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Commission on the Status of Women
Fifty-seventh session
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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": review theme: the equal
sharing of responsibilities between women and
men, including caregiving in the context of HIV/AIDS

Gender norms and stereotypes, socialization and unequal power relations, and sharing and balancing life-work responsibilities

Moderator's summary

1.   On 12 March 2013, the Commission on the Status of Women held an interactive dialogue to review progress in implementing the agreed conclusions on the theme "Equal sharing of responsibilities between women and men, including caregiving in the context of HIV/AIDS, adopted by the Commission at its fifty-third session in 2009 (see E/2009/27-E/CN.6/2009/15, chap. I, sect. A). The interactive dialogue was organized in the form of two panel discussions. The first panel discussion focused on two themes: (a) gender norms and stereotypes, socialization and unequal power relations; and (b) sharing and balancing life-work responsibilities, which are the focus of the present summary. The second panel addressed two additional themes, namely (c) caregiving in the context of HIV/AIDS; and (d) recognizing and valuing unpaid care work (see E/CN.6/2013/CRP.8).

2.   The panel discussion was moderated by Ms. Irina Velichko, Vice-Chair of the Commission (Belarus). Panellists for the segment on gender norms and stereotypes, socialization and unequal power relations were Ms. Fatou Sow Sarr, Director of the Gender Laboratory, Université Cheikh Anta Diop de Dakar (Senegal), and Mr. Warren Feek, Executive Director of The Communication Initiative; Mr. Niclas Järvklo, Secretary of the Government of Sweden's Committee on Men and Gender Equality (Sweden) and Ms. Lucia Zachariášová, Head of the Gender Equality Unit of the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs (Czech Republic), were panellists for

the segment on sharing and balancing life-work responsibilities. Mr. Luis Mora, Chief of the Gender, Human Rights and Culture Branch, United Nations Population Fund, and Ms. Renata Kaczmarksa, United Nations Programme on the Family, Division for Social Policy, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, served, respectively, as discussants for each of the segments. Representatives from 29 Member States, one regional organization (European Union) and two civil society networks participated in the interactive dialogue. An issues paper provided the framework for the discussion.

3.   In 2009, the Commission agreed on 54 action-oriented recommendations for improving and accelerating the equal sharing of responsibilities between men and women, including caregiving in the context of HIV/AIDS. The conclusions were categorized under four distinct themes: (a) gender norms and stereotypes, socialization and unequal power relations; (b) sharing and balancing of life-work responsibilities; (c) caregiving in the context of HIV/AIDS; and (d) recognizing and valuing unpaid care work. The following summary highlights key advances and remaining challenges and outlines recommendations to accelerate the implementation of the recommendations relating to gender norms and stereotypes, socialization and unequal power relations and sharing and balancing life-work responsibilities.

Progress made in implementation

4.   Participants recognized the persistence of gender-based inequalities worldwide and their negative impact on women, men, girls, boys and societies as a whole. They noted that discriminatory gender-based norms, stereotypes and practices continue to impede the equal sharing and balancing of work-life responsibilities and women's participation on equal terms with men in employment and decision-making, which are critical to economic and social development. Participants shared a range of promising policy and programme initiatives, in line with the recommendations of the 2009 agreed conclusions, that generated positive impacts and made the case for expansion and upscaling. These included addressing gender issues in education; equal access to economic resources and opportunities; gender issues in the media; policies relating to child care and parental leave; promoting men's increased involvement in the family and unpaid care work, which has contributed to the development of closer relationships between fathers and their children; and women's participation in decision-making — all of which contributed to more gender equal outcomes.

5.   Emphasizing the role of education in transforming gender norms and stereotypes, participants provided examples of initiatives related to enhancing the gender sensitivity of educational content, such as the introduction and integration of human rights and gender equality guidelines for curriculum development and revision of school textbooks to eliminate gender-based stereotypes.

