



Empowering parliaments to empower women Making the economy work for women

A parliamentary event organized by the Inter-Parliamentary Union and UN Women at the 61st Session of the Commission on the Status of Women

17 March 2017, ECOSOC Chamber, UN Headquarters, New York

CONCEPT NOTE AND DRAFT AGENDA

1. INTRODUCTION

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development provides a unique opportunity for bold and concerted action to achieve inclusive growth and curb all forms of discrimination and inequality, particularly gender inequality. Women's economic empowerment is a precondition to fulfilling this promise, and is one of the pillars of Sustainable Development Goal 5 – "Achieve Gender Equality and Empower All Women and Girls". Gender equality is key to achieving sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all (Goal 8). It is also an important part of building peaceful and inclusive societies (Goal 16). Women's increased participation in the economy and in economic decision-making is therefore a powerful means of redressing gender-based discrimination, which women face in all areas of life. In addition, it also increases well-being for all.

However, many obstacles still prevent social, economic and legal policies from working for women. Discrimination against women in law and in practice tends to confine them to unskilled, underpaid or unpaid work. It also prevents them from attaining equal pay for work of equal value. In addition, educational and economic opportunities for women are often hampered due to gender bias or security concerns. In many countries, women still face legal or cultural barriers to opening or running a business, owning and managing property, or accessing financial services.

Parliaments have a paramount role to play in identifying and addressing obstacles to women's economic empowerment, in ensuring that social and economic policies answer men and women's needs, and in monitoring their implementation and actual impact.

2. DRAFT AGENDA

17 March 2017

10:00 - 10:10 a.m. Welcome remarks

 Ms. Margaret Mensah-Williams, Chairperson of the National Council of Namibia and President of the IPU's Bureau of Women Parliamentarians

10:10 – 10:30 a.m. Introductory remarks

- · Mr. Martin Chungong, Secretary General, IPU
- Ms. Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, Executive Director, UN Women

10:30 a.m. - 1 p.m. Session 1: Lifting the barriers to women's economic empowerment

Women's economic empowerment cannot be achieved without addressing deeply entrenched discriminatory norms and legal barriers to women's autonomy.

Positive measures are needed, in particular to ensure gender equality in education, training and employment opportunities. More generally, discrimination in customary and legal norms related to marriage, inheritance, land, property and personal status, and the lack of measures to combat violence against women, constitute major obstacles to women's economic empowerment.

Panellists:

- Mr. Augusto Lopez Claros, World Bank
- Ms. Abigail Hunt, Senior Research Officer, ODI
- Ms. Oby Nwankwo, Vice-Chair of the CEDAW Committee
- Ms. Pia Locatelli, Member of Parliament (Italy), Member of IPU's Bureau of Women Parliamentarians

Following the panellists' presentations, a moderated debate will begin in which panellists and parliamentarians are invited to respond to the following questions:

- How best can women enjoy their economic rights to property, land and inheritance without fearing retaliation, repudiation or violence?
- What measures have proven useful in ensuring equal educational, training and employment opportunities for women and men across all sectors?
- How to make women's economic empowerment a reality in situations of conflict and a priority in post-conflict settings? What is needed to ensure that displaced and refugee women have access to economic empowerment opportunities?
- How best can parliaments contribute to women's empowerment through legal and policy reforms to eliminate gender-based discrimination?
- Are there best practices to ensure women can effectively access their rights, including through free legal aid and sensitization, especially in rural areas?
- What best practices are there in engaging men to challenge discriminatory norms and stereotypes that prevent women's full contribution to the economy?

1 – 2:30 p.m. *Lunch break*

2:30 – 4 p.m. Session 2: Empowering women at work

Just half of women worldwide are in the labour force, as compared to about 76 per cent of men. Increased attention has been placed on women's untapped potential, as studies have shown the benefits of gender balance for business and the economy. Companies with more women on their corporate boards outperform their rivals. Women's equal participation would add USD 12 trillion to the global economy.

Gender equality at work also has a multiplier effect for development, human rights and gender equality. Women who are economically empowered are more likely to invest in nutrition, education and health, with great benefits for their children.

Women workers are disadvantaged on several fronts. They are overrepresented in the informal economy, and in low-paid, low-skilled or unregulated jobs. ⁵ They often

¹ Report of the Secretary-General, *Women's economic empowerment in the changing world of work*, 30 December 2016, UN Doc. E/CN.6/2017/3, para. 11: http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=E/CN.6/2017/3.

