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CIVIL SOCIETY ADVISORY GROUPS (CSAG) STRATEGY



CIVIL SOCIETY ADVISORY GROUPS

CSAG STRATEGY



**CIVIL SOCIETY SECTION
UN WOMEN**

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

I. CONTEXT	3
II. UN WOMEN CIVIL SOCIETY ADVISORY GROUPS	5
Partnerships of value and mutuality	6
Defining the role of the CSAGs	7
Defining the role of the CSAGs at the global, regional and national levels	7
III. MAKING THE CSAG PARTNERSHIPS WORK	9
Strengthening the functioning of the CSAGS	10
Improving CSAG communication	11
Creating an Inter-CSAG solidarity network	11
IV. ANNEX	13
Where can CSAGs be established?	14
Who can be a member of a CSAG?	14
Selection process of the CSAGs	15
Rotation and renewal of CSAGs membership	15



UN Women/Enas Abul Komsan

1

CONTEXT

1.

Context

Feminist victories of the 20th century have contributed to enormous gains and advances for women and girls. The establishment of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW), Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the Security Council resolutions related to the protection of women and girls were, to a large extent, the result of active pressure from civil society, mainly women's organizations and the feminist movement.

The 21st century has also spurred major successes for women's rights. With the creation of UN Women in 2010, in large part due to the effective Gender Equality Architecture Reform (GEAR) campaign promoted by the women's movement, civil society finally has a new and powerful mediator to influence the global women's rights agenda.

2015 will be seen as a historic year for women's rights. The new Agenda 2030 marks a giant step in the path towards achieving substantive gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls. Not since the Universal Declaration of Human Rights has there been such a complete and far-reaching call to act on these global and universal imperatives for human progress. The full implementation of all 17 Sustainable Development Goals, combined with the full, effective and accelerated implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action, has the potential to achieve sustainable and irreversible gender equality and change the lives of women and girls forever.

These gains notwithstanding, new challenges have emerged which hold the gender equality agenda hostage. Civil society and citizen action movements are facing repression from increasingly authoritarian political regimes; the current global crises including those of conflict and violent extremism are driving increased securitization and militarization and an intolerance of dissent; the financial crisis is further exacerbating this issue and has severely affected the work of civil society organizations and governments, including those traditionally supportive of civil society are cutting back on funds to civil society organizations. As a result the space for feminist actors and critical civic engagement and mobilization is shrinking in

virtually every part of the world.

Moreover while there appears to be strong focus from policy makers to issues of gender equality and women's empowerment, at the same time, there is an increasing politicization of the women's rights and gender justice agenda that hinders the work of civil society. The success of the negotiations of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development -and Goal 5 in particular- demonstrated that multilateral negotiations can achieve big results for the gender equality agenda. But what is equally true is that global commitments are pointless without accompanying ownership of those commitments and action at the national level.

In this context, the importance of alliance building in feminist advocacy and in political engagement, in order to both influence the international agenda and realize women's and girls' rights at the national level, has become evident. New alliances with other social justice movements, such as environmental organizations, faith-based organizations (FBOs), men's movements against patriarchy and trade unions, among others, have also become key to the realizing of women's rights. Furthermore, young women and men, boys and girls, who are also at the core of these fundamental structural changes that are being pursued, need to be deeply engaged and in leadership positions of the gender equality movement. New forms of connection in which youth are strongly involved have emerged from advances in information and communication technologies; these enable alliance-building among networks and facilitate global, national and trans-national activism.



UN Photo/Melina Mulkenrs

2

UN WOMEN CIVIL SOCIETY ADVISORY GROUPS (CSAGs)



2.

UN WOMEN CIVIL SOCIETY ADVISORY GROUPS (CSAGs)

In light of UN Women's call for Planet 50-50 by 2030 and the accelerated implementation of the 2030 Agenda, UN Women Civil Society Advisory Groups (CSAGs), established four years ago as advisory and advocacy bodies, will play a key role in strengthened institutional partnership and engagement with civil society. Presently, there are 42 CSAGs set up or in process globally with more than 500 members. The past four years have highlighted various challenges in the UN Women-CSAG partnership in countries, regions and globally, that have prevented this innovative and important forum from delivering effective results. Therefore, in pursuit of achieving accelerated action towards 2030, it is crucial that the CSAG mechanism is strengthened to overcome these challenges. It is equally vital to ensure that the CSAGs function effectively as frontline partners for UN Women. This means that UN Women must call upon the leadership of the CSAGs and create the necessary space for the CSAGs to exercise this leadership.