6.   Measures to address labour-market segmentation and stereotypical perceptions of male and female jobs were also shared. These included promoting women's and girls' access to non-traditional vocational training and educational programmes, especially in the field of science and technology, and encouraging men and boys to engage in care work and jobs and tasks traditionally performed by women. Participants also shared efforts to provide education and guidance for parents and caregivers, including to facilitate men's increased involvement in child care. They

noted the important role of both women and men and good male and female role models in transmitting non-discriminatory social norms and in positively influencing the behaviours of their children.

7. The key role of the media in challenging gender stereotypes and enhancing gender equality was strongly emphasized. Participants discussed women's portrayal in the media and highlighted promising media policy and practice aimed at representing men and women equally in news reporting that also promoted equality between men and women in employment in the media. Although inequalities still prevail, participants pointed to an increasing number of women in senior management positions in the media. Discussants highlighted the rapid proliferation of digital and social media as powerful tools for advancing gender equality across all issues, including the equal sharing of responsibilities in paid and unpaid care work. The unmediated nature of social media provides opportunities to amplify the voices of women and girls within the public sphere and to share knowledge and create networks in ways that are not subject to immediate control by parents, guardians or male relatives. While recognizing the opportunities of social media and mobile technology such as cell phones, participants also noted gender gaps in access to knowledge, use and development of these technologies and their use in perpetrating violence against women and girls. Participants also identified other channels of more localized and more rural-oriented communication to address gender-based norms and discrimination. They shared examples of how, in some countries, messages about shared responsibilities between men and women were communicated though comic strips, fliers or songs in areas where illiteracy rates are high. Radio programmes, door-to-door campaigns and community dialogues have also proved successful in changing discriminatory attitudes in rural communities.

8. There was strong recognition of the deliberate effort to engage men and boys in efforts to promote gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls and to overcome stereotypes. Participants stated that while some countries have experienced a slow but steady increase in men's use of parental leave and participation in care work, there is a continued need to assess men's contribution to care work and to gain a better understanding of perceptions and challenges faced by men, including in making use of leave and flexible work policies in the labour market. Participants noted that examples of men's positive involvement in caregiving should be highlighted and that national political and business leaders, as well as other prominent men, could be drawn on as role models to promote behaviour that challenges gender stereotypes. A growing field of research on masculinities is providing more information, analyses and good practice that can transform gender relations.

9. The panel confirmed that issues linked to work-life balance are gaining growing attention. Examples of measures taken to facilitate the reconciliation of work, family and care responsibilities were highlighted. This included leave provisions, including maternity, paternity and parental leave, flexible working arrangements, the adoption or review of social protection policies and the provision of financial allowances for day-care centres or caregivers, the promotion of family-friendly workplaces, the provision of quality care services and facilities for children, and the development of physical infrastructure and increased access to public services, including education and health care, that reduce the time spent in unpaid care work. It was noted that setting concrete targets, such as the Barcelona targets established by the European Council for the provision of child care, can be useful in

driving policy change. Examples also showed that officially allocated leave for each parent had worked in some countries as an incentive and that men were increasingly taking their parental leave. Larger campaigns such as the forthcoming 2014 European Year for Reconciling Work and Family Life were also highlighted.

10.   The discussion also pointed to a need to build on and expand efforts to uncover the contribution of unpaid care work and other unpaid work to the economy, as it is still largely invisible. A number of good practice examples were highlighted, with a growing number of countries making efforts to measure and value informal unpaid work and unpaid care work through time-use surveys and the inclusion of unpaid work in national accounts.

11.   The importance of promoting voice, dialogue and organization in addressing and challenging deep-rooted social norms and promoting change was emphasized. Several participants stressed the critical role of social movements, civil society networks and organizations and community groups in that regard and called for stronger support for initiatives developed by such networks and groups.

12.   In the context of HIV/AIDS, participants drew attention to initiatives implemented to combat stigma and discrimination and respond to care needs, including the introduction of anti-discrimination laws, the inclusion of human rights and gender equality in national strategic plans on HIV, paid home-based care support, community outreach and door-to-door campaigns on HIV prevention and response that include efforts to address stigma and men's roles in caregiving. Yet, women carry a disproportionate burden of care, stemming from social norms around gender stereotypes; continued efforts to promote changes are needed, given the implications this has on their economic security. One concern is the evidence of new infections increasing among women in some countries. Participants stressed the importance of targeting and engaging youth in HIV prevention and response.

