



# REIMAGINING CSW

## CIVIL SOCIETY PERSPECTIVES ON IMPROVING THE UN COMMISSION ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN

The UN Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) is the pre-eminent and largest annual gathering of individuals and organizations in the world focused on gender equality, with representatives from governments, multilateral organizations, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), academia, media and other sectors. In view of CSW's potential to be a game-changing platform for gender equality

in the 21st century, NGO-CSW distributed a survey to nearly 50,000 civil society organizations (CSOs) to “collect input, ideas and views on how to transform the CSW to increase its value and potential to accelerate the advancement of gender equality in countries worldwide.”

Analysis of more than 600 responses received revealed that overwhelmingly, CSOs find CSW a crucial and effective space for advancing gender equality and that the evolution to a hybrid CSW (a combination of virtual and in-person) has vastly improved inclusion and relevance. It also highlighted three consequential areas of reform that are in high demand:

“We reiterate our commitment to further strengthening gender equality and the empowerment of all women and their human rights at the United Nations. We therefore resolve to revitalize the Commission on the Status of Women, including to promote the effective implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action... as well as to address situations of violations of women’s and girls’ rights...” *from Pact for the Future Zero Draft*

### **INCREASE ACCOUNTABILITY OF ALL CSW STAKEHOLDERS – GOVERNMENTS, UN ORGANIZATIONS, CSOS AND OTHERS BY...**

- ...establishing concrete and resourced mechanisms for local preparations prior to and follow-up processes after the annual convening. More active and strategic engagement of CSOs by UN Women and the UN regional commissions in focused preparatory and follow up processes – as well as significantly strengthened regional and global NGO coordination mechanisms for CSW – could enable this.
- ...streamlining and focusing the process of reaching agreed conclusions. Producing ambitious, evidence-based agreements that can be communicated in a one- or two-page document and assessed annually would be more effective.
- ...recognizing that gender inequality and the pushback on women’s rights is at crisis levels. Respondents suggested that CSW could operate more like the Conference of the Parties (COP) on climate change with a rotating host country and an agenda that assesses progress, sets goals, negotiates strategies and policies, and shares proven and promising practices and research.

## ENHANCE INCLUSION OF DIVERSE CONSTITUENCIES BY...

- ...urgently reforming the process of ECOSOC accreditation. Make it more transparent, expeditious and also create more pathways for non-accredited NGOs to participate.
- ...investing far more in publicizing the existence, agenda and outcomes of CSW. Many assert that CSW is 'the best kept secret' in work on gender equality.

"There needs to be year-long activities related to the CSW and recommendations from it. It needs to be more like the excitement and ongoing activity for, for example, COP." Survey Respondent

Recognizing the urgency of gender equality requires that the deliberations and outcomes of CSW are intentional and widely publicized. More information and consultations in local languages are also in high demand.

- ...focusing on those who are most excluded or inadequately represented at CSW, including young people, older women and widows, men and boys of all ages, grassroots organizations, indigenous women and girls and those with disabilities.

## ENHANCE EFFECTIVENESS AND RELEVANCE OF CSW BY...

- ...systematically and regularly providing a global overview of discriminatory laws and practices against women. There was overwhelming support having a regular annual review of discriminatory laws and practices against women and girls; having a standing item on ending gender-based violence against women;

"Having a regular focus on discriminatory laws would allow a comprehensive review and shed light on the challenges that women and girls face worldwide. It would provide an opportunity to showcase successful strategies and best practices for addressing and eliminating discriminatory practices. By highlighting both the problems and solutions, the CSW can contribute to the advancement of legal reforms and the promotion of gender equality globally." Survey Respondent

having the Women, Peace and Security agenda; utilization of reports of the CEDAW, Special Rapporteur on violence against women and Working Group on Discriminatory Laws with an interactive dialogue with CEDAW, SRVAW, and WGDAW.

- ...incorporating a regular focus on implementation of the SDGs relevant to gender equality rather than a singular focus on the (nearly) thirty-year old Beijing Platform for Action (BPFA).

The feedback generated by the survey is the beginning of a consultative process that NGO-CSW will undertake to ensure that CSO views are substantively and systematically represented in ongoing deliberations about a revitalized CSW. The demographic data in the survey suggests that respondents were older (60% were over 50 years old), largely from Africa, Europe and North America (77%), almost evenly divided between those that are accredited with ECOSOC (58%) and those that are not, and have limited familiarity with CSW (61%). Future consultations should be organized to amplify and expand this input with constituencies whose voices need to form part of the CSO response.