The UN Women CSAGs offer the opportunity to create a civil society solidarity network that can coordinate efforts with UN Women to accelerate advocacy and action to achieve gender equality by 2030. However, CSAGs are not the gatekeepers of UN Women's work with civil society. UN Women will continue to engage with civil society beyond the CSAGs widely, and in different spaces and constituencies; CSAG members must strengthen their own engagement with the broader civil society and social justice actors and support and facilitate UN Women's outreach, to multiply the impact of common actions.

Partnerships of value and mutuality

Achieving Planet 50-50 by 2030 requires collective leadership at all levels – global, regional and national; civil society is a fundamental part of this collective effort. UN Women needs the strong leadership of civil society to achieve Planet 50-50 as much as civil society needs UN Women to influence the global gender equality agenda.

What is the value of the CSAGs to UN Women?

Through the CSAGs, the expertise and knowledge of the women's movement informs UN Women's strategies and strengthens its capacity to exercise leadership at the global, regional and national levels. UN Women also draws upon civil society's mobilization power to amplify the impact of common messages including reaching out to those most in need.

What is the value of UN Women to the CSAG membership?

As an institutional mechanism, the CSAGs are an opportunity for civil society to influence and steer the global gender equality discourse and to use UN Women's convening role to bring in diverse stakeholders on contentious and emerging issues as well as strengthen new partnerships. CSAG members also derive strength and recognition for their on-ground work, at an individual and institutional level.

What is the value of CSAGs to each other?

The global, regional and national CSAGs together and in groups, form solidarity networks that can find strategies across region(s) so that larger gains can be forged for the gender equality movement beyond borders and nation- state boundaries.

Defining the role of the CSAGs

CSAGs are an institutional mechanism for regular dialogue, between UN Women and leaders from the gender equality movement, on key gender equality issues and priorities at national, regional and global levels. They have a double and complementary role — as advisors to UN Women and as advocates for the realization of the gender equality agenda.

Advisory Role

In their advisory role, CSAGs are a dynamic resource, for UN Women, of innovative initiatives, ideas, strategies and policy perspectives. In this vein, CSAGs will act to inform UN Women's strategic and policy perspectives and normative and intergovernmental activities. CSAGs are a strategic and substantive network of eminently qualified persons with diverse experience and expertise, perspectives and knowledge in UN Women's priority areas.

Advocacy Role

In their advocacy role, CSAGs play a vital political role in advancing shared objectives in promoting women's rights, gender equality and the empowerment of women.

CSAG members, individually and collectively, have leveraged their advocacy power and influence very effectively when engaged in inter-governmental processes and inter-governmental platforms.

UN Women's role is to facilitate spaces for dialogue

in these intergovernmental spaces and between CSAGs and other stakeholders such as governments and private sector to strengthen these advocacy efforts.

Defining the roles of CSAGs at the global, regional and national levels

Role of the Global CSAG

An advisory group to the UN Women Executive Director. The Global CSAG enables the Executive Director to consult with leading feminists and gender equality advocates and draw upon their rich and diverse expertise, experience, outreach and networks; the Global CSAG advises the Executive Director strategically and substantively and also politically as necessary; in doing so it strengthens her voice as the pre-eminent global gender equality advocate.

Role of the Regional CSAGs

Both advisory and advocate roles; UN Women and CSAG members draw upon each other's initiatives, ideas, and policy perspectives to advance on regional gender equality goals. UN Women draws upon the Regional CSAG for advocacy and political strategies at the regional level so that larger gains can be forged for the gender equality movement beyond country borders.

