

Issues Paper
CSW Interactive Panel Discussion on
"Integration of gender perspectives in macro-economics"
10 March 2005, 10 a.m. – 1 p.m.

Background

The Beijing Platform for Action (1995) examined issues related to the promotion of women's economic rights and independence, including access to and control over economic resources, markets, trade and employment, including in the context of globalization. It endorsed gender mainstreaming as a strategy for promoting equality between women and men, including in addressing the economic potential and independence of women. The outcome of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly (2000) emphasized the importance of implementing the gender mainstreaming strategy in key macroeconomic and social development policies and national development programmes as well as the important role of women in macroeconomic decision-making.

The Copenhagen Declaration on Social Development, adopted at the World Summit for Social Development (1994), emphasized that economic development, social development and environmental protection are interdependent and mutually reinforcing components of sustainable development. The outcome document of the twenty-fourth special session of the General Assembly (2000) noted a growing awareness of the positive impact of effective social policies on economic and social development. Similarly, the Plan of Implementation of the World Summit on Sustainable Development (2002) emphasized the need to promote the integration of the three components of sustainable development – economic development, social development and environmental protection – as interdependent and mutually reinforcing pillars.

There has been growing attention to women's role in the economic sphere at global level since the beginning of the new millennium. For example, the Monterrey Consensus, adopted by the International Conference on Financing for Development, held in Monterrey in March 2002, emphasized the importance of taking a holistic approach to the interconnected national, international and systemic challenges of financing for development, including gender sensitive development. To strengthen the effectiveness of the global economic system's support for development, the Consensus encouraged gender mainstreaming into development policies at all levels and in all sectors. It also emphasized the need to reinforce national efforts in capacity-building in gender budget policies. The São Paulo Consensus, adopted at the eleventh session of the United Nations Conference Trade and Development (UNCTAD XI), held in Sao Paulo in June 2004, recognized that gender equality is essential for sustained economic growth, poverty eradication and employment creation. It emphasized that trade and development policies in developing countries should aim at reducing poverty and supporting growth, sustainable development and gender equality.

Achievements and challenges identified

In their responses to the questionnaire for the ten-year review and appraisal of the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action, several Governments indicated that over the past years, macroeconomic policies (for example, liberalization and privatization) driven by economic globalization (flows of goods and services, capital and labour; diffusion of innovations and ideas) continued to present both opportunities and challenges for the fulfillment of the commitments and realization of the goals of the Fourth World Conference on Women. Governments reported that benefits in terms of increased jobs opportunities, incomes, trade and investment markets were only enjoyed by a very small proportion of women—the better educated and multi-skilled women workers. Low-skilled women workers, in particular in rural areas and in export processing zones, were among the most vulnerable to job instability, low income without employee benefits, intensive work loads,

long work hours and hazardous working environments. It was noted that equal access to education, training and upgrading of skills of women and girls, as well as knowledge and information, including on international standards and information and communication technologies, was crucial to avoid exclusion of women from fast-growing sectors.

Some countries emphasized that poor performance of the national economy was likely to affect women more adversely than men, given women's multiple roles as mothers, wives, food providers, care providers, heads of households and workers. Reduced public expenditures in the social sector had serious impact on women, who had to assume responsibility of health care and education of household dependents. A robust economy could enhance women's opportunities and capacity to effectively participate in and contribute to the national economy and the welfare of communities and households in which they live.

Some countries reported on specific steps taken to address or mitigate the negative impact on women of macroeconomic policies driven by economic globalization, and to find ways to enhance the positive impacts of globalization. Examples included a pilot project in which retrenched women workers were organized and trained; a study examining whether women were unfairly used as a source of comparative advantage in international trade; the establishment of a center to, inter alia, examine gender perspectives of globalization and identify enabling conditions for women's participation in market liberalization; activities to develop and implement gender-responsive budgets, including on public expenditures; and a national taskforce to produce a gender-sensitive profile of the process of liberalization and free trade agreements.

Issues for consideration

The objective of the panel is to and highlight ways and means to identify and integrate gender perspectives into macroeconomic policies and programmes, including through further clarifying the linkages between macroeconomic and social issues. Panelists and participants will have the opportunity to discuss achievements, gaps and challenges in incorporating gender perspectives into macroeconomic policies and programmes and linking economic and social development. Good practice examples and lessons learned should be shared. The issues which could be raised include, inter alia the following:

- What are the key challenges faced in integrating gender perspectives in macroeconomic policies and programmes at national level? How could good practices be shared among countries? What could be done at the global level to ensure gender-sensitive macroeconomic policies and programmes? What are the key challenges and constraints in ensuring a close link between economic and social development? How can collaboration be enhanced between ministries of trade, finance and other line ministries focusing on the economy, and those focusing on social development, as well as national machineries for the advancement of women in incorporating gender perspectives into macroeconomic policies and programmes?
- What role does the Ministry of Finance and other line ministries have in initiating, developing and implementing gender-responsive budgets?
- How could civil society, in particular women's organizations, be involved in macroeconomic policy-making processes? What role could the private sector play and how could private-public sector partnerships contribute to the development and implementation of gender-sensitive policies and programmes?
- In the context of the Millennium Development Goals, what are the linkages between promoting gender equality (Goal 3) and developing a global partnership for development (Goal 8)? What role do development partners play in this regard?