² Catalyst, 2007, The Bottom Line: Corporate Performance and Women's Representation on Boards:

http://www.catalyst.org/system/files/The Bottom Line Corporate Performance and Womens Representation on Boards.pdf.

3 McKinsey Global Institute (MGI), 2015, *The power of parity: How advancing women's equality can add \$12 trillion to global growth:*http://www.mckinsey.com/global-themes/employment-and-growth/how-advancing-womens-equality-can-add-12-trillion-to-global-growth

⁴ The World Bank, 2012, *World Development Report: Gender Equality and Development*, p. 5: https://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTWDR2012/Resources/7778105-1299699968583/7786210-1315936222006/Complete-Report.pdf.

face gender-based discrimination and harassment in the workplace. Women also bear the burden of most unpaid care work and tend to earn less than men for work of same value. Those are all major obstacles to their full participation in the economy and to their well-being.

Panellists:

- Mr. Vinicius Pinheiro, ILO representative in NY
- Prof. Maria S. Floro, Professor of Economics, American University
- Ms. Naisula Lesuuda, Senator (Kenya), Chairperson of the Committee on Broadcasting, Deputy Chairperson of the Committee on Devolved Government and Deputy Chairperson of the Kenya Women Parliamentarians Association

Following the panellists' presentations, a moderated debate will begin in which panellists and parliamentarians are invited to respond to the following questions:

- What policies have proven most useful in ensuring gender equality at work, including on recruitment, professional development and equal pay?
- What policies, laws and programmes can best contribute sharing unpaid care work more equally among men and women, especially childcare? How best can society at larger contribute to meeting households' needs in this regard?
- What measures have proven useful in addressing sexual harassment at work?
 What can parliaments do to promote them?
- What best practices are there in ensuring social protection in sectors where women are mostly represented, such as the informal sector, and in agriculture, manufacturing, domestic and care work?
- How best to ensure gender balance on corporate boards?

4 – 5:30 p.m.

Session 3: Promoting the financial inclusion of women

Women are less likely than men to own a bank account, to access loans or credit and to run a business. While poverty affects both men and women, women heads of household and older women are more likely to face economic hardship than men in similar situations. ⁶

Women are overrepresented among the poor and face cultural, technological and legal barriers to accessing financial services and assets. As a result, policies are required that are responsive to women's challenges and needs, and that are able to bridge gender gaps.

Parliaments can play a key role in a number of areas. They can contribute to mapping out women's needs, regulating the financial sector and ensuring that a gender perspective is applied in the design and implementation of fiscal and budget policies. They can also help to ensure public resources are allocated to enhance women's financial opportunities, including through affirmative action and by dedicating a growing share of international development assistance to the financial inclusion of women.

Panellists:

- Ms. Gabriela Cuevas, Senator (Mexico) Chairperson, International Relations Committee, Rapporteur of the IPU Standing Committee on International Development and Trade
- Ms. Arancha González, Executive Director, International Trade Centre

⁵ The World Bank, 2012, p. 79. ILO, 2016, Women at Work: http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---dcomm/----publ/documents/publication/wcms, 457317 pdf

publ/documents/publication/wcms_457317.pdf.

⁶ United Nations, 2015. *The World's Women 2015: Trends and Statistics*, Chapter 8 Poverty: http://unstats.un.org/unsd/gender/downloads/WorldsWomen2015_chapter8_t.pdf.

 Ms. Kavita Bali, Director, Development and Strategic Partnerships, Women's World Banking

Following the panellists' presentations, a moderated debate will begin in which panellists and parliamentarians are invited to respond to the following questions:

- What best practices are there in regulating the banking and financial sectors to ensure equal opportunities for women and men? What role could parliaments play?
- What accompanying measures are needed to ensure that dedicated financial services for women are effective and sustainable?
- What are the main challenges for women wishing to open or run a business? How can parliament best promote women's entrepreneurship?
- Does affirmative action in public procurement work?
- How best to hold governments, international financial institutions and donors accountable for contributing to women's financial inclusion? What makes gender-responsive budgeting and programming work?

5:30 – 5:40 p.m. Concluding remarks