

1st Meeting of the UNECE Initiative on “Gender Responsive Standards”

4th April 2017 – International Trade Centre – Geneva

Minutes of the meeting

1. The meeting was attended by representatives of the following organizations: Association des Etats Généraux des Etudiants de l'Europe, British Standards Institution (BSI), DRR Dynamics, EDGE Certified Foundation, Gender and Mine Action Programme, the Institute for Standardization of Moldova, the International Electrotechnical Commission (IEC), International Gender Champions & Women@theTable, the International Organisation for Standardization, the ISO/TC 68/SC 4 dealing with financial services, Permanent Mission of France to the UN Office Geneva, Permanent Mission of Sweden to the UN Office Geneva, Permanent Mission of Romania to the UN Office Geneva, the International Telecommunication Union (ITU), the Swedish Standards Institute, the International Trade Centre (ITC), the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe(UNECE), UNAIDS, UNICEF, World Meteorological Organisation (WMO), WorkSafe New Zealand.
2. They represented a diverse group of stakeholders and a large mixture of expertise. While introducing themselves and their institutions, they made the following points:
 - Standards bodies were very interested in strengthening the role of women in the process of making standards;
 - Regulators and other standards users needed to have good quality standards that could be used with confidence for policy-making purposes;
 - Representatives of women associations including vulnerable women expressed the need for standards that have a positive impact on women's lives.
3. The meeting was organized by the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe, Working Party on Regulatory Cooperation and Standardization Policies, to follow up on the decision taken at its last session “to initiate consultations on developing a roadmap and a recommendation on mainstreaming gender into standards and regulatory policies at national and international levels (Decision 4)¹”. It was facilitated by the Senior Policy Advisor on Gender Mainstreaming of the UNDP New York Office and hosted by the “She Trades” programme of the International Trade Centre.
4. The list of participants and the presentations are all available online, at <https://www.unece.org/index.php?id=45465>
5. The UNECE, UNDP, and ITC representatives made brief introductory remarks.
6. The facilitator introduced gender equality as a goal and gender mainstreaming as a strategy. She clarified that the group could work on two different priorities: it could focus either on gender

¹ [Report of Working Party on Regulatory Cooperation and Standardization Policies on its twenty-sixth session, ECE/CTCS/WP.6/2016/2.](#)

specific standards or on mainstreaming gender across all standards and across the process of standards making. Within this second priority, the group could also choose to focus on the standard organizations and how they integrate gender equality internally or the group can focus on the different stages of developing standards.

7. The facilitator explained that by choosing organizations as the entry point, our interventions are more sustainable and comprehensive but require long-term investments. She explained the Theory of Change on Gender Mainstreaming within organizations used by the UNDP Gender Certification Programme which shows how synergies among management systems, capacities, partnerships, knowledge and enabling environment lead to efficient development of gender equality results, in this case, gender responsive standards.
8. The UNDP facilitator suggested several entry points for mainstreaming gender in standards. These include:
 - Before the development of the standard:
 - o Gender-responsive selection of subject matter
 - o Analysis of the possible gender implications of the standards
 - o Gender balance in the composition of the Technical Committee
 - o Gender-responsive design of the consultation process
 - During the development of the standard
 - o Using the findings of the gender analysis to inform the standard draft
 - o Engaging women's organizations and / or gender experts during the development and consultations
 - o Highlighting gender in discussions with stakeholders
 - In the standard document
 - o Integrating solutions to address gender differences
 - Implementation of the Standard
 - o Gender-informed educational activities
 - o Measuring the impact of the standards on women and men
 - o Ensuring that conformity assessment processes are gender-informed.
9. The presentation was followed by a discussion on whether gender could be addressed as part of diversity. One of the participants said that his organization had a policy to ensure that a standard is universally relevant – for example across climatic conditions – and accessible to all – including to the disabled. That policy also – from his point of view - covered women as one of the aspects of diversity.
10. Other participants expressed the following thoughts:
 - Gender is the only aspect of diversity that is analytically accessible in every country;
 - Women are half of the populations while disadvantaged groups are a minority;

- Women's needs are different in that they change through their lifetimes – for example because of their child-bearing role;
- There is no need to prove or even discuss that increased participation of women in standards processes led to better standards, as it is a worthwhile goal from a societal point of view, as it contributes to their empowerment; and because there is enough evidence from a wide variety of other contexts of the value added and positive impacts gained by having a gender balanced / diverse group of participants
- Because privilege is invisible to those who have it – women will bring value to the standards process by perceiving aspects that men may fail to see.

