UN Women inputs
To the Third International Conference on Small Island Developing States (SIDS) Preparatory Process

Introduction

Gender equality, women’s rights and women’s empowerment are key to poverty eradication and sustainable development

The achievement of gender equality, women’s rights and women’s empowerment is a key component of sustainable development and poverty eradication.

At the SIDS inter-regional preparatory meeting held in Barbados in August 2013, Member States clearly recognized the need “for the enhancement of efforts towards ensuring gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls.” The outcome document further reaffirmed that gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls are cross-cutting issues and must be realized in particular through women’s full participation at all levels of decision making. SIDS also called “for a post-2015 development agenda that is people-centered and that focuses on eradicating poverty, engendering equality, and achieving environmental sustainability.”

The Joint Statement on Gender Equality and the Post 2015 and SIDS Agenda1 highlighted a range of Caribbean voices and expectations in the emerging post 2015 and SIDS global agendas on gender equality.

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1 With the support of the UN Women Multi-Country Office for the Caribbean, the Joint Statement was generated by high level government officials and civil society representatives from CARICOM countries, with inputs from regional inter-governmental bodies and international partners in the Caribbean.
The Barbados Declaration and the Barbados Programme of Action (BPOA) (1994) affirmed that “full attention should be given to gender equity and to the important role and contribution of women, as well as to the needs of women and other major groups, including children, youth and indigenous people.”

The Preamble of the BPOA recognizing the critical contribution of women to sustainable development and the involvement of youth to the long-term success of Agenda 21 called on the elimination of all obstacles to the equal participation of women in decision-making process to allow women to participate in and benefit from the sustainable development of their particular societies. Furthermore, actions [to address the constraints to the development of SIDS] “should integrate environmental considerations and natural resource conservation objectives and gender considerations consistent with the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development and Agenda 21, into the development of social and economic development policies in international, regional, subregional and/or bilateral cooperative programmes related to islands (paragraph 11, Preamble)

Other relevant provisions in support of women’s engagement and contribution include: i) the need to increase the awareness and involvement women in national planning, the development of environmentally sound and sustainable technologies, and the implementation of sustainable development programmes... (paragraph 81); ii) promoting and strengthening the role of women in science and technology disciplines (paragraph 59.A.ii); iii) training and capacity development for women with regard to the use of technology (para. 108); iv) engagement and active participation of major groups, including women, in the implementation of the Programme of Action (paragraph 68); v) support for new participatory approaches to policy-making and implementation of sustainable development programmes at all levels that include women...(pargraph 71); vi) developing and improving national databases and the dissemination of information to relevant groups, especially ... women... for land-use planning and management, including estimates of the carrying capacity, economic and environmental value of land resources, along with appropriate decision-making tools, such as
land/geographic information systems.” (paragraph 34.A.i); vii) supporting the involvement of non-governmental organizations, women, indigenous people and other major groups, as well as fishing communities and farmers, in the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity and biotechnology. (paragraph 45.A.viii).

The Mauritius Strategy of Implementation (2005), in its preamble identified gender equality along with sound environmental, social and economic policies, democratic institutions responsive to the needs of the people, the rule of law, anti-corruption measures, and an enabling environment for investment as the basis for sustainable development (paragraph 8). The Small Island Developing States also reaffirmed the importance of gender equality and promoting the full and equal access of women and men to political participation at all levels, economic opportunity, health-care services and programmes, and decision-making systems for sustainable development, and the full and equal access of girls and boys, women and men to all levels of education (paragraph 15).

The outcome of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (1992), Agenda 21, called for urgent action in Chapter 24 on global action for women, including “the need for countries to take urgent measures to avert the ongoing rapid environmental and economic degradation in developing countries that generally affects the lives of women and children in rural areas suffering drought, desertification and deforestation, armed hostilities, natural disasters, toxic waste and the aftermath of the use of unsuitable agro-chemical products. In order to reach these goals, women should be fully involved in decision-making and in the implementation of sustainable development activities” (Chapter 24, paragraphs 6 and 7).

The outcome of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20), entitled The Future We Want’, reaffirmed the vital role of women and the need for their full and equal participation and leadership in all areas of sustainable development. Member States resolved to promote gender equality and the empowerment of women and to ensure
their full and effective participation in sustainable development policies, programmes and decision-making at all levels. The section on Framework for Action and Follow-up as a dedicated section on gender equality and women’s empowerment, as well as explicit references to gender equality and women’s empowerment in twelve thematic priority areas, including poverty eradication, agriculture, water, energy, health and population, employment, and education. Member States committed to promoting the collection, analysis and use of gender-sensitive indicators and sex-disaggregated data.

The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) requires all States Parties to take in all fields all appropriate measures to ensure the full development and advancement of women for the purpose of guaranteeing them the exercise and enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms on a basis of equality with men (Article 3). The Convention requires the elimination of discrimination against women in political and public life, in the fields of education, employment, health care, and in other areas of economic and social life.

