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**APPROACHES FOR CREATING AND SUSTAINING AN ENABLING
ENVIRONMENT FOR GENDER EQUALITY**

(Item 6 of the provisional agenda)

Note by the secretariat

SUMMARY

The present document describes the way forward 10 years after the Beijing Platform for Action adopted at the Fourth World Conference on Women held in Beijing, in 1995. The gaps, challenges, emerging issues and persistent challenges vis-à-vis the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action, and the outcome of the first review of the Fourth World Conference on Women at the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly, held in 2000, require a new commitment to a holistic approach on the part of all stakeholders. Central to this approach is the strategy adopted by the United Nations at the Beijing Conference, namely the mainstreaming of women's interests into national development. Gender mainstreaming is a complex process, and merely including equality clauses in legal instruments without changing institutional practices will not necessarily benefit women. There is a need for a clear understanding of the various factors that work against women and for a more holistic approach that gives women the capability to exercise their rights. Mainstreaming is a process to achieve gender equality, not an end in itself. Other approaches are necessary to strategically and substantially complement the process. In the context of creating and sustaining an enabling environment, three other necessary approaches are proposed: (a) a rights-based approach; (b) working with men; and (c) partnerships, including regional cooperation.

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Introduction

1. The gaps, challenges, emerging issues and persistent challenges relating to the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action¹ in the ESCAP region require a new commitment, on the part of all stakeholders, to a broader and deeper approach to ensure an enabling environment for gender equality and the empowerment of women. Targeted actions aimed at righting gender inequalities in the economic and social spheres and in terms of civil and political rights must be taken together with efforts to engender the development process. In this regard, one major approach the present document revisits is gender mainstreaming, which was established as a major global strategy for the promotion of gender equality in the Platform for Action.

2. Gender mainstreaming is a complex process, and merely including equality clauses in legal instruments without changing institutional practices will not necessarily benefit women. Gender inequality is a human rights violation that must be addressed through various means. There is a need for a clear understanding of the various factors that work against women and for a more holistic approach that gives women the capability to exercise their rights.

3. Importantly, gender mainstreaming and a rights-based approach can make an effective difference when pursued in the context of partnerships, broadly with civil society, specifically with men and strengthened in the context of regional cooperation.

4. The present document emphasizes gender mainstreaming as the key approach towards the advancement and empowerment of women and gender equality. In the context of creating and sustaining an enabling environment, three other necessary approaches are proposed: (a) a rights-based approach; (b) working with men; and (c) partnerships, including regional cooperation.

I. Gender mainstreaming

5. Gender mainstreaming was recognized as a global strategy for the promotion of gender equality in the Beijing Platform for Action adopted at the Fourth World Conference on Women, held in Beijing in 1995. In its agreed conclusions 1997/2, the Economic and Social Council provided a clear definition of gender mainstreaming as “the process of assessing the implications for women and men of any planned action, including legislation, policies or programmes, in all areas and at all levels”.² Gender mainstreaming involves bringing the contributions, perspectives and priorities of both women and men into the core concerns of economic and social development.

6. A central strategy in the gender and development interventions of ESCAP, mainstreaming emphasizes that gender equality is a fundamental value that has to be pursued from the centre rather than the margins of decision-making. It aims for the increased involvement of women in the decision-

¹ *Report of the Fourth World Conference on Women, Beijing, 4-15 September 1995* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.96.IV.13), chap. I, resolution 1, annex II.

² See *Official Records of the General Assembly, Fifty-second Session, Supplement No. 3 (A/52/3/Rev.1)*, chap. IV, para. 4.

making process on social values, development directions and resource allocations. It goes beyond the participation of women in equal numbers as beneficiaries to the actual “agenda setting”.

7. While mainstreaming is clearly essential for securing human gender equality, it is increasingly being recognized that incorporating gender perspectives in different areas of development ensures the effective achievement of other economic and social goals. To cite but one example, gender inequality reduces the productivity of the next generation. There is mounting evidence that increases in women’s well-being yield productivity gains in the future. The probability of children being enrolled in school increases with their mother’s educational level and extra income going to mothers has a more positive impact on household nutrition, health and the education of children than extra income going to fathers (United Nations, 2002).