Role of the National CSAGs

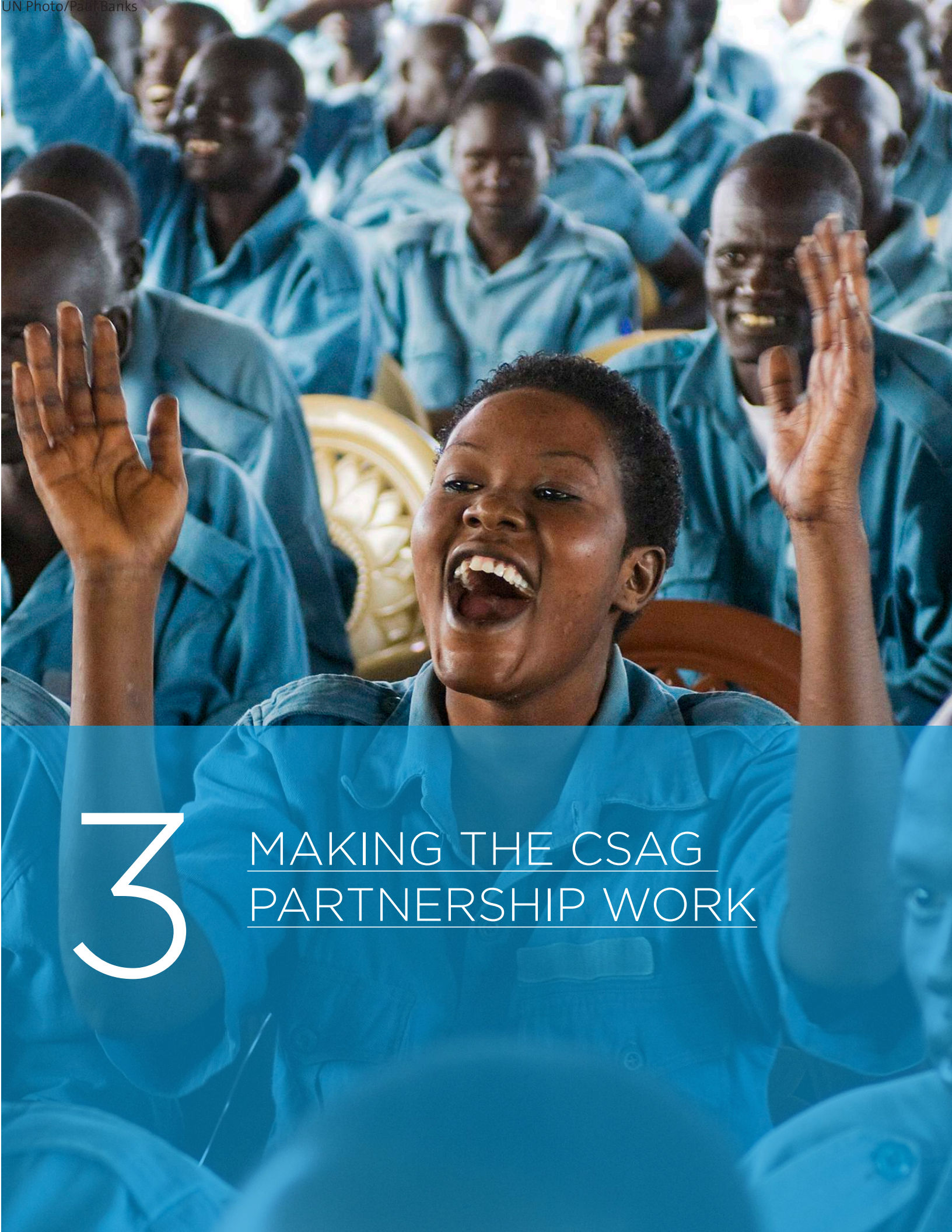
Both advisory and advocate roles; UN Women and CSAG members draw upon each other's initiatives, ideas, and policy perspectives to advance on national gender equality goals. UN Women draws upon the National CSAG for advocacy and political strategies at the country level to strengthen national activism and results for gender equality in countries.

TABLE 1:
UN Women's Civil Society Advisory Groups as of December, 2015

Group	Level
Africa (Eastern and Southern Africa)	Regional
Africa (Western and Central Africa)	Regional
Algeria	National
Arab States	Regional
Asia	Regional
Brazil	National
Cameroon	National
Caribbean	Multi-country
Colombia	National
Ecuador	National
Egypt	National
Ethiopia	National
Europe and Central Asia	Regional
Georgia	National
Global	Global
Guatemala	National
Haiti	National
India	National
Jordan/Syria	National

Group	Level
Kenya	National
Kyrgyzstan	National
Latin America and the Caribbean	Regional
Malawi	National
Mexico	National
Moldova	National
Morocco	National
Nepal	National
Nigeria	National
Palestine	National
Pakistan	National
Paraguay	National
Sierra Leone	National
South Africa	National
Tajikistan	National
Tanzania	National
Tunisia	National
Zimbabwe	National

*9 CSAGs are in the process of establishment or renewal



3

MAKING THE CSAG PARTNERSHIP WORK

3.