The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, adopted in 1995, reaffirmed Agenda 21’s recognition of the essential role women play in advancing sustainable development objectives, and noted that a transformed partnership based on equality between women and men is a condition for people-centered sustainable development. The Platform for Action is ‘an agenda for women’s empowerment’ (para.1). Together with the outcomes of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly (2000), it is the defining and foundational policy framework for the achievement of gender equality and women’s rights. This framework has been the impetus for concerted action by governments and other stakeholders to address and eliminate inequality and discrimination against women. Section K on Women and the Environment calls for action to: (1) involve women actively in environmental decision-making at all levels; (2) integrate gender concerns and perspectives in policies and programmes for sustainable development; and (3) strengthen or establish mechanisms at the national, regional and international levels to assess the impact of development and environmental policies on women.
Despite these strong normative standards and efforts on the ground to ensure their implementation, the potential of women in the small island developing states to engage as agents and beneficiaries of change has not been fully realized. Women have vital roles in ensuring sustainable use of resources as well as productivity patterns and contributing to the enhancement of human well-being.

The SIDS Conference is an opportunity to assess the progress in the implementation of international conventions and action plans on gender equality and women’s empowerment in the context of sustainable development of SIDS and highlight lessons learned, gaps, challenges and good practices and launch partnerships advancing women’s empowerment in SIDS.

KEY MESSAGES

1. Gender equality, women’s rights and women’s empowerment are critical to realizing sustainable development in the small island developing states

Gender equality and women’s and girls’ rights is fundamental for realizing human rights for all, creating and sustaining peaceful societies, and pursuing sustainable development trajectories with equitably shared benefits. Women and girls must be able to exercise their right to be actors and beneficiaries of development, economic growth and poverty eradication.

The SIDS Conference should aim for an outcome that is transformative, tackles the structural inequalities and multiple discriminations that affect women and girls and hinder progress and slow development gains and that perpetuate inequalities and disparities between women and men, rural and urban areas, and within and between countries.
2. Governments should accelerate implementation of commitments to gender equality, women’s rights and women’s empowerment

Implementation of existing commitments is critical in a number of priority areas: eliminating violence against women and girls; access to health, including sexual and reproductive health and rights; guaranteeing women’s equal access to and control over productive resources and assets, including land as well as access to finance (including financing for climate change adaptation) and technology; recognizing, reducing and redistributing women’s disproportionate burden of unpaid care work; increasing women’s access to decent work, closing gender wage gaps, and ensuring universal social protection over the lifecycle; and ensuring women’s and girls’ right to equally participate in decision-making and engage in shaping their livelihoods at all levels in public and private institutions.

This requires strategies, and approaches that will promote, protect and fulfil the full spectrum of women’s and girls’ rights, including:

- legal and policy frameworks that are aligned with international human rights norms and standards, eliminate discrimination against women and girls;
- macroeconomic policies that reduce volatilities in global markets, reduce income inequalities, and generate decent work for all, facilitate resource mobilization for public investments in infrastructure and services, and thereby facilitate the realization of women’s economic and social rights;
- labour market regulation and employment policies that promote decent work for all, and allow the reconciliation of paid work with family/care responsibilities for both women and men; policies that ensure universally accessible and affordable health care, including provision for women’s sexual and reproductive health and rights, accessible quality education and care services, and provision of infrastructure, including ICTs; comprehensive social protection measures that give women and girls protection against risks and vulnerabilities across the life cycle; support to women farmers for environmentally friendly and sustainable crop production;
encourage and facilitate dialogue and measures between government and the private sector for food production, and widespread distribution of locally produced agricultural and agro-processed goods;

- environmental and climate policies that enable women’s active and equitable involvement in governance, decision-making, access and benefit-sharing related to sustainable use of biodiversity and natural resources, access to renewable energy, and climate change mitigation and adaptation;

- gender mainstreaming as a strategy for ensuring that gender perspectives are integrated in the design, budgeting, implementation, and monitoring and evaluation of all policies and programmes, so that women and men benefit equally from the outcomes, and that inequalities are not perpetuated;

- collection, analysis and use of gender statistics and data disaggregated by sex and age are key to effectively and accurately measure progress for women and girls as well as the impacts efforts undertaken for women and girls.

