

Distr.
LIMITED
E/ESCWA/ECW/2016/Technical Paper.1
15 April 2016
ORIGINAL: ENGLISH

ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMISSION FOR WESTERN ASIA (ESCWA)

**Leveraging Multi-stakeholder Partnerships to Promote
Gender Justice and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable
Development**



United Nations
Beirut, 2016

16-00101

I. A COLLECTIVE RESPONSE FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

The adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in September 2015 signalled a realization of the need to rally all nations and stakeholders around a new common vision of development that takes all its dimensions into account. Partnerships are one of five key dimensions of the 2030 Agenda, along with People, Planet, Prosperity and Peace. They will enable a broad range of actors to work together to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Governments can lead the way by fostering mechanisms for systematic, continuous engagement, and promoting “effective public, public-private, and civil society partnerships” (target 17.17 of the Agenda). Other partners will be called on to pool their “knowledge, expertise, technology and financial resources to support the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals” (target 17.16 of the Agenda).

The 2030 Agenda emphasizes that States should involve the public in all stages of the design, implementation and monitoring of sustainable development strategies. Mechanisms for regular dialogue should be established in order to foster a common understanding of development challenges and generate innovative and gender-sensitive solutions. Partnerships may be formed at different levels. At the grassroots level, multi-stakeholder initiatives can facilitate the involvement of women in setting priorities for local government spending and provide opportunities to monitor the quality of public services. At the national level, the public can be further involved in decision-making through dialogue with women’s groups and other civil society associations and the creation of citizens’ committees. Such civic dialogue should also inform national reviews of strategies for implementing the SDGs, thereby creating a participatory feedback circuit.

Multi-stakeholder partnerships constitute a natural platform for coordinated efforts and rationalized resource allocation, and can contribute to the inclusion of a gender perspective across sectors and at all levels of policy, strategy and programmes. They are a vehicle for tailoring SDG solutions to regional and national contexts, and can help identify and replicate successful initiatives. Specific gender justice partnerships should work for equality and accountability, and could include initiatives to facilitate women’s transition to work, increase their access to finance, or promote better protection and prevention services for them.

II. THE ROLES OF EACH CATEGORY OF PARTNER FOR GENDER JUSTICE

A. THE ROLE OF GOVERNMENT INSTITUTIONS

Policymakers will need to demonstrate the political will to adopt a new approach to governance based on public engagement and participatory decision-making if they wish to implement responsive development policy and reinforce the legitimacy of government actions. The approach may at times involve delegating responsibilities to local government. Institutions, particularly ministries of planning, development agencies and national gender equality mechanisms, should include civil society in the design, implementation and review of gender equality policies. The adoption of the 2030 Agenda also represents a timely opportunity for national women’s machineries to conduct comprehensive national needs assessments, devise mechanisms for consultations with civil society on gender policies, and step up strategic alliances with the private sector and academia rather than merely working with them on ad hoc projects.

B. THE ROLE OF CIVIL SOCIETY

By partnering with government institutions, civil society organizations can promote public and private accountability, which lies at the heart of the notion of gender justice as highlighted in the 2016 Muscat Declaration, adopted by ESCWA member States at the seventh session of the Committee on Women. NGOs have a valuable role to play in providing data and proposing solutions at the community and district levels, participating in national, regional and global consultations, and preparing policy reviews for Governments and United Nations organizations. They are well placed to articulate the concerns of women whose voices might otherwise go unheard because of existing power structures, geographic location or illiteracy, and can design

women's advancement programmes, such as livelihood support and assistance to survivors of violence. In addition to raising awareness of gender-related targets in the 2030 Agenda, civil society should help to weave a gender perspective in to development projects. Civil society can stimulate public participation in policymaking, including through the use of information and communications technology (ICT).