MAKING THE CSAG PARTNERSHIP WORK

The following recommendations on strengthening the functioning of the CSAGs, improving CSAG communication and creating an inter-CSAG solidarity network are drawn from diverse consultations and from the responses to the Survey on the roles and functions of the CSAGs launched early 2015 and reflect the views of UN Women country and regional offices and CSAG members. The Survey attempted to seek clarity on three key questions: the role of the CSAGs and how to strengthen it; what is necessary for effective CSAG communication; how do groups build solidarity to strengthen and add value to each other. More than 240 responses were received from all over the world.

Strengthening the functioning of the CSAGs

Recommendations on how to strengthen the functioning of the CSAGs:

UN Women should set up regular and substantive dialogue sessions between UN Women and the CSAG on crucial gender equality issues and topics of national, regional and global significance. The frequency of these meetings should be decided in advance and ideally at the beginning of the year and in consultation with CSAG members.

Together, UN Women and the CSAG must establish clear Action Points for follow up from meetings, for the CSAG and UN Women to accomplish.

UN Women should provide regular feedback on advice that it receives from CSAGs including information on how this advice informs policy decisions made by UN Women.

UN Women should clarify what deliverables are expected from the CSAG. For example, proposing a minimum number of formal inputs from the CSAG to

UN Women, with topics and frequency to be jointly established.

UN Women should facilitate sharing of successful practices and lessons learned, and disseminate the different ways in which CSAGs are able to push an agenda further, in collaboration with UN Women. There could be an annual CSAG review with inputs from all CSAGs.

UN Women should identify specific CSAGs to focus on particular women's rights challenges - such as in conflicts, disasters, etc.

CSAGs should play a stronger role in mobilizing and activism, with UN Women, in cases where women's human rights are challenged.

UN Women should use its convening role to facilitate the dialogue and partnership among CSAGs, civil society and other stakeholders such as policy makers, parliamentarians, social justice actors and the private sector on specific gender equality objectives at national and regional levels.

UN Women should use its convening role to facilitate dialogue with leading media actors and the CSAGs at national, regional and global levels to strengthen popular and mainstream media attention to particular gender equality objective.

CSAG members must facilitate UN Women's outreach to and engagement with the broader civil society to enlist new advocates and amplify the gender equality goals in countries in regions.

Improving CSAG communication

UN Women should meet with the CSAGs more regularly, even if with a group of selected members

Based on national and regional priorities, UN Women should establish focus groups and restrict some meeting agendas to certain themes for closer consideration. UN Women Civil Society Section at HQ should, in consultation with CSAGs, facilitate or initiate conversations on the online communication platform on certain themes and topics. Discussion leaders should be appointed; and networking and discussion between members of different groups should be facilitated.

UN Women Civil Society Section at HQ can facilitate networking among the CSAGs by adding topic-related online discussion spaces on Yammer which would bring together CSAG members from different groups based on their interest and area of expertise. CSAG members could decide on the topics, and a CSAG member (perhaps on a rotating basis) could be the moderator of a discussion space. Discussions could be time-limited (e.g. 4 weeks) or ongoing.

UN Women Civil Society Section at HQ should facilitate access and use of available online tools and should convene meetings using alternative tools such as Skype, Blue Jeans, phone calls, etc.

Creating an inter-CSAG solidarity network

Recommendations on how to contribute to the solidarity network:

Ensuring regular regional meetings in particular to increase face-to-face exposure between CSAGs.

