

CSW 60th Session Report Back – eS4W and JERA International

Australia's engagement at the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) has long been admired and respected. Economic Security 4 Women (eS4W) and Justice Equality Rights Access (JERA) International sincerely commends all Australians who continued the high quality contribution to the outcomes of the CSW60th session, including the Australian government and agency representatives, the Civil Society representatives of the government delegation and the many Australian organisations and individuals who attended over the two weeks of CSW with dedicated hard work.

This report reflects on some of the key issues for eS4W and JERA International as arising from the Agreed Conclusions from CSW 60th Session, which took place at the United Nations Headquarters in New York from 14th to 24th March 2016. Representatives of Member States, UN entities, and ECOSOC-accredited non-governmental organisations (NGOs) from all regions of the world attended the session. This Commission on the Status of Women (CSW 60th) was unique in that it was the testing ground to see how far States genuinely commit to gender equality through the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). This is a test of political will towards not only Goal 5 of the SDG's, but to mainstreaming across all the Sustainable Development Goals.

Six months prior, the UN General Assembly adopted the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), an ambitious agenda to end extreme poverty and tackle inequality and climate change by 2030. These 17 goals and 169 targets will become a key feature of future CSW's and civil society representatives were keen to hear about the role of CSW in achieving the SDGs. It was also hoped that the Agreed Conclusions from CSW would demonstrate accountability mechanisms for States to achieve gender equality and strengthen women's rights.

It has to be recognised that CSW 60th was a difficult negotiating space to achieve any progressive language that may substantially impact the realisation of women's human rights. Given this, it was encouraging to see reference to the major global challenges that climate change poses to the achievement of sustainable development on gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls

It was promising to see several references to human rights in the context of gender equality and women's empowerment throughout the Agreed Conclusions, however where the documents fails to make any progress in these areas, were on issues related to sexual orientation and gender identity and sexual and reproductive rights.

The Multi-year programme of work of the Commission on the Status of Women clearly articulates how the Commission will be used to influence the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and strengthen the implementation of the BPFA, but it does not articulate how CSW or its outcomes will interact with the HLF and support gender mainstreaming across all of the 17 Goals and 169 targets.

Financing and investment to achieve the 2030 Agenda are recognised in paragraph 18 of the Agreed Conclusions and the real challenges are highlighted in paragraph 20. Gender disaggregated data is crucial to identify the gender gaps in resourcing. The current challenges of incomplete or lack of data needs to be fully recognised in the Agreed Conclusions.

It was hoped that CSW60 would develop action orientated outcomes and strong State accountability to implement the SDGs and progress women and girls rights. Putting women's rights at the centre of the agenda is key to full achievement of the SDGs, not only

Goal 5, on reaching gender equality, but having women's rights reflected across all 17 SDGs. The Agreed Conclusions do not appear strong on state accountability. To use the words of Dr Anu Mundkur¹, Civil Society Representative with the Australian Delegation, at CSW...*"Fierce battles were fought to prevent the addition of caveats such as "taking into account different national realities," "respecting national policy space," and "bearing in mind national priorities," which allow countries to opt out of addressing substantive rights issues claiming that they are not in the national interest. We succeeded in some places but not others"*.

Regarding the eS4W submission to Office for Women (17/2/2016) and priorities moving into CSW60; the strategic strengthening of the language to advance female participation in the workforce and to remove all barriers especially those caused by violence and its impacts in the workplace, we were heartened to see language on eS4W issues reflected in:

Preamble

- Paragraph 11: which includes recognition of the disproportionate burden of unpaid care work done by women;

Strengthening normative, legal and policy frameworks

- Paragraph 23 (e): which references 'equal opportunities for full and productive employment and decent work'
- and
- Paragraph 23 (f): which, in addition to women's rights at work emphasises *"equal pay for equal work or/and work of equal value"*
- Paragraph 23 (g): which recognises that unpaid care needs to be dealt with, but discusses it within redistribution of government resources for provision of services and does not recognise or act on the undervalue of unpaid care work, and the impact this has on the economy or on women's participation in the workforce.