11. During the discussion, participants made the following points:

- The very low participation of women in standards setting is an undisputed fact. There is little data available about the participation of women in standardization. A survey by BSI indicated that women were, approximately, about 11 % of the 11'000 experts voluntarily involved in the BSI activities.
- Increased participation by women was seen by all participants as a value per se, as it would lead to better quality standards – although not all participants agreed that standards themselves (in their content and/or implementation) were at present moment necessarily gender biased.
- There is some evidence that women's participation improves the quality of the standards: one example being standards for humanitarian demining. However it was, in general, accepted by the group that more participation by women would improve not only the technical aspects but also the "soft" aspects because of the mounting body of evidence from other contexts.
- Some standards may already be at least in part gender informed. For example, IEC takes into account the different effect of the electric current in the body for men and women, and gendered tests for some equipment have become more widespread.

12. The group wanted to produce change that would be systematic (institutionalized) rather than incidental or "tokenistic". One action that could be undertaken is the adoption of a gender policy in the standards organizations as workplaces, which some of the institutions represented at the meeting already had.

13. Participants thought that reaching parity in some of the technical committees (TCs) is a distant objective because of the very limited pool of women available, due to the low number of women in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) and certain other industries.

14. One participant said a possible solution to that problem was to have a gender expert participate in the work of the TCs, in a similar capacity as, for example, the representative of consumers. In his country, the "consumer representative" did not necessarily have to be a technical expert if none were available. As an alternative, another participant said women NGOs could be invited to participate in the work of TCs, even if they lacked subject matter expertise.

15. Other participants thought that all members of a technical committee could be mandated to take a gender course. They pointed to the availability of relevant online courses, for example by UN/WOMEN.
16. Using the analytical framework that had been previously introduced, participants engaged in a practical group-work on a standard on protective equipment (PE). PE that is not well adapted to women's morphology could result in: exposing women to hazards, women performing their tasks less effectively, or women not using the equipment. This could affect women's participation in the economic activity: they could be reluctant to take up the job, they could be terminated or not promoted, or the employer – knowing about the limitations of the PE - would hesitate to hire them. The PE needed to take into account not only morphology but also cultural and psychological aspects, as well as be based on relevant research on the different effects of exposure to toxic substances on men as opposed as on women. Additionally, the standards development process needed to be inclusive, involving not just women but also for example representatives of clothing manufacturers. In general, the adoption of a standard is a corporate decision, or it may be a societal decision if it is a compulsory standard. In some cases, role models could play a role and incentivize the use of PE for example.
17. The following session was devoted to an exchange of existing gender-specific certification schemes. EDGE introduced its certification system for workplace gender equality, AFNOR presented two state labels: France's label *diversité* and label *égalité*, and UNDP its Gender Equality Seal Certification program for the Private Sector. Additionally, the UN/CEFACT work on "Women in trade facilitation" was briefly introduced. All presentations are available online.
18. The closing session discussed next steps for the group. Several proposals for action in the short – medium and long term emerged from the discussion. These included:
 - To develop and adopt a Charter of Gender-Responsive National Standards Bodies which includes selection of actions which can be taken and would ask for commitment to a set number of those actions as appropriate / applicable / practicable for each organization, for example:
 - o To develop a recommendation with guidance to standards bodies for the development of a gender plan for their standards setting process;
 - o To present the experience of implementing the Charter or Recommendation to international meetings, such as the WP. 6 annual session, or the ISO General Assembly;
 - o Standards bodies would commit to no more panels that are all men – and no more TCs that are all men (no same sex panels);
 - o Develop training programmes for the implementation of the recommendation.
 - Investigate the formation of an alliance of "International Gender Champions-Standards";

- To replicate the experience of gender champions to “standards gender champions”: for example to develop a role description and key responsibilities / actions for standards gender champions
- Investigate the possibility of creating Gender Expert Networks (similar to consumer expert network model); network of people trained as gender experts who can join committees specifically to help them identify, analyze and resolve issues of gender bias with the standard and/or which may be created by its implementation
- Pick a pilot:
 - o Identify a standard that is being developed and make that standard gender informed;
 - o Pilots could include, among others: Disaster risk reduction/Security and Resilience – Trade – Financial sector services.
- Assessing whether standards are gender-biased:
 - o Collect evidence whether there exists gender bias in the content and implementation of standards;
 - o Propose actions for removing gender bias from standards where it exists and taking measures to avoid introducing gender bias into newly developed standards;
 - o Collect evidence of how participation of women in standards setting contributes to improving the quality of standards (irrespective of a gender bias).
- Assessing the impact of standards on women:
 - o How do women entrepreneurs use standards?
 - o Could women have more opportunities if they used standards more?

19. The representative of BSI agreed that she was willing to coordinate the work on the Charter.

20. Participants agreed that they would meet twice more via webinars in May and June and if possible organize another physical meeting in September. A first deliverable for the group would be reporting back to the Annual Session of the Working Party of Regulatory Cooperation and Standardization Policies (Geneva, 28-30 November).