8. Gender mainstreaming, however, does not eliminate the need for targeted activities to promote gender equality. Such gender-specific activities are still required to address serious gaps that must be urgently tackled to support the empowerment of women and develop their leadership capacities and to test ideas and approaches that may then be applied to the mainstream development process.

9. The representation of women is an essential element in gender mainstreaming; increasing the numbers of women is not enough. The mainstream agenda can only be transformed when the perspectives of both women and men inform the design, implementation and outcomes of policies and programmes. This requires analysing the gender perspectives in every area of development. It also requires examining the institutional mechanisms through which development is undertaken, so that the necessary changes can be made to the structures, processes and procedures within organizations.

10. In practical terms, gender mainstreaming has been the responsibility of the national machineries for the advancement of women and gender equality. However, it is crucial for commitment to gender mainstreaming to emanate from the highest level of national decision-making and translate into multiministerial and multisectoral approaches to planning and implementation. This will also create enabling environments for focal point staff to combine research and statistics with programme and project experience to furnish a solid foundation for recommendations to a multiministerial or multisectoral audience. In many countries, however, such commitment to gender mainstreaming is lacking or absent at the highest level of political leadership. While some Governments introduce training to enhance the analytical capacity and gender sensitivity of their staff, it offers insufficient support for the effective operation of the national machinery.

11. The dissemination of information is another priority area of concern in strengthening national mechanisms. While several Governments have organized information centres in recent years, these remain inadequate and often lack staff with sufficient training to use what is available effectively. Focal point initiatives on behalf of women are severely curtailed by inadequate information, especially accurate and timely data and policy-oriented research.

12. In many cases, there are wide gaps between policy commitments to women's empowerment and gender equality and resource allocations to meet the goals set. Budgets are one of the most powerful instruments for bridging this gap, promoting women's equitable access to public resources and mainstreaming a gender perspective into national development.

13. The experience of incorporating gender perspectives into budgeting also demonstrates the need for clarity in the responsibilities and accountabilities of the organizations and individuals involved. The involvement of economic and planning bodies, finance and budget departments and the legislature, and oversight by an informed and committed group of gender advocates, both inside and outside Government, are critical to the process of making budgeting processes gender-responsive. To be effective and sustainable, gender mainstreaming in budgets must be supported by an active constituency for gender equality, both within Government and in civil society. The role of the national machinery is important in ensuring political and technical support in terms of gender auditing and budgeting.

14. It is important to consider the issue of gender mainstreaming in the context of poverty-reduction efforts. Many national Governments have responded through women-specific poverty programmes and interventions for the empowerment of women. However, some of these programmes usually address income poverty in isolation and do not recognize the fact that poor women face human poverty through multiple deprivations and violations of their equal rights and entitlements. This approach may have hindered the incorporation of gender perspectives into mainstream sectors, such as agriculture and manufacturing, that are critical for gender-responsive poverty eradication strategies. A human poverty perspective should be incorporated into the design and implementation of all mainstream programmes for poverty reduction.

15. A strong, continued commitment to gender mainstreaming is one of the most effective means for all stakeholders to support the promotion of gender equality at all levels, in research, legislation, policy development and activities on the ground, and to ensure that women as well as men can influence, participate in and benefit from development efforts. Most important, there is also an increased awareness that bringing gender perspectives to the centre of attention not only supports the promotion of gender equality but also contributes effectively to the achievement of other development goals.

II. A rights-based approach

16. The rights-based approach to development has been tried and tested in several areas where the human rights of groups and individuals have been violated. In the context of women's empowerment and gender equality, a rights-based approach focuses on the ways and means to ensure women's rights in terms, among others, of access to economic resources and opportunities, participation in decision-making, gender inequality in the formal and informal labour market and women's unequal access to education, land, property and credit and social security.

17. It is unacceptable that many women in the ESCAP region do not yet have legal or traditional rights to land or other assets. They cannot obtain loans or credit because they have no collateral. They cannot leave violent relationships because they are dependent on men for their economic survival and social status. In addition, they often lack the productive resources, including skills, information and economic organization, to be involved in the marketing of production.

