

Multi-Stakeholder Forum on “Social protection systems, access to public services and sustainable infrastructure”

1 February 2019

Opening Remarks

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Excellencies,
Distinguished Delegates,
Leaders from Civil Society,
Colleagues and Friends,

I welcome you to UN-Women’s Multi-Stakeholder Forum devoted to the priority theme of the sixty-third session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW63).

This Forum is now a well-established part of our preparations for the annual session of CSW, and I thank the many distinguished Permanent Representatives and Deputy Permanent Representatives who will be contributing to the discussion as panelists and moderators. A warm welcome also to the many experts from permanent missions, and we look forward to your active engagement.

I extend a warm welcome also to our friends and colleagues from civil society and the UN system who will provide their expertise and expectations to this dialogue. We are heartened to once again see such a high level of interest and participation.

Together, we can strengthen the global normative framework for gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls. Together, we can bring about real progress for all women and girls.

The CSW63 priority theme on **social protection systems, access to public services and sustainable infrastructure** holds enormous potential for gender equality and the empowerment of women. This is **the first time that CSW will consider the key issue of social protection systems**. And it will do so in conjunction with public services and sustainable infrastructure.

There is a solid evidence base of what works to close gaps in these areas. We can build on the work of previous CSW sessions. We can draw on reports produced by ILO, UN-Women and others.

Our analysis of what we know suggests **three key areas of action**:

- (1) actions to **close gender gaps in coverage and access**, including for the many women in **informal** employment;
- (2) actions to make the design and implementation of social protection, public services and infrastructure **responsive to women’s rights and needs**; and

- (3) actions that **strengthen policy coherence between the three areas**, including through greater coordination across sectors and levels of government, so that social investments, labour market and fiscal policies work synergistically towards gender equality.

Even as we look at the role and potential of each of the three areas for advancing gender equality, we always also need to work for better policy coordination across government to avoid trade-offs that can harm women. Instead, we need to focus on harness synergies across sectors for better results for women and girls.

Let me provide a few examples:

- **Cash transfers** are an increasingly prevalent component of social protection systems. But without adequate investment in health and educational services to respond to increased demand, for example, conditionalities attached to cash transfers may push women and girls to use poor quality facilities. Access to public services requires infrastructure. So all three policy areas have to work together.
- **Education** is widely considered a public service, but it cannot function without adequate physical infrastructure, including school buildings with safe sanitation facilities for girls.
- **Electricity, water and sanitation systems** are infrastructure-heavy sectors; but they also operate as public services and often require social protection measures, such as connection fee waivers or subsidies, to be affordable for all.

The CSW 63 priority theme is therefore the time for governments to see what needs to be done in each of the three sectors from a gender perspective, and how to weave laws, policies, strategies and other measures into a tightly knit web of actions that support and reinforce each other.

Excellencies,
Ladies and gentlemen,

Today's Multi-Stakeholder Forum is the space for Member States and other stakeholders to start focusing on some of the key expectations and issues that will come up at the sixty-third session. This is also the space and time to strengthen partnerships and create an environment that will be conducive to a substantively strong session with solid consensus. I hope that our dialogue today will lay a fertile ground for a successful session in March.

In line with past practice, various regions are also converging to prepare for CSW63:

- The **Latin American and Caribbean** region already held a consultation in mid-December, hosted by the Government of Argentina in Buenos Aires.
- On 4 February, the Government of Egypt is hosting a regional preparatory meeting for **Arab States** co-organized by the League of Arab States, ESCWA, the Arab Women's Organization and UN-Women.
- The Government of Egypt is also hosting a regional preparatory meeting for **Africa** co-organized by ECA, African Union Commission, UNDP and UN-Women, on 5-6 February, also in Cairo.

- In the **Asia-Pacific** region, there will be an event on 14-15 February, which is co-organized by ESCAP, UN-Women and the UN System's Regional Coordination Mechanism in Bangkok.

We know that many governments and civil society organizations are already well advanced with their preparations for the session at national level.

Your contribution and leadership in this preparatory phase and during the session is essential to help the Commission reach another strong and forward-looking outcome.

Today, I call on you to:

- Engage comprehensively with the theme.
- Focus on the three key areas in their entirety, and in an integrated manner, for an outcome that strengthens the global normative framework.
- Use the Commission on the Status of Women as the leading intergovernmental space for advancing women's and girls' rights.

We hope that we can use this Forum to facilitate dialogue across regions as we shape an ambitious agenda for the session. We look forward to your examples of good practice, to your expectations for the session, and how you will contribute to a solid result.

Thank you once again for being here today and, most importantly, for your commitment. I look forward to rich discussions and to your guidance as we prepare for the session.