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Commission on the Status of Women

Fifty-fifth session

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Agenda item 3 (a)

Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and to the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly, entitled “Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century”: implementation of strategic objectives and action in critical areas of concern and further actions and initiatives

High-level round table on access and participation of women and girls in education, training, science and technology, including for the promotion of women’s equal access to full employment and decent work

Chair’s summ0euion e n t i

dialogue. Fifty-one Government representatives, two representatives from regional groups and one observer offered interventions at the high-level round table.

3. Many good practices and experiences in respect of how to achieve results geared towards gender equality in education, training, science, technology and employment do exist. There is a need to reinforce, expand and replicate good practices, and use them as the basis for designing and implementing better policies and programmes.

4. Education is a basic human right and a basic human need. The importance of education and training and the role of science and technology in poverty eradication, economic development and growth, and social change, and in catalysing the empowerment of women, have been well established and repeatedly reaffirmed by Governments at key United Nations conferences and meetings. A range of normative and policy commitments are in place, including in human rights treaties such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women¹ and policy instruments such as the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, adopted at the Fourth World Conference on Women,² the Tunis Agenda for the Information Society,³ adopted at the World Summit on the Information Society, the Dakar Framework for Action,⁴ adopted at the World Education Forum, and the Millennium Development Goals. More focused action and investments are needed to ensure that these commitments are translated into concrete results at global, regional and national levels.

5. As a result of increased momentum and political will, demonstrated through the prioritization of and investment in the education sector, and more widespread use of strategies such as gender-sensitive budgeting and planning and targeted policies, many countries have made substantial progress in increasing girls' and young women's access to and completion of primary, secondary and tertiary education, as well as in improving female literacy rates. In a number of countries, girls have surpassed boys in both completion rates and academic achievement.

6. Many countries are implementing policies and programmes designed to make education more affordable to the poor, including the elimination of tuition and school fees, conditional cash transfer programmes, child benefit allowances, scholarships, school feeding programmes, and free boarding schools. While many of these

technology is critical. Ensuring that women can acquire the necessary skills and competencies is an economic imperative. There is therefore an urgent need to prioritize targeted measures designed to introduce girls to, and increase their interest in, math, science and technology at an early age. Innovative training initiatives to strengthen capacity in teaching math, science and technology in creative and participatory ways do exist, and include the granting of awards and scholarships to students in the fields of science and technology; the establishment of women's colleges offering specializations in science and technology; and special programmes to promote the engagement of women in engineering.

13. In some countries, the number of women in decision-making positions, including in universities, parliaments, Governments and the judiciary, as well as in the private sector, has increased. Universities have established advisory boards and taken other steps to monitor and promote gender parity in institutions of higher education, including improving the recruitment, promotion and retention of female professors, and advancing women's participation in managerial and leadership positions. Financial incentives have been provided to encourage universities to appoint more women to professorship positions. However, women are still underrepresented in leadership positions and the glass ceiling has not yet been shattered. Greater efforts are needed to ensure the achievement of gender parity among decision makers, including in academies of science, funding institutions, academia and the public and private educational and science and technology sectors.

14. Despite their important progress in the area of education, women continue to experience difficulties in finding decent work. Education in itself is not sufficient when women and girls seek to gain access to decent work. The disconnect between women's education and their job opportunities calls for targeted public policies to ensure a better transition from education to decent work and full employment. Increasing women's access to and control over financial resources and stronger action to promote equal pay for work of equal value are necessary.

15. Other means of strengthening the link between education gains and decent employment include action to promote the equal sharing of responsibilities and better work-life balance through measures such as flexible working hours and access to high-quality childcare. Measures such as preschool education, access to childcare after school hours, specific programmes targeted at single mothers and extended hours of operation of public services also help parents better balance family and work responsibilities. In some countries, private companies receive certification when they meet standards on workplace policies promoting the equality between women and men.

