Commission on the Status of Women
Sixty-fifth session
15–26 March 2021
Agenda item 3 (a) (ii)
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: review theme: women’s empowerment and the link to sustainable development

Women’s empowerment and the link to sustainable development

Chairs’ summary

1. On 23 and 24 March 2021, in a series of interactive dialogues, the Commission on the Status of Women evaluated the progress made in the implementation of the agreed conclusions on the priority theme of its sixtieth session “Women’s empowerment and the link to sustainable development” (see E/CN.6/2021/4). The Vice-Chairs of the Commission, Shilpa Pullela (Australia) and Ahlem Sara Charikhi (Algeria), chaired the interactive dialogues.

2. As part of the review, the following 10 Member States presented information, on a voluntary basis, on trends and challenges: Algeria, Costa Rica, Egypt, Mongolia, Qatar, Rwanda, Spain, Ukraine, the United Arab Emirates and the United States of America.

3. The Assistant Secretary-General and Deputy Executive Director for Normative Support, United Nations System Coordination and Programme Results of UN-Women, Åsa Regnér, presented the report of the Secretary-General on the review theme (E/CN.6/2021/4). The report draws on information received from 53 Member States and other sources and provides a review of the implementation by Member States of the agreed conclusions adopted at the sixtieth session. The report includes a review of the actions taken by Member States in the following areas: strengthening normative, legal and policy frameworks; enhancing national institutional arrangements; financing gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls; strengthening women’s leadership and their full and equal participation in decision-making; improving gender-responsive data collection in the context of follow-up to
the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development; and tracking and monitoring the gender-specific effects of and responses to the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic.

**Strengthening normative, legal and policy frameworks**

4. All the countries that gave voluntary national presentations reported progress on strengthening normative, legal and policy frameworks, with some countries emphasizing the important synergies between the implementation of the agreed conclusions, the Sustainable Development Goals and the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. Most countries recognized the equality of women and men, women’s rights and gender equality as enshrined in their constitutions. Several countries recognized the importance of achieving gender equality and women’s empowerment as a critical part of the collective effort to address climate change, with reference to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, the Kyoto Protocol and the Paris Agreement.

5. The countries highlighted the progress made on the implementation of strategies to end violence against women, female genital mutilation, child marriage and trafficking in persons as well as the progress made on strengthening penal codes to address domestic violence and repealing discriminatory laws related to honour killings. In several countries, dedicated national action plans have been elaborated to combat gender-based violence. Multiple countries noted that the scourge of violence against women has been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. The disproportionate risk of intimate partner violence faced by women who are most vulnerable and marginalized was also raised as a critical issue.

6. Member States have enacted laws and policies that promote women’s participation in the world of work and that prohibit discrimination in the labour market. Such measures included guarantees of equal work opportunities, equal pay for work of equal value and pay transparency, as well as the introduction of legal protections to prevent the wrongful termination of pregnant workers. Member States also reported having amended inheritance laws to ensure the equal treatment of women.

**Enhancing national institutional arrangements**

7. Member States have expanded the scope and influence of national gender equality mechanisms aimed at enhancing gender mainstreaming and coordinating policy implementation. They also reported that increased multi-stakeholder cooperation between national gender equality mechanisms and the private sector, civil society and development partners was important for protecting, mobilizing and strengthening the capacities of women.

**Financing gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls**

8. A few countries that make specific allocations in national planning and budgeting for the promotion of gender equality and gender mainstreaming highlighted measures they have taken to increase financing for gender equality. Some of those Member States have committed national budgets to gender mainstreaming and to sector-specific interventions for social protection, education, health and food subsidies. The countries provided other examples of fostering enabling environments for gender equality, including expanding access to digital finance, such as e-payment methods and microcredit for women-led micro-, small and medium-sized enterprises, and scaling up village savings and loans associations.

9. Countries recognized women’s economic empowerment as a process of enhancing productivity and sustainable development of women while also upholding
their human rights. One country underscored the need to link women’s entrepreneurship and climate change. Speakers emphasized the interlinkages between social protection and an enabling environment for women’s participation in the economy, emphasizing that women’s unpaid care and domestic work responsibilities inhibit their full potential in the labour market. Several participants noted that the private sector could play a positive role in shaping better workplaces for women. Member States acknowledged the need for women to have equal access to education, financial resources and technology, in particular in the context of COVID-19 recovery efforts. Some countries highlighted feminist approaches to development assistance, addressing both structural issues and material needs to ensure that women in the most vulnerable situations are not left behind.

**Strengthening women’s leadership and their full and equal participation in decision-making**

10. Member States underscored the importance of improving measures to strengthen women’s leadership and participation in decision-making at all levels and of advancing the political empowerment of women. Member States also highlighted progress in women’s representation in politics, giving specific examples of temporary special measures such as quotas to ensure women’s increased representation, participation and leadership in decision-making.

11. Several participants emphasized the need to address racism, be inclusive and empower groups that face multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination. Speakers called for feminist approaches to root out and eliminate the influence of colonialism and racism, which continues to fuel gender inequalities.

**Improving gender-responsive data collection in the context of follow-up to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development**

12. Member States reported progress on strategies to improve the regular collection, analysis and dissemination of gender statistics, including sex-disaggregated data, for follow-up and review processes in relation to the 2030 Agenda. A few countries reported having stepped up efforts to generate gender statistics through improved collection and analysis of sex-disaggregated data, including one example of a newly created Ministry of Digitization and Statistics. Countries highlighted examples of enhanced web-based information management systems to facilitate data collection, monitoring and evaluation and dissemination of gender statistics.

**Challenges and gaps**

13. Member States identified challenges and gaps that should be addressed so as to make progress towards achieving women’s empowerment and sustainable development, as follows:

- Multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination pose persistent obstacles to gender equality and women’s empowerment in the context of sustainable development. These challenges have been intensified by the health and economic effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and compounded by the climate emergency;

- Prevailing patriarchal attitudes, discriminatory social norms, women’s higher rates of poverty and their disproportionate share of unpaid care and domestic work continue to impede progress towards the achievement of gender equality and women’s empowerment. Several countries stressed the need to further engage men and boys through campaigns, training activities, behavioural change, awareness-raising activities and community-based approaches that provide for a more equal sharing of power between women and men. Others stressed the need to target women and young people as part of inclusive growth strategies, including by providing
women and girls with greater access to vocational training; science, technology, engineering and maths programmes; entrepreneurship capacity-building opportunities; capital and long-term financing; and by creating decent work opportunities;

(c) More inclusive approaches must be taken which respond to the needs of women, in all their diversity, to ensure that women are represented and have a voice at all levels of decision-making in institutional mechanisms, frameworks, laws and policies;

(d) The crisis brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic has demonstrated the importance of building the resilience of all people and sectors against future shocks and crises. All socioeconomic recovery efforts must be gender-responsive and include women at the table, to avoid further entrenching gender inequalities;

(e) A gender-responsive human rights-based approach is necessary to achieve sustainable development and gender equality.