



Report on CSW61 and Analysis of the Agreed Conclusions

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I. Introduction

The 61st session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW61) took place at the United Nations Headquarters in New York, from 13 – 24 March 2017, at a critical juncture in the changing political landscape and realignment of forces mobilized around the gender equality and women's empowerment agenda (GEWE). Champions of GEWE, human rights and the women's movement saw this CSW as a litmus test of the strength of international political commitment in the face of fresh challenges to the historic and hard won normative gains of the gender equality compact secured especially between 2012-2016.

They were concerned whether the international community would hold on to these precious gains and make further progress on all fronts. They also wanted Member States to re-commit to forge ahead on implementing the GEWE promises of the Beijing plus 20 Political Declaration, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the Paris Climate Change Agreement, the New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants, and the Quito New Urban Agenda, and with specific reference to the priority theme of CSW61 on **'women's economic empowerment in the changing world of work, and its focus area on 'the empowerment of indigenous women'**.

The review theme of MDGs (Challenges and achievements in the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals for women and girls -agreed conclusions of the fifty-eighth session) also provided a platform for countries to present their experience and success in implementing and achieving the MDGs for women and girls and how they are now adapting and creating necessary laws, policies, measures and institutions for the gender-responsive implementation of agenda 2030 and its GEWE compact more broadly.

Expectations were also high because CSW61 came on the heels of the landmark Agreed Conclusions of CSW60 which set out a detailed normative roadmap for the gender responsive implementation of the 2030 Agenda. There was a keenness to affirm the relevance for GEWE of the universality, multilateralism, global solidarity, partnership and development cooperation around the three pillars of the UN's mission of sustainable development, peace and security, human rights and humanitarian response.

It was also the **first CSW after the new Secretary-General took office** and proclaimed his determination to put the UN at the forefront of the global movement for the achievement of GEWE. He said at the

[opening of CSW](#) that "the empowerment of women is about breaking structural barriers." "With nearly a billion women entering the global economy in the next decade their empowerment will unleash the potential of all these women and girls - and they will lead the world to a new future." Stressing the importance of accountability, he pledged that the UN and he himself will wholeheartedly support efforts for gender equality and asked all the assembled ministers and officials, delegates, youth and civil society (he addressed a Town Hall of CSOs) "do not let us off the hook. Keep our feet to the fire." The Secretary-General also prioritized preparatory consultations on CSW61 in his Executive Committee.

In [her statements, the Executive Director](#) called this CSW a barometer of the progress on achieving a world free of gender discrimination and inequality, a world that leaves no one behind. She affirmed that women's economic success is critical for flourishing economies, a positive world of work and breaking repeated poverty cycles as well as for the success of the 2030 Agenda. She noted progress in some areas as well as erosion of gains already made. She gave a clarion call to swift and decisive action so that positive developments happen fast enough, reach tipping point numbers, and changes in the world of work do not leave women further behind. She urged for "constructive impatience", "to change the sluggish trajectory and make real breakthrough impact in certain areas with greatest influence."

In this [statement](#), the Chair of CSW stressed the relevance of the 61st session indicating that it "was a demonstration of the strength of our conviction and belief that together, we can and we will accelerate progress towards the empowerment of women and girls everywhere." The chair emphasized that "the future of work should not, and must not, enshrine and perpetuate existing inequalities." The Commission was expected to provide guidance on how to address and eliminate persistent work related barriers within and across countries that discriminate against women and disadvantage women in the world of work, ensuring solid legislative frameworks are in place; strengthening evidence based guidance; and investing in women's economic empowerment, all of which would strengthen economies and benefit all society.

Both the [NGO consultations](#) and the [CSW61 Youth Forum](#) provided valuable inputs and dynamism to the CSW61 deliberations and outcomes. The key messages from the NGO-CSW61 consultation just prior to the opening of the session stressed the need to reimagine the flawed economic model that was perpetuating gender inequality and repurposing it for gender equality and social justice. They insisted on the role and responsibility of the State - through macroeconomic, fiscal, social and development policies to actively create the enabling environment that serves first and foremost social justice and gender equality. The international enabling environment - aid, trade, foreign direct investment, technology policies, were also identified as critical. The role of women's organizations at all levels including grass roots and their activism on the theme was essential. They wanted the private sector to be held to account.