18. Additionally, economic policy and analysis tend to focus on productive work and the money economy, ignoring production for household consumption and the informal economy, where women predominate, and the unpaid work of caring for family and household. This leads to aid, development, investment and finance policies which both fail to promote development and further entrench gender inequality through reinforcing stereotypes. The view that productive work is men's responsibility, and consequently of greater value, is a serious barrier to development and detrimental to both sexes.

19. Once retrenched or unable to find employment owing to global and local trends, women often seek inferior and less secure livelihoods in the informal sector or through migration. The trafficking of women in the Asian and Pacific region is another impact of the same situation.

20. Women and girls form the majority of refugees or displaced populations. The proportion of woman-maintained households in conflict situations has increased; in addition, women in conflict situations suffer sexual assault and other forms of exploitation in the home during and after conflict.

21. In many parts of the region HIV/AIDS has become a serious issue affecting development and poverty. There are strong links between the spread of HIV infection, gender equality and gender-based violence. While the fastest-growing group of those infected with AIDS is adolescent girls, the extra burden of care is often placed on elderly women.

22. Gender-based violence remains widespread and has clear links with many other factors, such as poverty, HIV/AIDS, property and land rights, race, ethnicity and age. The rapid growth of trafficking in persons is causing increasing global concern. Anti-trafficking legislation must embrace a human rights approach and protect the rights of those most vulnerable to abuse.

23. The human rights of women and girls continue to be widely violated. They face different forms of discrimination and disadvantage at different stages in their life cycles. Customary laws, practices and traditions can affect people more than statutory laws on an everyday basis. Therefore, it is critical to promote active dialogue and engagement among members of the justice system, religious, cultural, traditional and civil institutions and communities, particularly to address harmful practices.

24. Women are by no means a homogeneous group; the effects of gender inequalities affect them in different ways. There are many groups of women with particular needs, for example women with disabilities, rural or urban women, younger or older women, migrant, refugee and indigenous women and women of different races, ethnic groups, cultures and classes. When referring to "women" this recognition of diversity is vital.

25. The rights-based approach promotes zero tolerance for gender-based violence and views harmful practices as human rights violations. Customs that are considered harmful include female genital mutilation, early or forced marriage, son preference and restrictions on women's mobility. Other harmful practices are extreme age differentials within couples, older men marrying adolescent girls or older men who have sex with young, usually poor girls in exchange for material goods. The rights-based approach draws attention to other inequities as well, for instance in the area of inheritance law and access to land and income. It also provides men with gender role options. Services designed within this framework meet the needs of both men and women and give men access to information, knowledge and understanding about themselves and their partners.

26. Development programmes must ensure that women participate fully and freely in decision-making that has an impact on their lives. Equality not only refers to equality of participation, but also to equality of resources, equality of access and equality of benefits.

27. Programmes with relevance for women to which such principles would be applied directly in terms of relevant legal, policy and institutional frameworks would be those promoting microcredit enterprises or those concerned with the right to equal pay for equal work. Such programmes would evaluate not only the right to non-discrimination, but also collateral rights such as the right to adequate remuneration, employment and favourable conditions of work.

28. The rights-based approach for women and gender equality may be understood in terms of mainstreaming women's rights in global human rights and the United Nations system of human rights through the various human rights monitoring mechanisms and advocacy approaches. The rights-based approach also seeks to integrate the international and regional human rights frameworks into the policies, programmes and activities promoting gender equality and the advancement of women.

29. One of the main human rights frameworks that is relevant for the rights-based approach is the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.³ The twin fundamental principles of non-discrimination and equality are central to this approach. Advocacy for gender equality and the advancement of women increasingly uses the rights-based approach and the Convention framework with success in empowerment efforts.

30. The promotion of women's rights as human rights, including the mainstreaming of these rights in decision-making processes, was one of the main objectives of the Beijing Platform for Action. In that context, ratification and implementation of the Convention has become an important instrument in empowering women in the region. The Convention has been ratified by over two thirds of ESCAP members and associate members. Of those, nearly one third have entered reservations for reasons of religion, culture and conflict of law. Such reservations or declarations effectively dilute the human rights standards set by the Convention for women in those countries and the region as a whole.

³ General Assembly resolution 34/180, annex.

