

Statement at the panel discussion on Social Protection systems for gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls. Ms. Nupur Kukrety, Policy Specialist, UNICEF

Thank you UN Women for the opportunity to speak at this Multi Stakeholder Forum and to be a part of this esteemed panel.

Let me begin by stating the obvious i.e **gender equality and empowerment of women & girls are directly linked with vulnerabilities and challenges faced by women and girls at different stages of life.** We all know that the first 1000 days of life are crucial for cognitive and physical development of the child. Discrimination at this stage in care, nutrition and health can give a very shaky start in life to the girl child. It then can have serious implications on her educational attainment and economic participation in later life. As they grow, girls are more likely to face serious violations of their rights to education, health services and protection resulting in limited investments in their human capital development in the growing up years. It is therefore no surprise that women enter the labour market with an inherent disadvantage – this has further implications as they age.

I will focus my presentation on - 'how are gender and age specific risks and vulnerabilities being taken into account in the design and implementation of social protection systems?' I will do so, by using non contributory cash transfers as the example to highlight some observations and considerations for addressing gender inequality & empowerment across the life course.

- Owing to the importance of 1000 days of life, we see quite a few cash transfer programmes implemented by governments that are targeted at the new born and pregnant/lactating women. For example, LEAP 1000 in Ghana, MCCT in Myanmar, Juntos in Peru, etc. that are designed to improve nutrition and survival of children in the most critical window of 1000 days of life and health/nutrition of mothers. Depending on the design of the programme, some cash transfers are accompanied with access to information and health services for mothers. **As primary carers, women are often the recipients of these cash transfers and responsible for its utilization as 'Mothers'.**
- In the school going age, we find several conditional and unconditional cash transfer programmes implemented by governments that are designed to encourage households to invest in human capital development (mainly health and education) of boys and girls. These programmes tend to target children (regardless of their gender) from poor households BUT the **transfers are received by women in their roles as 'mothers'.**
- As children reach the second decade of life, gender norms begin to firm up and solidify the foundation for what girls & women can or cannot do in future. This is a critical window of opportunity for transforming gender relations, yet very few programmes attempt that. Some cash transfer programmes such as the CCTE in Turkey try to address gender inequality by providing a higher transfer value to girls to encourage girls' enrolment in schools, but this too is limited to access to education only.
- In general, there are **very few non contributory cash transfer programmes that are designed to proactively address gender based inequalities and life course based needs of boys and girls, especially that of adolescents.** Most programmes (as mentioned earlier) provide the transfers to women in their role as 'mothers'. While the strategy to give cash to 'mothers' **sends a strong signal** in the household and community on the ability of women to manage financial resources, in case of CCTs it also **contributes to women's workload and reinforces pre existing gender norms.**

- **Public works** programmes are popular with governments and are open to adult women and men. To encourage women's participation **provision of creche/child care facilities are often included in the designs of these programmes** – effectiveness of the implementation of such provisions is unclear. Some programmes like the PSNP in Ethiopia go a step further by entitling pregnant and lactating women to unconditional cash transfers by exempting them from engaging in physical labour.

Social protection can do much more than what it currently does to address inequality and women's empowerment. It can bring about transformational change, but for that -

1. Social protection **policies and strategies** have to be designed with an understanding that **poverty is gendered**. Sustainable poverty reduction cannot be achieved without addressing gender inequalities at all stages of the lifecycle. More needs to be done in countries in this area.
2. In addition, **programmes that address gender specific vulnerabilities and risks at different stages of the life course must be designed, and implemented in ways that empower women and girls**. This will not happen automatically unless explicit efforts are made.

In the end, as an outcome of the CSW63, UNICEF would like social protection policies and programmes to :

- **Go beyond merely targeting women as 'mothers'** and do more to empower women as **individuals and 'Rights holders'**, by increasing their voice in household & community, skills, access & rights over productive assets, linkage with services, information for economic participation etc.
- **Focus on the critical window of opportunity in the second decade of life by enhancing capacities of adolescents girls for safe and productive transitions to adulthood** (such as linking with menstrual health, delaying sexual debut, delay in marriage of girls, skills to break intergenerational poverty etc.).
- **Strengthen the design of social protection programmes and their implementation such that they address gender inequality & empower women**. This does not necessarily mean designing new programmes. Often, programmes exist and they require consolidation and adjustment in a manner that they address gender based inequality through out the life course.

Thank you.