The Deputy Secretary-General Amina Mohammed addressed and inspired the young women and men at the historic CSW61 Youth Forum and called upon them to work together so to ensure that young women can be whatever they want to be with nothing holding them back and called on young men to be allies and partners. She emphasized the urgency of young women's empowerment, called for action not words, and reminded them of the importance of transformation at the local level. She called upon youth to "go back to their communities and be the change agents and torchbearers the world so desperately needs."

Particularly noteworthy was that three young women read messages at the opening Plenary of the highly successful CSW Youth Forum. They emphasized the importance of SDG 5 and its implementation for their empowerment and set out a comprehensive 36-point agenda for action emphasizing that it is crucial to adopt and implement policies, resource programmes, and foster partnerships to economically empower

all young women and girls, and sensitize men and young men to embrace this and share decision making space.



The priority theme of CSW61 was **in itself a pioneering one** – ‘Women’s economic empowerment in the changing world of work’. Whilst women’s economic empowerment has previously been considered in various fora including the CSW, this focus on the connection between **women’s economic empowerment and the changing world of work encompassing women’s right to work and rights at work**, as well as the commitment to **decent work and full and productive employment**, is **both new and constitutes a vital area of intergovernmental norm and standard setting**. Coming after CSW60 Agreed Conclusions’ reconfirmation that women’s economic empowerment is essential for both the full, effective and accelerated implementation of Beijing Platform for Action and for the achievement of the 2030 Agenda, the stakes were very high.

Another context was that, beyond **closing persistent gender gaps** for women and **improving their terms of engagement in the traditional world and sectors of work**, the **world of work is changing rapidly at a pace not seen**

before, spurred by innovation and technology, globalization, and increasing human mobility and informality of work. This changing world of work is at the same time adversely impacted by an unprecedented jobs crisis, persistent and widespread poverty, climate change, conflicts, humanitarian, migration and refugee crises, financial and economic challenges, economic slowdown and persistent and growing inequality between and within countries. **These forces continuously shape the dynamics of the world of work, deepen extant challenges as well as present new and emerging opportunities for women’s economic empowerment through their leapfrogging into the new and green economy, ‘New Collar’ jobs and new entrepreneurship opportunities in the Fourth Industrial Revolution.**

II. Preparations

As it is a supreme institutional priority, UN Women's preparations for CSW61 have been systematic, ground up, consultative and all embracing. On the substantive preparations, the Expert Group Meeting was convened involving the participation of experts from government, civil society, and academics, in close collaboration with the ILO. A [Report of the Secretary-General on Women's Economic Empowerment in the Changing World of Work](#), which examines women's economic empowerment in the changing world of work at a time when the international community has made an unprecedented commitment to gender equality and women's empowerment, in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, was the substantive basis over which the intergovernmental discussions were structured.

At the country level, and particularly at the regional level, platforms were prepared and political buy-in was secured at the very useful gender ministers' and expert level CSW regional Conferences for Africa in Addis Ababa, for Arab States in Bahrain, for Latin America and the Caribbean in Panama and for Asia Pacific in Bangkok. A multi-stakeholder forum was held at UN Headquarters engaging permanent representatives and delegates of the permanent missions in New York to substantively involve them in the preparations. Civil society was engaged throughout. We also involved the private sector in different preparatory activities.