Even where ratification has been without reservation, implementation has been slow, thereby allowing existing discriminatory practices against women to continue under the sanction of religious principles or cultural and customary values. Given the differences and the degree of sensitivity posed by the cultural and religious particularities of individual countries of the region, a rights-based approach to gender equality may provide some common ground, which could then yield positive results.

III. Working with men

31. The importance of involving men in achieving gender equality has been highlighted within the United Nations system and in international and civil society organizations. There has been a growing recognition that the role of men is crucial in changing unequal power relations. In the Beijing Declaration,⁴ Governments expressed their determination to encourage men to participate fully in all actions towards gender equality. The Declaration emphasized that equal sharing of responsibilities and a harmonious partnership between women and men were critical to their well-being and that of their families as well as to the consolidation of democracy. The Beijing Platform for Action⁵ emphasized the principle of shared power and responsibility between women and men at home, in the workplace and in the wider national and international communities. It stressed that gender equality could only be achieved when men and women worked together in partnerships, and that the principle of equality of women and men must be integral to the socialization process. This would entail, in particular, involving men in movements to end violence against women, encouraging men to share equally in child care and household work and promoting programmes to educate and enable men to assume their responsibilities to prevent HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases.

32. Men are the main agents of violence in the world. It is also clear that widespread patterns of masculinity, or definitions of what it means to be a man, support this violence. Yet many men are not violent and there are alternative patterns of masculinity that are displayed by and open for men.

33. The roles and responsibilities of men in ending violence are manifold. They range from men changing their relationships with their intimate partners to male-dominated institutions changing the way they function to better confront issues of gender and power.

34. A broad and intense amalgamation of cultures and practices in the Asian and Pacific region offers specific opportunities to engage men in violence prevention. This may include engaging men who are policy makers, public service providers and civic and religious leaders. Other innovative initiatives include workshops for men, police training and awareness-raising activities or campaigns targeted at and led by men who repudiate violence against women.

⁴ *Report of the Fourth World Conference on Women, Beijing, 4-15 September 1995* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.96.IV.13), chap. I, resolution 1, annex I.

⁵ *Ibid.*, annex II.

35. Ultimately, however, policy and institutional transformations also require fundamental changes among the individual perceptions, beliefs and behaviours of men, who are fathers, sons, husbands and brothers.

36. Several groups of men in the ESCAP region are actively campaigning to eliminate violence against women. Such movements are active in Bangladesh, Cambodia, Fiji, India, Malaysia, Pakistan and the Philippines. The white ribbon campaign that was started by men to advocate against violence against women in Canada currently has chapters in China, India, Japan, Pakistan and Viet Nam.

37. Policies and programmes should be designed to involve men and boys to promote an improved understanding of their own identity and behaviour and to change gender-insensitive traditional attitudes and cultural beliefs about the roles of men and women. Men and boys need to adopt responsible sexual behaviour and become involved in care and support. They need to practice egalitarian and consenting sexual relations and provide caring roles in relation to pregnancy, birth and child-rearing. Men have critical roles to play in gender relations, promoting women's economic rights and independence, including access to employment, appropriate working conditions, control of economic resources and full participation in decision-making.

38. Attention is increasingly being paid to the role of men and boys in sharing the responsibility of providing comprehensive care for those infected with HIV. Family members, almost overwhelmingly women and girls, usually provide such care, which is often unrecognized and unpaid. A disproportionate burden affects women's ability to access and retain work and girls are forced to drop out of school to take care of the family when one or both parents die of AIDS. Unequal distribution of caregiving between women and men in relation to HIV/AIDS in the household and community, especially in worst-affected countries, may also have economic implications. For example, in cases where women do not have access to paid work or are prohibited from inheriting or owning property, the death of a spouse or a father often deprives a family of significant economic support. Men therefore have an important role to play in promoting women's economic rights and independence, including access to employment, appropriate working conditions, control of economic resources and full participation in decision-making. Also required is a policy response based on gender equality, empowerment of women and equitable distribution of paid and unpaid work between women and men.

39. Men's roles in enhancing women's reproductive health and rights are also increasingly a focus of attention. There is growing recognition that the role of men is crucial in challenging, and in changing, such unequal power relations, and for effective interventions in these areas.

