

Session VI: Gender equality and women's empowerment

The title of the presentation will be "Gender responsive solutions to address the barriers to sustainable development"

- Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen:

- I would like to thank again for hosting the SPECA ECONOMIC FORUM ON "GREENER AND SAFER FUTURE". It is an honour for me to be part of this event

- While the world is facing an unprecedented set of challenges that threaten progress for women and girls, the past years have also seen the reaffirmation of gender equality as inextricably linked to achieving sustainable development for all.

- The 2030 Agenda is clear: development will only be sustainable if its benefits accrue equally to both women and men.

There have been important gains since the adoption of the Beijing Platform in 1995. In recent years, however, progress towards gender equality has stalled and even reversed in some areas.

- Progress in the education and health outcomes of women and girls is one of the major success stories of the past 25 years.

- o More girls are in school than ever before; more countries have reached gender parity in educational enrolment; and global literacy rates have improved, especially among youth.

- o Yet, worldwide nearly half a billion women and girls 15 years and over still lacked basic reading and writing skills in 2018.

- Current economic models have failed to generate progress and prosperity for all. Economic security and autonomy remain elusive for most women, especially during their child-bearing years.

- o Women aged 25-34 globally are 25 per cent more likely than men to live in extreme poverty. Many of these women are mothers who, in the absence of supportive policy frameworks, face the impossible choice between working and leaving their children unattended, or sacrificing an income that could lift them and their children out of poverty.

- o The gender gap in labour force participation among prime working-age adults (25-54) has stagnated over the past 20 years, standing at 31 percentage points globally. Of those women who are employed, 58 per cent (740 million) are in the informal economy.

- o Unpaid care and domestic work remain stubbornly feminized the world over. Women on average do three times as much unpaid care and domestic work as men, with long-term consequences for their ability to earn an income and build up assets for their later life.

- There has been constant progress over the past two decades in the enactment of legislation to address violence against women. Today, more than three quarters of countries have laws on domestic violence in place. Yet, violence against women and girls in the public and private sphere remains pervasive.

- Globally, the proportion of women in parliament has doubled since 1995, but gender parity in decision-making positions is a long way off.

- Implementation of global women, peace and security commitments has been slow and despite their contributions, women continue to be marginalized from peace processes.
- The world is facing a climate crisis fueled by the over-exploitation of natural resources, with devastating impacts on the most marginalized women and girls.

Fundamental shifts in the global gender equality landscape have taken place over the last five years.

- Overall, there is a sense that the gains of development have not been shared equally, with wealth and power concentrated among the few, while economic insecurity prevails for the many.
- The world is seeing the rise of exclusionary politics grounded in misogyny and xenophobia, with democratic erosions, while push-back against gender equality is becoming stronger.
- Increasing push-back against women's rights occurs not only through regressive policy reforms, but also through a less visible hollowing out of institutions mandated to advance gender equality.
- Rapid technological change is impacting every aspect of economic, social and political life, creating new opportunities as well as new risks.

Across the globe women's movements, energized by young feminists at the helm, are challenging slow and piecemeal progress and are impatient for systemic change in the face of these multiple crises. Their voices must be heard and acted upon.

- World leaders can learn from the ways in which these movements work across silos and political boundaries, seeing their work to advance the rights of women and girls as inextricably linked to the achievement of economic, social and environmental justice for all.
- These movements are proposing brave new alternatives for a different world, challenging the power asymmetries that have led the world to the current point of crisis.

Governments and other stakeholders need to respond to these claims and act with urgency to realize gender equality and the rights of women and girls, for today's generation and the next.

Action is needed to bring the transformative change needed to turn existing commitments into a lived reality for women and girls.

We need to Make the economy work for women and sustainable development

- For women to start and grow their own businesses, they need better access to financial services, including digital finance.

We need to Accelerate the participation of women, including young women, in decision-making and create enabling environments for women's rights organizations to hold decision-makers to account

- To enable women's political participation, the expansion of temporary special measures should continue. Greater efforts are needed to address discriminatory gender norms and practices in political institutions and violence against women in public life.

We must harness the potential of technology for gender equality

- This must include efforts to close the gender digital divide and ensure that women participate equally in the design and development of technology.

We need to remove discriminatory laws and strengthen institutions for gender equality

- States should take immediate steps to eliminate discriminatory laws and invest in gender-responsive policies and institutions to close the gap between legislation and practice.

We must transform social norms to create cultures of non-violence, respect and equality

- Support for community-based women's rights organizations in their key role in shifting social norms is critical to achieve this goal, as is the role of education and the media in fostering positive norms and challenging stereotypes.

There is a lot of work to be done to realize these gender responsive solutions to address the barriers to sustainable development. There is a need to act with urgency to realize gender equality and the rights of women and girls, for today's generation and the next.

Thank you.