C. THE ROLE OF THE PRIVATE SECTOR

Companies can lead by example with gender balance in recruitment, equal representation of women at senior levels, facilitation of life–work balance, gender-oriented accountability systems and strong sexual harassment policies. Firms should also promote such initiatives for employees in supplying companies and ensure that their products and services do not contribute to human trafficking or the exploitation of women. Private sector philanthropy in the form of donations and aid needs to be replaced by innovative corporate social responsibility programmes with decent work and the financial inclusion of women at their core. The private sector should reach out to women's small and micro-scale enterprises, contribute to skills development and promote equal access to credit, business networks and global markets for women. Companies should back national and local initiatives that advance gender equality. Their actions should be measured not only in monetary terms but also by qualitative indicators, such as the company's overall contribution to the integrity of the community and to social justice.

D. THE ROLE OF THE UNITED NATIONS

United Nations institutions, such as the High-level Political Forum, the Commission on the Status of Women, mechanisms under the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and regional forums for sustainable development, can foster partnerships, for instance by encouraging stakeholders to join in progress reviews of the Beijing Platform for Action and the International Conference on Population and Development. The United Nations can promote innovative thinking in partnership building. In the Arab region, for instance, it has regularly partnered with religious organizations in an effort to combat violence against women and contribute to a culture of inclusiveness. Civil society consultative arrangements in the General Assembly should be strengthened through facilitation of access to consultant status and stronger funding mechanisms for civil society initiatives.

The ESCWA study, *Combating Violence against Women in the Arab Region: Multisectoral Efforts*, is an excellent example of a successful partnership. The collaborative study was informed by an in-depth consultative process that took place in Egypt, Kuwait, Lebanon, Morocco, Palestine, Qatar, Tunisia and Yemen. Research built on the expertise and resources of organizations and individuals, including ministerial officials, members of parliamentary committees and political parties, judges, prosecutors, lawyers and law enforcement officers, NGOs, religious authorities, academics and media representatives, and other stakeholders working to protect women from and prevent abuse. ESCWA also engaged with individual survivors of violence in order to echo their demands and concerns. Those far-reaching consultations helped to generate realistic, evidence-based recommendations, which had the support of partners across the region. A reliable knowledge base on violence against women in the Arab region was established.

The same multi-stakeholder approach was adopted in subsequent ESCWA research projects on services to women survivors of violence, human trafficking and child marriage. The ESCWA toolkit on violence against women has been developed in close consultation with service providers (police, health workers and social workers), the media and religious leaders. A project to develop a conceptual model to estimate the economic cost of violence against women in the region will be governed by an advisory board of experts in statistics, economics, gender studies, sociology and health. Experts from UN-Women will make a proposal on the methodology best suited to the Arab region.

III. CONCLUSION AND THE WAY FORWARD

Effective multi-stakeholder partnerships will be a critical element of the success of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Partnerships are not just a work modality and cannot be limited to consultancy, monitoring or funding roles. They reflect a philosophy of shared commitment to gender justice.

Good intentions, however, are not always enough to sustain partnerships between actors who may have widely varying interests and diverse ways of functioning. It is equally important to consider the impact of partnerships and to refrain from assuming that any kind of partnership is necessarily effective. At the global level, partnering efforts can be coordinated by the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women. Partnerships and inclusive reviews can be reinforced by regional mechanisms for sustainable development, such as the Arab Forum for Sustainable Development, and other specialized bodies, such as the ESCWA Committee on Women. At the national level, the establishment of similar mechanisms will be critical for institutionalizing the engagement of the private sector, civil society and other local actors, including through consultative councils, and help to ensure the implementation of nationally adopted development goals.

“It is “we the peoples” who are embarking today on the road to 2030. Our journey will involve Governments as well as parliaments, the United Nations system and other international institutions, local authorities, indigenous peoples, civil society, business and the private sector, the scientific and academic community – and all people. Millions have already engaged with, and will own, this Agenda. It is an Agenda of the people, by the people and for the people – and this, we believe, will ensure its success.”

2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, paragraph 52