40. Full engagement of men and boys in achieving gender equality requires much greater attention to gender stereotypes and expectations about men's roles and responsibilities, and how these expectations influence male behaviour. Such stereotypes continue to place greater emphasis, as well

as greater value, on the role of men and boys in public life and in the workplace, as opposed to women's role in unpaid family labour, caregiving and community work.

41. Peer pressure, socialization processes and belief systems influence adherence to gender-specific stereotypes. Ideas of the inferiority or superiority of either of the sexes, and of stereotyped roles for men and women, not only limit progress in achieving gender equality but also perpetuate inequalities and can constitute obstacles to men's abilities and opportunities for redressing gender inequalities.

42. While prevention of violence against women, of HIV/AIDS infection and reconciliation of professional and family responsibilities have thus far received the most attention, the role of men can have a decisive impact, in terms of promoting gender equality, or constituting obstacles and challenges, in many other areas. For example, unequal power relations continue to affect opportunities for women's equal participation in decision-making in many spheres and at different levels. Gender stereotypes continue to affect boys' and girls' educational opportunities and achievement, as well as expectations with regard to their working lives, thus perpetuating inequalities.

IV. Partnerships with civil society and regional cooperation

43. In the context of accelerated globalization, the diversity of member countries in the ESCAP region and the commonality of the gender issues that are being addressed, partnerships and regional cooperation are vital for policy collaboration and strategy building related to women's concerns and gender equality. The need for greater regional cooperation is obviously not limited to Governments. Regional interaction between civil society organizations and all-round partnerships between these Governments and the business community are crucial to develop and sustain broad-based political action towards women's empowerment and gender equality. Indeed, this partnership is an essential corollary of greater intergovernmental cooperation and a crucial element of appropriate systems of governance.

44. Partnerships and regional cooperation are of great importance and their benefits are numerous. Cross-border partnerships encompassing a range of governmental and non-governmental stakeholders have established the global frameworks for addressing gender issues. Highlights include the Charter of the United Nations, which declared the equal rights of men and women; the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, which adopted the goals of gender equality, development and peace; and the historic United Nations Millennium Declaration, which pledged "to promote gender equality and the empowerment of women as effective ways to combat poverty, hunger and disease and to stimulate development that is truly sustainable".⁶ These frameworks, in turn, have guided Governments through a common set of goals, appropriate implementation strategies and indicators to measure the progress in implementation and achievements.

⁶ See General Assembly resolution 55/2 of 8 September 2000.

45. Partnerships and regional cooperation enable the best technical assistance to be made available for mainstreaming gender in policies and programmes. The union of regional and subregional partners allows different stakeholders to identify, pool and share information, intelligence and expertise, to address common needs or problems and to advocate and demonstrate new and innovative concepts, tools, strategies and practices. In this regard, the institutional and technical capacity of Governments and their non-governmental organization partners can be strengthened. Multilateral agencies can provide technical guidance in sensitization and awareness-raising on gender issues through evidence-based approaches and in the integration of gender concerns in policies and plans. The latter entails the analysis of data, policy assessment for gender sensitivity, reformulation of programmes and strategies and the derivation of gender-sensitive indicators for monitoring and evaluation.

46. While many forms of economic and social interaction and of governance can and should occur at the global, national and local levels, there is a clear need to strengthen them at the regional level. For example, partnerships and regional cooperation are essential to check on Asia-Pacific cross-border gender issues such as migration, trafficking in women and children and the spread of HIV/AIDS. These issues and their impact on gender relations are not confined to national boundaries and measures to address these require a region-wide partnership. In this connection, there is a role for a regional mechanism for advocacy on gender concerns and the coordination of strategies for the promotion of gender-based policy development. Additionally, the capacities of non-governmental organizations and civil society can be enhanced for planning and conducting advocacy campaigns for gender equality.

47. Gender inequality intersects social, economic and racial boundaries. The cultural, religious and ethnic diversity of the region makes it imperative to understand the socio-cultural and religious bases of the unequal gender power relations, female subordination and male domination. The sharing of research on these issues at the regional and subregional levels presents opportunities for sharpening the understanding of the structural bases of gender inequalities to form the basis of behavioural change communication programmes. Conducting multi-country socio-cultural research and deliberating the findings at the regional or subregional level can provide in-depth insights into cultural and religious belief systems that determine gender-power relations and how they can be transformed and reconstituted in the light of changing circumstances.