16. Persisting unequal sharing of responsibilities in the private and public spheres between women and men remains a challenge. While there is impetus for change, current efforts target mostly girls and women. In many societies, the male breadwinner model continues to prevail. Further efforts, particularly targeted at boys and men, are needed to challenge the entrenched stereotypic perceptions of the division of labour as being between a male breadwinner and a female caretaker and to deepen the understanding of the need for equal sharing of parenting and caregiving responsibilities between women and men.

17. Measures to expand women's entrepreneurial opportunities and skills remain inadequate. There is a need to provide training for women in business skills, including the development and finalization of business plans and operations. Public

policies should foster a sound entrepreneurial culture and help ensure that the mainstream financial sector better responds and caters to women's interests, needs and priorities.

18. Experiences from several developing countries show that information and communication technologies (ICT), including mobile phones, can have a transformational impact on poverty eradication efforts and women's socio-economic empowerment. ICT can provide families with access to a wide range of information about social services, including provision of health care and medication, and care of infants and children. ICT can also facilitate and promote the prevention of violence against women and girls, provide access to mobile banking, improve entrepreneurial opportunities through e-commerce, provide adolescent girls with access to information on sexual and reproductive health, and offer literacy training to women and girls. Effective use of ICT in distance and online learning has also been documented. In some countries, the Internet is perceived by girls as an important tool for expanding their horizons beyond their families and the communities in which they reside. Yet, millions of women and girls worldwide, especially those living in poverty and in rural areas, have insufficient or no access to ICT, including mobile phones. The potential impact of science and technology, including ICT, on women's activities should be further examined and efforts undertaken to ensure that women can have better access to and use of new technologies for economic and social purposes.

19. In many of the areas discussed, more detailed research, and better-disaggregated and comparable data and analyses are needed to explore and further clarify the underlying causes of inequalities, including differences in dropout and completion rates, low school attendance and low participation by sex in certain subjects or fields of study, and the relationship between paid and unpaid work and access to decent work. National capacities in these areas should be strengthened in order to ensure the formulation of the appropriate policy responses needed to address such inequalities. Promising initiatives to improve capacity in data collection and analysis include more detailed questions on education and employment in national surveys and censuses, improved monitoring and evaluation of programmes and projects, and initiatives to collect and share good practices.

Recommendations

20. Based on experience and good practice, participants recommended a range of actions to increase the access and participation of women and girls in respect of education, training, science and technology, and to promote women's equal access to full employment and decent work, including:

- Improving the quality and relevance of education and training to ensure the employability of women, including in non-traditional sectors such as science and technology
- Encouraging girls' interest in math, science and technology and combating gender stereotypes, including by exposing girls and boys to female role models; recruiting female science teachers and professors; equipping teachers with gender-sensitive teaching methods, curricula and material; and sensitizing parents, teachers and other educational personnel to gender-equality issues

- Creating safe environments for girls at and on the way to and from school, including by providing safe transportation and infrastructure and conducting comprehensive violence-prevention activities
- Expanding the use of gender-responsive budgeting, and increasing public and private investments in the education system through the use of innovative forms of partnerships and financing
- Supporting the transition of girls and women from education to full employment and decent work, including through provision of career counselling, job search support services, internships and mentorship programmes
- Fostering women's entry into the business sector by providing them with access to and ownership of economic and financial resources, and capacity-building opportunities in business management skills, market intelligence and information technology, and networking and information-sharing
- Promoting women's effective participation in decision-making and leadership positions, including in the fields of science and technology
- Facilitating the reconciliation of family and work life, including through flexible and family-friendly work policies; the reduction of unpaid care work through investments in public infrastructure (for example, energy, water and sanitation); and the redistribution of unpaid care work between women and men, as well as between the household and the public and private sectors, through the provision of accessible and affordable care services and after-school programmes
- Providing women and girls, especially those living in poverty, and in remote and rural areas, with access to information and communication technologies including mobile technology and the Internet
- Improving the collection, analysis and use of sex- and age-disaggregated and comparable data on all aspects of women's access to and participation in education, training, science and technology and decent work, so as to better inform policymaking, taking into account the many factors that intersect with gender, including social class, ethnicity and disability, and residence in rural and urban areas
- Monitoring and evaluating the impact on women and girls of all science, technology and innovation policies and programmes.