

UNITAR Course on UN Reform
Organized by UNITAR and the Permanent Mission of Switzerland to the UN
Session on:
Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women: Composite Entity
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1. Rationale for reform

It is a great pleasure to have the opportunity to make a presentation on this important topic. I would like to set the stage by providing a brief overview of the rationale for reform of the institutional arrangements for gender equality in the United Nations (or as it is more popularly known – reform of the gender equality architecture).

a) Progress on norm setting and policy development

Perhaps somewhat paradoxically, I would like to start by focusing on that the United Nations has done well on gender equality. I believe it is very important to keep in mind that significant progress has been made by the United Nations on gender equality and empowerment of women since its establishment in 1945. In the context of on going discussions, it is easy to forget to acknowledge the role in increasing the momentum in 1975 with the International Year of Women and the four world conferences held between 1975 and 1995. I imagine where we would stand on gender equality today if it had not been for these efforts and in particular the work of the Commission on the Status of Women and their follow up processes.

A critical milestone was the adoption of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) in 1979 which has now been ratified by 113 States, and has an Optional Protocol. The Convention provides a unique and binding instrument. The Fourth World Conference in 1995 provided the global framework – the Beijing Platform for Action – which is still – nearly 15 years later – and guides the work on gender equality and empowerment of women at the global and national levels.

Another important watershed was the adoption of the gender mainstreaming strategy by the United Nations at the Fourth World Conference on Women in 1995 and the adoption of the Strategy on gender mainstreaming in ECOSOC in 1997. While implementation of the Strategy has not been from satisfactory, it has resulted in significant changes in the work on gender equality in both the United Nations itself and in Member States. One clear

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promising practices from national level to intergovernmental processes, completing the circle.

In the ongoing intergovernmental process on the reform of the gender equality architecture, Member States have come to some important agreements on the objectives that need to be achieved and on the constraints which must be addressed. There is also agreement on the functions required of a new entity, as well as consensus on the composite model as the most appropriate model for meeting the objectives, fulfilling the desired functions and addressing the identified constraints. What is required now is a decision to move forward with a clear mandate for the Secretary General to act.

3. The way forward

We are hopefully nearing the end of a long intergovernmental process which has actively

gender equality, and equal sharing of responsibilities between women and men often do not get picked up and effectively utilized in country level work. As these outcomes are implemented on the ground, the experiences, lessons learned and promising practices need to be feed back into the Commission. Strengthening the link between the policy and operational work – closing the circle – will strengthen the role of the UN generally, and its role on gender equality and empowerment of women in particular.

§ A lot of attention has been 0