48. There is an ongoing need for strengthening monitoring and evaluation systems, especially through the development of a set of indicators and data retrieval modalities. Regional collaborative mechanisms can facilitate the development of an agreed set of gender-based monitoring and evaluation indicators and in the planning and implementation of a system of data generation, reporting and dissemination, i.e. gender management information systems. Indicators alone cannot provide a complete picture of the situation of women and men in the region. The generation of a set of

indicators, the documentation of processes and distillation of lessons learned and best practices could lend useful insights into the success or failure of programmes.

49. Non-governmental organizations and civil society are important partners in advancing the Beijing agenda as well as other gender-related plans. Rights-based groups continue to raise awareness of the legal entitlements of women, violence issues and reproductive rights. The promotion of women's human rights and the elimination of violence necessitate concerted efforts and partnerships between Governments and civil society. Advocacy activities by non-governmental organizations can be strengthened to sustain broad-based political will through intercountry coalition-building and networking. Various partnership modalities could be identified and shared with other countries through regional conducts.

50. Partnering with relevant government ministries, non-governmental organizations and the private sector can be an effective way to extend basic social services to cover hard-to-reach groups. Partnering can offer increased access to funding, training and other resources that could enhance the quality and scope of service delivery strategies. The initiatives can include decentralizing some of the services traditionally provided in residential institutions, thus enabling more people to live in their own homes and communities. They also involve creating new services, such as helping to reintegrate trafficked women and assisting people living with AIDS. In many countries, Governments are developing new methods for delivering services through partnerships. These initiatives can be supported through a regional project that promotes the sharing of experience, identification of good practices and development of training materials for service providers.

51. Some of the other principal potential benefits of regional cooperation and partnerships relate to activities that can provide all stakeholders with greater resources and opportunities to facilitate effective implementation of gender policies. However, there are also broader potential benefits, including cross-country assistance, in the form of resources, information and experience. Additionally, partnerships at the regional level provide valuable opportunities to create a strong sense of common identity, which is necessary for effective, joint efforts. In this manner, regional cooperation can be mobilized more rapidly and can be more responsive to particular circumstances. It will be easier to develop close, informal and frequent contact between key actors, both governmental and non-governmental, and to achieve sufficient mutual understanding so that problems are addressed effectively. It may be easier to develop principles, rules and standards that are sufficiently specific to have a practical impact yet are appropriate for and acceptable in the circumstances of each country.

V. The way forward

52. In spite of the long history of efforts to promote the advancement of women, many obstacles remain in terms of achieving the empowerment of women and gender equality in the region. Many women continue to face de jure and de facto discrimination. It is therefore important to intensify

efforts to promote the elusive goal of gender equality. The first and key approach is to mainstream a gender perspective in all sectors of development and integrate gender concerns in the public policy agenda in line with the agreed conclusions 1997/2 of the Economic and Social Council and Council resolution 2001/41.

53. Mainstreaming is a process to achieve gender equality, not an end in itself. Other approaches are necessary to strategically and substantially complement the process. In the context of creating and sustaining an enabling environment, three other necessary approaches are proposed: (a) a rights-based approach; (b) working with men; and (c) partnerships, including regional cooperation.

54. The selected areas of focus, linked to gender mainstreaming and aimed at creating and sustaining an enabling environment for gender equality, are interrelated and therefore cannot be addressed in isolation. Progress in one area cannot occur without interventions in another. For example, mainstreaming gender activities is achieved by concentrating on women's human rights; therefore, women's human rights and gender mainstreaming belong to a continuum. Gender mainstreaming and the adoption of a rights-based approach require fundamental changes in societal and organizational cultures if women's interests are to be fully integrated. Regional cooperation represents the broadest, most practical institutional partnership to focus efforts for positive changes, including changes in goals, policy-making, resource allocations and the sharing of expertise. Engaging with men indicates that gender mainstreaming is just as much an issue for men as for women. It is a social and community issue, at which levels men's roles and responsibilities generally predominate.