3. **Priority areas for SIDS must systematically integrate gender perspectives.**

SIDS continue to face significant challenges to the achievement of sustainable development as well as to the achievement of internationally agreed development goals, including the MDGs. SIDS face food insecurity, lack of adequate transport networks, degradation of their coastal marine environment, limited access to fresh water, water insecurity, inadequate access to or inappropriate infrastructure, inadequate waste management systems, land degradation, soil erosion and deforestation. The Conference must address climate induced diseases, non-communicable diseases, threats to food security from ocean acidification and continued use of non-renewable energy. Social and economic factors negatively impact both boys’ and girls’ participation in formal education systems.
Women are disproportionately affected by climate change impacts, such as droughts, floods and other extreme weather events, but they also have a critical role in combatting climate change. The overuse of and destruction of natural resources exacerbates social and economic inequalities and hardships, including but not limited to access to clean water, subsistence agriculture, fishing and livelihood options, as well as the physical, social and mental health of women, men, boys and girls, and the ongoing sustainability of communities.

Women’s full participation in green growth is crucial. Making resources and technologies accessible and affordable for SIDS is essential to provide greater access to information and services, for education and skills development, and to enable women’s economic empowerment and to ensure educational outcomes for both sexes. Commitments must be made to ensuring that both national governments and donor financed programmes on climate change adaptation equitably address the needs of both women and men. This includes ensuring the full participation of gender equality advocates in the conceptualization, planning, implementation and monitoring and evaluation of programmes on sustainable development and climate change action.

4. The SIDS Conference should contribute to the discussions on the post-2015 development agenda and the sustainable development goals

In their summary of the eighth session, the co-chairs’ of the Open Working Group on Sustainable Development noted the widespread support among Member States for a stand-alone goal on gender equality, supplemented by cross-cutting targets under other goals.

A stand-alone goal on gender equality, women’s rights and women’s empowerment seeks to address the key structural barriers to gender equality in three target areas:
i) **Freedom from violence for women and girls.** This violence is a direct violation of their human rights, constrains their ability to fulfill their true potential and carries great economic costs for them and for society. Concrete actions to eliminate violence must therefore be a centerpiece of any future framework for SIDS.

ii) **Gender equality in capabilities and resources.** The new framework must ensure that gender inequalities in women’s and men’s capabilities and their access to resources are addressed to enable them to make meaningful choices in their lives. This means also tackling the gender-based social norms, roles and expectations that constrain their choices.

iii) **Gender equality in decision-making power in public and private institutions.** The low numbers of women in public decision-making fora, including in key institutions influencing public opinion and promoting accountability, such as the media and civil society has to be redressed. It is equally important that power inequalities within the sphere of family and community life are remedied.

All development goals/SDGs must integrate gender-responsive targets and indicators.

5. **Means of implementation – finance, technology transfer and development, capacity-building, investments - and partnerships to support the realization of sustainable development for the SIDS, must engage women as active contributors and beneficiaries**

Human rights standards mandate that the means of implementation for development include global cooperation, universal accountability, and the expenditure of maximum available resources, including technological and human resources, for development.
Any supporting means of implementation, as well as partnerships must contribute to delivering on international commitments on gender equality, women’s rights and women’s empowerment. This requires women’s full and equal participation at all levels of policy formulation and decision-making and in formal governance institutions, in particular those relating to natural resources and environmental management, conservation, protection and rehabilitation.

Greater investments (including provision of adequate financing, technology, and knowledge for sustainability) in programmes and projects with gender equality and women empowerment components and/or targeting women as direct beneficiaries must be strengthened. Gender considerations must be taken into account in all stages of sustainable development finance. Gender-responsive budgeting tools are useful in this regard.

6. **All stakeholders have a role in ensuring that gender equality and women’s empowerment are integrated into the sustainable development agenda and implementation frameworks**

Governments have the primary responsibility for ensuring that gender perspectives are mainstreamed in policies and programmes as well as in institutional structures and processes. Enabling laws, policies and frameworks must be gender-responsive and gender-sensitive. Adopting gender-responsive planning and budgeting ensures targeted programming and monitoring for gender-based results. Special measures need to be put in place to ensure that women have access to resources, finance, technology and decision-making.

The SIDS Conference provides an opportunity to discuss progress made in this regard and to broker a consensus for adequate monitoring of gender equality commitments. Future and existing policy and planning frameworks on sustainable development, including on promoting green growth at both regional and national levels, should be discussed with a view on how they respond to gender inequalities.
Within governments, national gender equality machineries should be positioned at senior levels and adequately resourced to work with line ministries, in particular those responsible for policymaking on sustainable development.

The Bretton Woods Institutions, regional banks and other donors providing finances including ODA must be further encouraged to adopt a gender-responsive aid policy and make gender responsiveness/gender component a key indicator of aid effectiveness.

The private sector can make a powerful contribution in promoting gender responsive and environmentally-, economically- and socially- sustainable business practices and investments.

To promote gender equality, women’s rights and empowerment, women’s organizations and networks at the global, regional and national levels must be supported and have access to the discussions on a new framework.

The UN system needs to highlight and prioritize the interdependence between gender equality, women’s rights and women’s empowerment and sustainable development policies and outcomes in the SIDS.