



Annual discussion on the integration of a gender perspective throughout the work of the Human Rights Council and that of its mechanisms

Theme: *The universal periodic review and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development: Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls (Goal 5)*

15 September 2017

Round 1:

“At the time of the Council’s establishment, the Institution Building Package included, as one of the principles and objectives of the review, the full integration of gender perspective particularly as it related to new mechanisms like the UPR. In your view, how effective has been gender integration in the UPR recommendations in the First and Second cycle? What would be your recommendations for the Third cycle of UPR to successfully guide the implementation of the 2030 agenda in a gender-sensitive way?”

Mr President of the Human Rights Council, Mr High Commissioner for Human Rights, Excellencies, esteemed colleagues, ladies and gentlemen. I am honoured to be amongst you today to represent *UPR Info* on this distinguished panel.

UPR Info is a non-governmental organisation (NGO) that works to promote and strengthen the UPR by raising awareness, providing capacity-building tools, and bridging the different actors of the process in order to ensure the universal advancement of human rights.

Gender and UPR

Council resolutions 5/1 and 6/30 expressly call for the inclusion of a gender perspective in all stages of the UPR. The mechanism has acted as a catalyst to strengthen cooperation with other human rights bodies such as CEDAW and the Special Procedures. Nauru ratified CEDAW after receiving a UPR recommendation, while Thailand withdrew its reservation to Article 16, which guarantees the rights of women in all matters relating to marriage and family relations.

The socio-economic empowerment of women has equally featured in UPR recommendations. Belgium and Estonia introduced gender budgeting in the distribution of resources, while Mauritius increased maternity leave from 12 to 14 weeks.

Looking to the level of implementation of first-cycle recommendations, *UPR Info’s* analysis found that women’s rights and gender was the theme that had triggered highest action by mid-term. Quantitatively speaking, there is an undeniable ubiquity of women’s rights throughout the UPR. Out of over 57,000 recommendations made during cycle 1 and 2, women’s rights and gender accounted

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for over 10,700, of which 85% were accepted. Qualitatively speaking, however, there are shortfalls. The recommendations have generally been of a relatively low standard in terms of specificity; only 30% have been action-orientated. Too often, women have been clustered with other groups, such as children, and labelled collectively as “vulnerable”. This gender-stereotyping not only undermines their legitimacy as rights-holders, but also conflates issues, thus diluting the effectiveness of recommendations. Going forward, States are strongly encouraged to make SMART recommendations in order that implementation can be effectively monitored.

Including gender in UPR recommendations is only one element of the process. According to Resolution 6/30, a gender perspective should be included at all stages of the review. It further calls on States to consult with NGOs working on gender issues in the preparation of the national report. This consultation should include marginalised voices of society, including grassroots movements in rural areas.

On the home front, *UPR Info* systematically integrates a gender perspective at its Pre-sessions to ensure that gender and women’s rights are raised at this international advocacy platform. The first-hand information shared by local NGOs offers a unique insight into the level of gender equality on the ground. During the Pre-session on Nepal in 2015, an NGO speaker highlighted the narrow definition of rape, which included a 35-day statute of limitation. Following the recommendations made on that issue, Nepal extended the timeframe to 180 days, and has stated it will consider further prolongation.

In terms of implementation, it is crucial that States establish a national mechanism for reporting and follow-up. This mechanism should monitor gender-related recommendations, as well as ensuring an integrated gender perspective across all human rights. Mid-term reporting is yet another critical element of the UPR process, which should further highlight the progress made in achieving gender equality across all human rights. In addition, *UPR Info* proposes a new strategy for the third cycle of the UPR. One year after the adoption, each State should report on five recommendations of its choice during the Item 6 General Debate. This would encourage States to start working on the implementation immediately after their review. If gender-related recommendations are included amongst the five, this would further accelerate efforts to combat gender discrimination.

The UPR has been made critical contributions in furthering dialogue and action on gender equality at the international level and women’s rights have become a permanent and integrated discussion by all States.

UPR and SDGs

In terms of the relationship between the UPR and the SDGs, the Danish Institute for Human Rights states that “more than 90% of the targets directly reflect elements of international human rights and labour standards” and that “the 2030 Agenda and human rights are thereby tied together in a

mutually reinforcing way”. We believe that the UPR could be a strong vehicle to implement the SDGs. Firstly, States should be encouraged to make more recommendations at the UPR related to economic, social and cultural (“ESC”) rights in general. A study from the Centre for Economic and Social Rights showed that civil and political (“CP”) rights were twice as much represented as ESC rights in UPR recommendations. Secondly, States should refer to specific goals when making UPR recommendations that could be linked to SDGs. Similarly, States should use SDG targets to formulate UPR recommendations, for example, target 3 of Goal 5: “Eliminate all harmful practices, such as child, early and forced marriage and female genital mutilation”. Finally, in the implementation phase, the SDG indicators should be used as benchmarks to measure the implementation of UPR recommendations. This is what we are already doing at the national level when supporting civil society engagement in the implementation of UPR recommendations, and we believe this should be systematised. Critically, we must remember that a gender perspective must be mainstreamed across all the SDGs, and not only Goal 5. In a similar way, UPR recommendations should also be implemented in a manner that adequately tailors their application to address specific gender disparities. For example, a UPR recommendation calling for improved access to water and sanitation – also reflected in Goal 6 of the SDGs – is a human rights issue that has an inherent gender component. According to UN Women, women spend 4 times more time a day collecting water¹, which significantly hinders their access to work and school. With increased awareness and political will, States can synergise their efforts for the SDGs and UPR recommendations to include a common gender perspective in their implementation, harnessing the scope of both mechanisms to catalyse the promotion of gender equality in the 2030 agenda.

¹ 16 million hours compared to 4 million hours spent by men (data relative to 25 sub-Saharan countries).
<http://www.unwomen.org/en/news/in-focus/women-and-the-sdgs/sdg-6-clean-water-sanitation>