III. Analysis of the Agreed Conclusions of CSW61

The groundbreaking Agreed Conclusions of CSW61 were adopted by the Commission after over three weeks and more than 100 hours of intense and grueling negotiations among delegations supported by UN Women, with civil society including veterans and youth keeping watch and providing inspiration, insights and advocacy. **As also affirmed by the women's movement and youth, what was remarkable was that the resulting Agreed Conclusions not only held progressive ground on sensitive issues of sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights and family-related issues, but also secured recommitment on key aspects of the gender equality compact from previous years, built on and consolidated the gains, elaborated on the "normative of implementation" and made pathbreaking new commitments.**

In this respect the following concepts, principles, policies, measures and action recommendations constitute a veritable **Global Plan of Action for the achievement of women's economic empowerment in the changing world of work**. Moreover, the multiple ministerial, civil society and private sector dialogues led to the reimagining of the world of work in a feminist perspective which, when implemented, has the potential to bring about quantitative and qualitative shifts in mindsets, policy and practice in all countries, settings and sectors on this agenda.

The Commission committed to lead a pivotal transformation for an enabling environment that makes systemic and substantive impact on the reality of all women and girls. It would also be instrumental in engendering the world of work and transforming the destiny of the women themselves, their economies and societies. Most significantly, the Agreed Conclusions envision and committed all stakeholders to creating what we call an **Ecosystem of Strategic Enablers** that would bring about the feminist transformations for women's full, equal and effective participation, leadership and economic empowerment in the changing world of work.

CSW61 was an occasion to take stock of the why, what and how of bridging the gender gaps in the world of work decisively through the resolve, actions and investments of all stakeholders, **addressing both the**

supply side and the demand side of the labour market and related enabling environments. Governments, private sector, civil society are expected to do so in the following action categories: Strengthening normative and legal frameworks; Strengthening education, training and skills development; Implementing economic and social policies for women's economic empowerment; Addressing the growing informality of work and mobility of women workers; Managing technological and digital change for women's economic empowerment; Strengthening women's collective voice, leadership and decision-making; and Strengthening private sector's role in women's economic empowerment.



1. Gender Gaps in the World of Work

The Agreed Conclusions provided a **diagnosis of the existing and growing gender gaps and disparities** in key areas of the world of work as well as their root causes. The major gender gaps identified included those relating to wages, income, pension, social security, work force participation, recruitment, retention, promotion, re-entry, leadership, occupational segregation, burden of unpaid care work, and access to economic and productive resources, all of which were comprehensively outlined. Also, it was recognized that progress has been insufficient and that this was impeding the realization of women's full potential and the full enjoyment of their human rights and fundamental freedoms. **Multiple and persisting structural barriers which contribute to these gender gaps and disparities in the world of work were identified throughout, along with ways to overcome them.**

2. Human rights and labour rights including life cycle approach

CSW61 provided concrete, practical and action-oriented recommendations towards the achievement of women's economic empowerment by re-affirming and further elaborating upon the **breakthrough concept and principle of advancing women's right to work and rights at work**.



Women's human rights and fundamental freedoms were very strongly asserted throughout the text (15 references) with **universality, indivisibility and interconnections of economic, social, cultural and labour rights framing** women's economic empowerment and women's work - unpaid, paid, informal and formal. This was an important conjunction and validation that was achieved.

The theme was posited on the foundation of GEWE related norms and standards, human rights treaties and intergovernmental agreements, such as the

Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, the **Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, along with relevant ILO conventions and labour standards**.

The essentiality of women's economic empowerment in the changing world of work was deemed variously **vital, critical, mutually reinforcing and important to the achievement of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development** and identified as both a means and an end.

The juxtaposition of the conceptual **trinity of women's economic rights, women's economic empowerment and economic independence** with women's access to decent work and full and productive employment marks a major leap.

The **importance of the lifecycle approach** was emphasized, including regarding the enjoyment of human rights by all women and girls including women's economic empowerment in the changing world of work; in the context of poverty eradication and ensuring an adequate standard of living and social protection; about the right to education and skills development; and to decent work in new and emerging fields. All this while making clear that child labour for girls is prohibited.

3. Conditions of work for women's economic empowerment

A. Equal Pay and Living Wages

The Commission recognized the worldwide efforts in bridging gender gaps in the labour markets, and noted that additional progress may be made through temporary special measures.