55. Gender mainstreaming is the process of ensuring that women's and men's issues are integrated into development planning. It means considering the impact of all actions and decisions on females as well as males. It implies making sure that the outcomes are equal and equitable for both women and men. At times, it involves special programmes for increasing women's status to a level similar to that of men and implementing strategies to address men's issues and behaviours, particularly in the areas of responsibility for family planning and preventing violence against women.

56. Mainstreaming is not simply about numbers. It is primarily about participation, i.e. the right to participate. It is therefore extremely important that gender mainstreaming be accompanied by a rights-based approach, which is necessarily aimed at the expansion of assets and the capabilities of men and women to participate in, negotiate with, influence, control and hold accountable institutions that affect their lives (Sen, 1999). Increased participation in an unequal development process will not secure a significant change in women's options or opportunities, nor will it achieve gender equality.

57. Mainstreaming is, in essence, a process of partnerships. It depends on and works towards partnerships in and for development. Specifically, this entails collaboration among allies and coalitions and the participation of agencies representing a wide range of constituencies working

together to identify shared goals and mutually reinforcing strategies towards the empowerment of women and gender equality.

58. Governments alone cannot resolve the problem of gender inequality. Diverse groups representing civil society constituencies must work together so that their combined efforts can match the systemic and deeply embedded nature of the problem.

59. Women, women's movements and their allies will continue to advocate for and guide gender-sensitive policies and practices. This will ensure that the work of mainstreaming will be adequately implemented despite the interests of a changing cast of governmental, bilateral and multilateral personnel who may or may not have a commitment to or understanding of gender mainstreaming and equality. A mainstreaming strategy hinges on supporting women to collectively assess their situation, express their priorities and concerns, strengthen their public voice, advocate and lobby for policy reform, and develop approaches to substantively influence societal decision-making (UNIFEM, 2003).

60. Gender mainstreaming is about how women and men have access to and control of resources, their capabilities to participate in development processes, and how all of these lead to different levels of health, education, salary, jobs and decision-making, among others.

61. Men therefore have a critical role to play in mainstreaming gender in the family, the community and society. Their involvement in achieving gender equality must be guided by gender justice and gender partnership, as these principles are integral to men's ability to work with women in cultivating a lasting legacy of equality. Gender partnerships and alliances are essential as they are powerful and viable for achieving gender equality.

62. Regional cooperation represents an important partnership for taking forward gender mainstreaming to promote gender equality. By drawing on mutual strengths, sharing resources, knowledge and expertise from a range of stakeholders across the region, regional cooperation can in fact play a central role in meeting the many gender inequality challenges currently confronting countries in the ESCAP region. Obvious cross-border gender concerns pertaining to migration, trafficking and HIV/AIDS, for instance, can benefit greatly from Governments, non-governmental organizations, regional-level intergovernmental organizations and international development partners working together at the regional level for constructive dialogue and policy action.

63. Regional cooperation is an excellent opportunity for bringing together expertise from the region to counter sex-related and transnational crimes, for example Internet pornography, people smuggling and trafficking of persons, especially women and children. Regional initiatives and programmes developed by multilateral agencies have played a vital role in the struggle against gender violence. Regional cooperation can also provide a concerted and coordinated approach for partners to organize capacities, to build networks within and between regions and to coalesce in order to advocate

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successfully for the inclusion of gender mandates within the mainstream development themes, inter alia, of environment and development, human rights, population and development, economic and social development, human settlements and food.

64. Regional cooperation involves working both with women's movements and non-governmental organizations, as well as supporting and strengthening women's national machineries. In this regard, the focus should be on developing mainstreaming strategies to encourage gender-responsive planning and policy-making, both within national Governments and with regional policy-making organizations and other multilateral agencies.

65. Regional cooperation can enable the broadening and deepening of gender mainstreaming strategies by bringing together diverse groups. Working together, their efforts can match the systemic and deeply embedded nature of the problem of gender inequality. The regional venue provides an excellent space for Governments, United Nations agencies and civil society, especially men's and women's groups, to come together in a broad-based movement to find common ground around an agenda for achieving gender equality.

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