

## **Intervention – Ms. Elina Kalkku, Under-Secretary of State for Development Policy at the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland**

Panel discussion: Education for gender equality: a powerful tool for transformation

### *Check against delivery*

Education is a powerful tool to transform lives of young women. Ensuring every girls' access to quality education is crucial as it enables girls to realize their rights, increases their participation in the society and gives girls brighter future prospects. Education gives girls and young women power to decide on their own lives.

Gender equality in education is not only a matter of the education authorities. Issues such as child labour, child marriage and gender-based violence are factors that determine the "fate" of girls' study path. This means that all sectors of the society should contribute to successful education and career track of girls.

During its 100 years of independence, my country Finland has changed from a rather poor, agrarian country into a prosperous, safe and stable place. High-quality education and gender equality have been the most important reasons behind that success.

The guiding principle in the Finnish school system is to give equal educational opportunities for all. In order to ensure equal opportunities, education, study materials and school meals are offered free of charge.

Women in Finland have reached high positions in political decision-making and in business life. For example, eleven of our Government's nineteen ministers are women. However, boys and girls choose to study different subjects which leads to high segregation in the employment sector. Men are the overwhelming majority in IT and engineering. Women are over-represented in social and health care, arts and education sectors.

According to UNESCO, nearly 1 billion girls and women lack the skills to succeed in rapidly changing job markets. The gender disparity in Science, technology education and mathematics (STEM) subjects is alarming, especially as STEM

careers are often referred to as the jobs of the future. Sustainable development, social wellbeing and inclusive growth are highly dependent on innovation and human rights centered use of new technologies.

Finland is striving to make an effort in our foreign policy to influence global challenges in the field of education and gender equality. Finland's target is that 85 % of all new development actions contribute to gender equality and women's empowerment.

Finally, I would like to remind that women and girls' rights cannot be achieved without their right to make informed choices and decide over their own bodies. Having access to comprehensive sexuality education is key to the realization of sexual and reproductive health and rights of all women and girls. In Finland, we are proud to ensure that our school system provides comprehensive sexuality education to all students, regardless of gender.