takes a comprehensive approach to tackling the structural barriers to overcoming poverty, inequality and environmental degradation. The inclusion of a standalone goal, SDG 5 on achieving gender equality and empowering all women and girls, as well as gender mainstreaming across the framework is a landmark achievement.

In making the case for a transformative policy agenda to advance substantive equality for women and girls, this event will highlight some key considerations for Member States in implementing and localizing the new framework. The event will focus on the following two areas:

- **Reinforcing the positive synergies between gender equality and sustainable development**

There is growing evidence of synergies between gender equality, on the one hand, and economic, social and environmental sustainability, on the other. For example, when women have greater voice and participation in public administration, public resources are more likely to be allocated towards investments in human development priorities, including child health, nutrition and access to employment. Likewise, ensuring women's access to and control over agricultural assets and productive resources is important for achieving food security and sustainable livelihoods.

However, while gender equality and women's empowerment can have a catalytic effect on achieving economic, social and environmental sustainability, the reverse does not always hold true. While women's time and skills are often harnessed for spurring economic growth or ensuring environmental sustainability, recognition and rewards for their contribution do not always follow. To ensure that women benefit from sustainable development policies, it is essential to support their participation and agency. Their knowledge, innovation, action and agency is central to finding, demonstrating and building more economically, socially and ecologically sustainable ways to manage local ecologies, adapt to climate change, produce and access food and secure sustainable and appropriate water, sanitation and energy services.

- **Transforming economies and realizing women's rights**

In order to meet the SDGs, gender inequality and discrimination on a range of grounds need to be addressed in an integrated manner. Achieving substantive equality for women -- enabling women to enjoy their rights in practice -- requires policy action in three inter-related priority domains: first, redressing women's socioeconomic disadvantage; second, addressing stereotyping, stigma and violence; and third, strengthening women's agency, voice and participation.

Human rights frameworks provide an important basis for the design of public policies, monitoring their implementation and outcomes and for holding all duty-bearers (states, as well as global institutions and corporations) to account for the realization of substantive equality. Effective integration between economic, social and environmental policies can create a virtuous cycle through the generation of decent work, in environmentally sustainable sectors; gender responsive social protection, social services and infrastructure that help people adjust to environmental and economic challenges while reducing and redistributing women's unpaid domestic and care work; and enabling macroeconomic policies that prioritize job creation and investments in human beings and the fulfilment of social and environmental objectives.

**Moderator:**

**Ms Lakshmi Puri**, Assistant Secretary-General of UN-Women

**Speakers:**

- **James Heintz**, Associate Director and Andrew Glyn Professor of Economics, Political Economy Research Institute (PERI), University of Massachusetts, Amherst, and co-author of *Progress of the World's Women 2015-2016*
- **Ruth Nyambura**, African Biodiversity Network
- **Martha Alter Chen**, Lecturer in Public Policy at the Harvard Kennedy School, Affiliated Professor at the Harvard Graduate School of Design, and International Coordinator of the global research-policy-action network Women in Informal Employment: Globalizing and Organizing (WIEGO).
- **Nieves Rico**, Director for the Division of Gender Affairs, Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean
- **Discussant:** Radhika Balakrishnan, Faculty Director of the Center for Women's Global Leadership, and Professor of Women's and Gender Studies at Rutgers University.

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