Gaps and challenges in implementation

13.   While progress has been achieved in a number of areas and many innovative programmes are being implemented, the interactive dialogue revealed a number of issues and areas that require sustained attention. The prevalence of social attitudes and behaviours preventing change and tolerating discrimination and violence against women and girls is of great concern. In addition, available research and data confirm that, globally, women continue to carry a disproportionate burden of unpaid care work, which negatively affects their political, economic and social participation and empowerment.

14.   Challenges persist in addressing gender-based segregation in the labour market, which contributes to keeping women out of male-dominated sectors and decision-making positions. Women tend to disproportionately avail of parental leave, and their share in part-time jobs remains larger than that of men.

15.   While there is increased awareness about the role of domestic workers and their contribution to the economy, strengthened efforts are needed by States and other actors to regulate domestic work and promote and protect the human and labour rights of domestic workers, including working hours and wages, and to improve access to health care and other social and economic benefits. In this regard, participants drew attention to International Labour Organization Convention No. 189 on decent work for domestic workers and the need to promote its ratification and to

implement legal and social protection for domestic workers in line with that Convention, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and other relevant international human rights standards.

16.   Participants drew attention to a range of other concerns and challenges affecting the reconciliation of work, family and care responsibilities and the transformation of gender norms and stereotypes. These included demographic changes contributing to growing care needs, the impact of the ongoing global financial and economic crisis and the effects of fiscal austerity measures, when cutbacks in public services and/or increases in user charges reduce household access to those services. Such changes and cutbacks are often compensated for by women and girls, increasing their work burden within the household. Several participants noted that budgetary commitments to the implementation of gender equality commitments were still insufficient.

Recommendations to accelerate implementation

17.   The discussion confirmed the value and continued relevance of the recommendations put forward in the 2009 agreed conclusions and the need for renewed attention and accelerated action to implement them. There was agreement that addressing deep-rooted social norms and practices requires a holistic approach with actions at many different levels. Such an approach may target educational systems, the labour market, leadership and the media to foster images, attitudes, behaviours and learning that promote and foster gender equality and the equal sharing of responsibility, as well as women's and men's equal access to opportunities, resources, services and decision-making.

18.   In particular, participants emphasized the following actions to accelerate implementation of the agreed conclusions:

      (a)   Ratifying relevant legal instruments, including labour, employment and human rights instruments, and having gender-sensitive national legal frameworks in place that are harmonized with international norms and standards promoting non-discrimination and gender equality;

      (b)   Ensuring that normative frameworks and legislation are translated into policies that support women's participation in paid employment and facilitate the involvement of men in caring for their children and other care-related tasks. This involves adopting gender-sensitive policies or reviewing existing policies to improve rights, social protection, working conditions and recognition of and support to both paid and unpaid caregivers; ensuring that both women and men have access to parental leave and other forms of leave; increasing flexibility in working conditions; and investing in the development or expansion of quality and affordable care and other public services;

      (c)   Ensuring that all stakeholders, including Governments, civil society organizations, employers and employees, men and women, are involved and consulted in policymaking processes to ensure joint ownership;

      (d)   Strengthening advocacy and awareness-raising at the local, national, regional and international levels to challenge gender stereotypes and combat discriminatory attitudes and behaviours;

(e)   Monitoring gender-equality trends in the media and promoting women's participation in knowledge generation and platform development to ensure equal access to and ownership of the new media technology;

(f)   Working to break down dichotomies between public and private spheres in policymaking and recognizing women's paid employment as a requisite for societal advancement;

(g)   Building capacity for and strengthening collection and analysis of sex-disaggregated data as well as the measurement of unpaid work and ensuring that this measurement is used to inform social and economic policy development;

(h)   Creating opportunities for continued sharing of experience, knowledge, good practice and lessons learned across the themes discussed.

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