Strengthening gender-responsive data collection, follow-up and review processes

- Paragraph 23 (mm): which recognises the critical need for gender disaggregated data for women's full human rights and access to full economic empowerment to be achieved.

What was not reflected through Agreed Conclusions was:

- Strong recognition of ILO Conventions and Standards
- The challenges faced by women regarding violence experienced in their private lives and the consequent challenges in their ability for full participation in the workforce.
- The lack of recognition of the undervalue of the care economy as a major structural barrier to women's participation and gender equality in the workforce

Successful implementation and achievement of the SDGs relies on all actors – civil society, governments, private sector and communities, in implementing and monitoring the SDGs and holding States accountable. Australia, once more, was supportive of civil society within the CSW processes, and maintained a strong civil society presence at the formal proceedings and negotiations. Australia's role in negotiating with other States to strengthen civil society engagement in CSW and other SDG related forums was also evident at CSW 60th Session. Success was also found in the addition of Human Rights Institutions in the Agreed Conclusions.

The Agreed Conclusions include strong references to the involvement of civil society, including feminist groups and women human rights defenders across the implementation, evaluation and monitoring of the SDG's. However, the shrinking space and lack of funding for all diverse women to engage at international forums such as CSW paint a different

¹ Dr. Anu Mundkur, YMCA Adelaide – Reflections <http://ywca.com.au/wp/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/Anu-Mundkur-CSW60-reflections.pdf> accessed 28 April, 2016

picture. There is recognition of the importance of an open, inclusive, and transparent engagement with civil society in the gender responsive implementation of the 2030 Agenda. This transparency will be a major challenge without mobilised civil society groups being able to attend meetings at the national, regional, and international levels. Women Human Rights defenders are especially at risk in this work and should be recognised, supported and assisted in their work.

A key area of challenge in both the SDG development and CSW 60th was the apparent sidelining of Sexual and Reproductive Health Rights.

Moving forward

Strong language in CSW60 Agreed Conclusions 23 (g), *‘undertake all appropriate measures to recognize, reduce and redistribute unpaid care work by prioritizing social protection policies,’* reflects the need to address the unequal gendered responsibilities of care, and State accountability.

Given Australia’s increasingly diverse population, better sex and gender disaggregated data is required to understand and consider the implications of this in the care economy. The re-introduction of Time Use surveys would assist in more informed policymaking. Formal and Informal carers provide a significant contribution to the health and wellbeing of Australians in need of support and assistance. Women bear the brunt of responsibility for care work. With current trends (aging population, lack of flexible work practices etc.) and international obligations (25x25) greater recognition and awareness of carer demographics and preferences will ensure that approaches to health, disability and aging policies undertake a holistic approach, and are responsive to the needs of carers and care recipients equally.

In the context of the CSW61, language should be further strengthened to acknowledge and include the way both paid and unpaid work remains under-valued and remains a major structural barrier to the realisation of women’s full economic empowerment, and their ability to fully access workforce participation.

The fundamental gendered existence of care work challenges gender equality and income equity in the workforce.

The CSW60 Agreed Conclusions lack specific recognition of the impact that domestic, family and kinship group violence has on the attendance, performance, safety and consequently the economic productivity of a woman whether she has children or not. Controlling and isolating behaviours by an abusive partner both prevent and restrict a woman’s choice of work and impact severely on the lifelong economic wellbeing of women.

Moving towards CSW61, further consideration should be given to the diversity of women facing violence² in all its forms in their private lives and the consequent challenges to women’s full access and participation in the workforce.

Progressing the spaces and roles of civil society representatives, especially feminist groups and human rights defenders, should remain a priority moving forward. Australia leads by example and could be a key advocate for progressing this agenda.

The apparent sidelining of sexual and reproductive health was of concern this year. Denying women sexual and reproductive health rights is a fundamental barrier to the full achievement of women’s potential and the successful accomplishment of the SDGs.

² For the purposes of this paper, domestic violence is defined as a pattern of abusive behavior in any relationship that is used by one partner to gain or maintain power and control over another intimate partner. Violence can be physical, sexual, emotional, economic, or psychological actions or threats of actions that influence another person.