The Commission expressed concern over the persistently low wages earned by women workers and the gender pay gaps which frequently prevent women from providing decent and dignified living conditions for themselves and their families. As never before, **policy recommendations** to deal with these major gender gaps **in both the formal and informal contexts** were provided. **Enacting, strengthening or**

enforcing laws and regulations that uphold the principle of equal pay for equal work or work of equal value in the public and private sectors was singled out as a critical measure to eliminate the gender pay gap, and effective means of redress and access to justice in cases of non-compliance should be in place.

The implementation of equal pay policies through, for example, social dialogue, collective bargaining, job evaluations, awareness raising campaigns, pay transparency, gender pay audits, certification and review of pay practices and increased availability of data and analysis on the gender pay gap were given as effective and very practical means to bridge the gender pay gap. Regrettably, the reference to enacting and enforcing minimum wage legislation was not retained though reference was indirectly made to the concept of living wage.

B. From Informal to Formal and Decent Work

The Commission expressed concern regarding **unequal working conditions, limited opportunities for career advancement, as well as the growing high incidence of informal and non-standard forms of employment for women in many regions**. As women employed in the informal economy and in less skilled work are especially vulnerable to abuse and exploitation, **their transition to the formal economy and their equal access to decent work and full and productive employment, and to social protection systems are especially important**.

In this regard, the Commission committed Member States to **facilitate the transition of informal workers, including those engaged in informal paid care and domestic work, home-based work and in micro, small and medium-sized enterprises, as well as work in the agricultural sector and own-account and part-time work, to the formal economy**. Actions such as the promotion of decent paid care and domestic work for women and men in the public and private sector; providing social protection and wages that allow for an adequate standard of living; promoting safe working conditions and equal pay for equal work or work of equal value as well as the occupational safety and health protection to workers in the informal economy are called for. Although there were strong references to the situation of women in the informal economy, and pathways to formalization and decent work, separate and targeted recommendations regarding women domestic workers by the Commission would have been most relevant.



C. Occupational Segregation

The Commission expressed concern about occupational segregation, **including its vertical and horizontal dimensions, in all sectors. It recognized that expanding equal opportunities for women and men in the labor market can address the root causes of segregation in working life, and empower women and men to enter professions in the public and private sectors that are dominated by the opposite sex**.

The Commission consequently **called for action to address the root causes of segregation in working life**, namely structural barriers, gender stereotypes and negative social norms, and the promotion of women's equal access to and participation in labour markets. Education and training, including greater emphasis

on STEM, and women's full access to economic and productive resources, were **identified as measures to overcome occupational segregation and facilitate women's full participation and integration in the formal economy and non-traditional sectors.**

D. Recruitment, Retention, Re-entry, Promotion and Progression

The Commission was clear on its specific interest in ensuring that working women have real opportunities to recruitment, retention, re-entry, promotion and progression throughout their lifecycle, to advance in the paid labour market, consolidate economic opportunities and entrepreneurial activities, as well as ensure social protection and pension benefits.

It highlighted that barriers to these opportunities be compounded by multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination in the private and public spheres, and gave attention in this regard to women with disabilities.

The elimination of structural barriers and stereotypes that young women face in the transition from school to work and providing access to technical and vocational skills training, entrepreneurship development, job-matching and career guidance, including towards high wage and high growth occupations, are part of the strategies to ensure women's advancement in the labour market and to address the challenges faced by women returning from care-related career breaks and by older women. Special mention was also made in relation to developing measures to promote re-entry of victims and survivors of violence into the labour market.

E. Gender-responsive Social Protection and Pensions



New territory was covered on the need for gender-responsive social protection, social services and care infrastructure, with a focus on equitable, quality, accessible and affordable early childhood education, child care, elder care, health care, care and social services for persons with disabilities and persons living with HIV and AIDS, which meet the needs of both caregivers and those in need of care.

Establishing or strengthening inclusive and gender-responsive social protection systems,

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