

VG ON GENDER EQUALITY, WOMEN AND GIRLS' EMPOWERMENT. WAYS FORWARD

Report of the Chairperson of the CFS, 5 October 2022

Background

- CFS Plenary agreed in 2019 to develop and endorse Vol Guidelines on Gender Equality and Women's (later broadened to 'Women & Girls') Empowerment, as part of its Multi-Year Program of Work (2020-2023); CFS Plenary later adopted negotiated Terms of Reference for these VG's at CFS 47 in February 2021.
- As agreed in the TORs, the tentative timeframe for developing the draft Guidelines was 2021-2022, with their adoption targeted in October 2022.
- CFS Members and Participants did not reach an agreement on the draft text at the third and last scheduled negotiation session in late July, making it virtually unfeasible to formally adopt Guidelines during CFS 50.
- Against this background, I released a public statement in August acknowledging the efforts by all delegations, expressing my deepest gratitude to the co-chairs of the OEWG Amb. Tomas Duncan and Tanja Gren. I noted that I would be carrying out a round of bilateral consultations with various Ambassadors and PRs whose delegations had been actively engaged in the negotiation process.
- My objective was to survey various perspectives and assess potential avenues for moving ahead in the coming weeks, months, and the final year of the current MYPOW, to try to find a common ground for reaching consensus on the Guidelines mandated by the Plenary.
- I am deeply grateful to those Ambassadors and PRs that are making the time to meet with me, which has been extremely welcome and informative.
- I began these bilaterals with the delegation of Indonesia; I have also met with either the Ambassadors, Perm Reps or deputy PRs of the missions of: Kuwait (as current Chair of the G77), Morocco, Canada, the United States, the Philippines, Egypt, several EU Heads of Mission, the Holy See, the Russian Federation, Nigeria, Zimbabwe (on behalf of the Africa Regional Group), Argentina, Brazil, the European Union – in that order. Lastly, our Vice Chair met with the Representative of China to the CFS.

- I have also met with the CSIPM and PSM representatives, with senior management of FAO and IFAD. Lastly, I met the Deputy ED of UN Women and her team in NY to discuss the existing multilaterally agreed framework on gender issues and seek her advice on ways forward that may gather consensus while preserving the goals, approaches and progress on advancing gender equality.

Assessment

- My assessment, which evolves after each of these meetings, is as follows:
 - > While there is wide agreement on finalizing these VGs before the end of the current MYPOW, most delegations see the critical importance of having enough additional time to reflect on the matter, and to calm the waters.
 - > While most recognize the high relevance and importance of the text so-far agreed during negotiations (nearly 80% of the document), it was recalled that ‘nothing is agreed until all is agreed’ –hence, that the so-far agreed text may not be considered as such until the most contentious issues have been solved.
 - > There is unanimous recognition that the issues agreed ‘ad referendum’ during the three rounds of formal negotiations address the core component of Guidelines that would be needed – to focus on empowerment of women and girls and gender equality in the context of FSN, agriculture and food systems.
 - > It is also now widely recognized and better understood that what still divides delegations is not the core issues related to gender equality, empowering women and girls, in the context of FSN. Rather, issues that are related strictly to ‘gender’ in broad sense, is at the heart of the divide, and are issues that cannot be advanced via the CFS in Rome.
 - > At the same time, it is also widely recognized that it is reasonable and legitimate to recognize that the current difference of views cannot justify taking any step backwards on text or agreements on gender issues that have been achieved by consensus within the UN General Assembly or other relevant multilateral venues.
 - > Finally, there is a shared understanding that the way forward should also clearly represent a new orientation of this process, on its facilitation, support, and methodology as well as on the draft text.

Conclusions

- I welcome the agreement by the CFS Bureau on its session on 27 September on “*its support for an inclusive and consensus-based process to achieve agreement on Voluntary Guidelines for presentation to the CFS 51 plenary session and requests the Chair to convene consultations, including an inclusive diverse inter-sessional Group of Friends (of the Chair) to discuss the working method and the ways forward;*”
- Consequently, and soon after CFS 50 plenary session, I will undertake further rounds of informal consultations and I will convene the aforementioned Group of Friends of the Chair. A new draft text will be distributed once I believe that it is ready to serve as a positive basis for achieving consensus, following the guidance of the Bureau and of the Plenary and deliberations within the Group of Friends.
- I believe that, with the needed flexibility from all delegations and participants, there is a possible space for consensus, with an expectation to finalize the VG’s no later than the CFS Plenary in 2023.
- I see this space for consensus delimited by the following three principles:
 1. The overarching gender issues cannot be advanced by the CFS, while the current status of multilaterally agreed gender issues must be preserved and recognized -> “No step forward, no step back.”
 2. The Guidelines should clearly reflect on its structure and language the focus of the guidelines: gender equality, empowerment of women and girls’ in the context of FSN - > “Focus”
 3. The Guidelines should preserve an integrated approach to address the structural causes of gender inequality. -> “Inclusive”
- Observing these Principles, I will lead the preparation of a new draft Guidelines text after CFS 50, along the following lines:
 - 1) Solve the non-agreed contentious issues making use, exclusively, of the language used at the UNGA Resolution A/RES/76/140 “Improvement of the situation of women and girls in rural areas” (adopted without a vote on 16/12/2021) and that included in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.
 - 2) Build on the text already agreed *ad referendum*, slightly revised to adjust contentious language as per 1) above.
 - 3) Restructuring of the document, to reflect more accurately the focus of the Guidelines.

- OEWG Negotiations will resume once I identify enough space for convergence, and they will do so considering a different methodology, facilitation and draft.
- In the meantime, in the Plenary session on this agenda item we will celebrate the International Day of Rural Women; we will also listen carefully from women leaders' vivid experiences on why these CFS Vol Guidelines would be so meaningful, once adopted. We will openly exchange our views on this topic.

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CFS CHAIRPERSON