

A high-level policy event
EMPOWERING WOMEN IN DEVELOPMENT: CHALLENGES BEYOND 2015

October 8-10, 2014
Vilnius

CONFERENCE CONCLUSIONS

BACKGROUND:

The Conference aimed at strengthening, mainstreaming and expanding partnerships for the promotion of women's rights and gender equality in the post-2015 agenda.

The specific objectives of the Conference:

- to facilitate a comprehensive discussion on policy principles and good practices in gender equality and women's rights in the post-2015 agenda;
- to develop the synergies between gender initiatives from different regions;
- to enhance the political and civil dialogue on the best practices for promoting gender equality.

The 3-Day Conference was organized in 5 sessions, concentrated on the issues of gender-based violence, women's economic empowerment, women's leadership and political participation in democratic development.

150 participants - most prominent women activists, politicians, entrepreneurs, journalists, academia and other experts from the European Union and its neighborhoods, Middle East and other regions (34 countries) – attended the event. The representatives of the Community of Democracies, UN WOMEN, UN CEDAW, European Institute for Gender Equality, Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, Nordic Council of Ministers were present.

Event organizers: the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Lithuania and the Eastern Europe Studies Center, Lithuanian NGO. Event partners: Nordic Council of Ministers / Office in Lithuania, Women's Democracy Network / the International Republican Institute, Community of Democracies Working Group on Women and Democracy, Swedish International Liberal Centre, Center for Equality Advancement (NGO, Lithuania), Vilnius University Gender Studies Center (Lithuania).

CONCLUSIONS:

The introduced experiences, practices, entailed by deliberations resulted in the following conclusions and recommendations:

- Increasing attention to gender equality and women's rights in different contexts and formats world-wide, with a special focus on the recently discussed post-2015 development agenda, is promising and encouraging. Nevertheless, gender

inequalities, segregation and discrimination still represent severe obstacles for fair and sustainable social and economic growth, therefore it is strategically important to keep this issue in the forefront;

- On the issue of women's participation in the governance, the focus should shift to the implementation of obligations related to developing women's empowerment and leadership capacity, ensuring necessary legal frameworks and measures on equal participation with men (e.g. parliamentary quotas ensuring equal political participation of women and men), and monitoring the implementation of already existing both international and national laws and practices on the subject. Solidarity among women, men's involvement, mentorship and gender competence development are also of significant importance. Understanding that mature democracy is impossible without full women's participation and that it is founded on gender equality should be leading preconditions of successful governance.
- Economic empowerment could be supported and promoted by approaching the existing challenges in a constructive and consistent way, applying gender sensitive measures, backed by systematic collection of sex-disaggregated data, statistics and research. Mapping the evidence of effective problem solutions, learning from good practices, investing into women-friendly policy planning, taking advantage of the existing funding opportunities for creating infrastructures, capacity building and combatting harmful practices are the means recommended to follow.
- In dealing with gender-based violence and harmful practices, it's important to publicly condemn them and acknowledge that they should not be considered a private matter. Adequate legislative commitments should follow. Human rights approach has to be implemented based on principals of prosecution, protection and prevention. Economic engagement plays a big role here. The same importance should be attached to advocating women's participation in peace and confidence building, post-conflict reconstruction processes in cases of social upheaval and conflict situations. The role of NGOs, especially their initiatives targeted to support activists on community-level, is of extreme significance.
- In the light of the upcoming post-2015 agenda, a number of persisting problems are challenging the smooth achievement of the present Millennium development goals as well as the future development agenda. Maintaining consistent manifold gender dialogue, backed by coalitions, self-support groups, as well as individual dedication and self-determination is a prerequisite for mainstreaming the gender equality on global, national and local agendas. A number of multiple supplementary means – implementation of temporary special measures, legislation and its implementation management, financial commitment, education, capacity building – are key for improving the situation worldwide.
- Gender based problems (harmful practices, violence, stereotypes) are closely interrelated with the existing objectifying and discouraging public discourse. At this point such means as pro-active approach, creativity and consistency, use of

media, with a special emphasis on benefits of social media and its application to everyday work, can help “seizing the window of opportunity”.

- Gender related problems should be dealt with as a single entity, with respect to a complexity of prevailing societal moral values, historical and cultural experiences, as well as economic background. Such cross-cutting issues as closer cooperation with media, governmental institutions, international and local organizations (including church where appropriate), improved skills and competences, better access to information, involvement of men and boys should be taken into consideration when dealing with inequality. A human rights–based approach is encouraged.
- Even in the era of high technological advancement there is still a necessity to meet, create networks and support groups for sharing experiences, achievements and lessons learned.