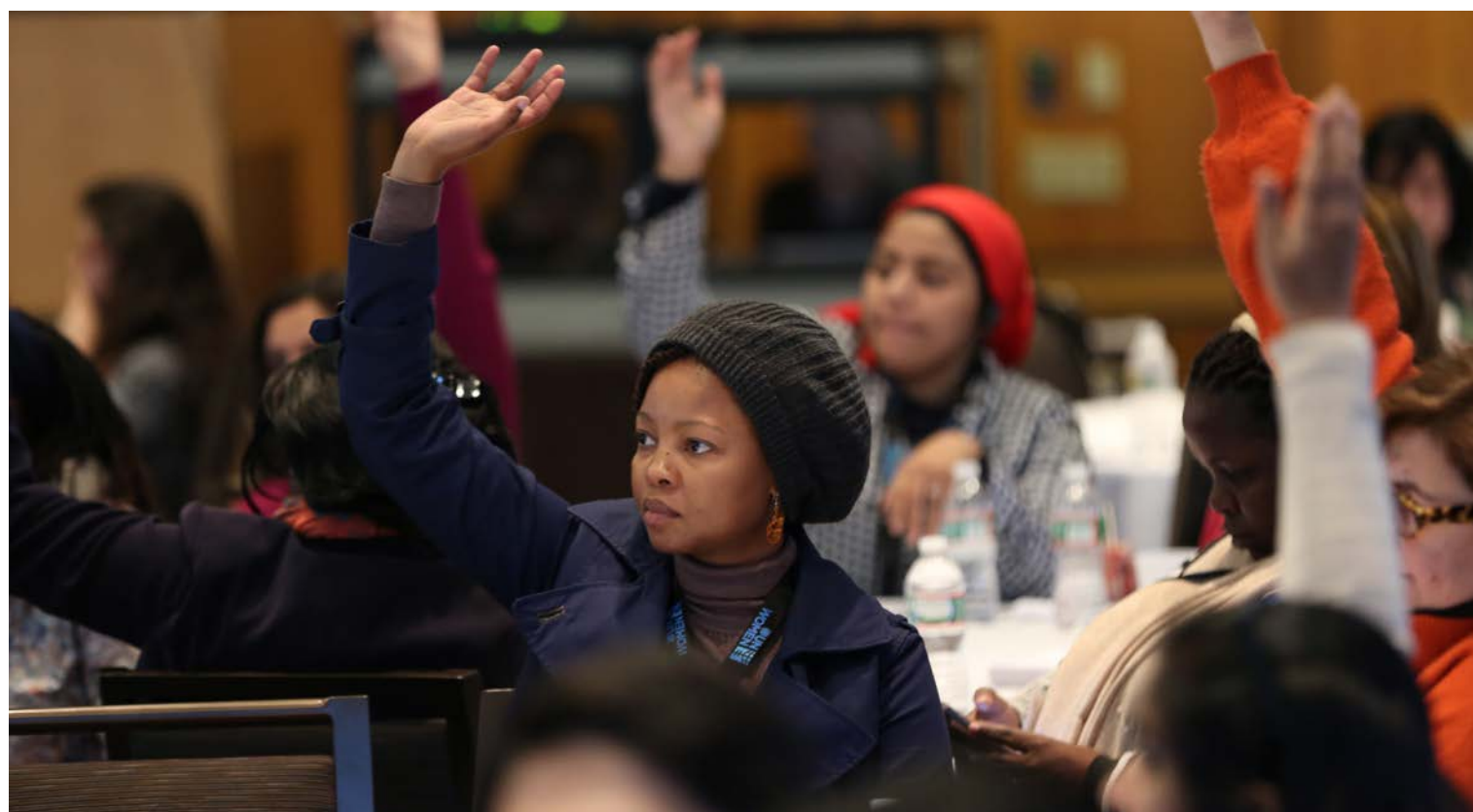
Together, UN Women and the CSAG must establish clear Action Points for follow up from meetings, for the CSAG and UN Women to accomplish.

Members of global, regional and national CSAGs to participate in other CSAG meetings (beyond their own) to facilitate global solidarity network, information sharing and common advocacy, to ensure a common thread between groups.

Looking into the formal directories of global, regional, and country-level CSAG members with contact information, available in the Sharepoint and Yammer online Tools.

Developing calendars or timely notifications of meetings or conferences of interest to CSAGs and publish regular newsletters highlighting the achievements and work of CSAGs.

Link the CSAGs at national and regional level with UN coordination opportunities, including those that lack substantive civil society input.



Top and Bottom photos: Participants at UN Women's Global Civil Society Dialogue in November 2015
UN Women/ Ryan Brown



4

ANNEX

4.

ANNEX

Where can CSAGs be established?

The CSAG is intended to be an expert body, offering advisory and advocacy support to strengthen UN Women's work on gender equality, women's rights and women's empowerment. Therefore, CSAGs should be set up in countries where civil society and the women's movement is strong with established voice and influence in the national gender equality agenda. UN Women should not establish a CSAG in those countries where civil society and the women's movement is weak or not well developed. In such countries, UN Women should work to strengthen the capacity of civil society and ensure that the context of the country is represented in the regional CSAG.

Who can be a member of a CSAG?

CSAG members will be selected among gender equality leaders who are strong, progressive and hail from the following categories: women's rights leaders; male gender equality advocates who are considered leaders on this issue; youth leaders with a track record of work on gender equality; leaders of indigenous groups; LGBTI leaders; advocates and leaders of marginalized groups; labor/Trade Union leaders; feminist media leaders and advocates; progressive and feminist faith based organization leaders.

In order to preserve the integrity and autonomy of the CSAG as a civil society group of eminent women's rights advocates and gender equality leaders, Private Sector representatives and members of government or political parties or government bodies cannot be part of a CSAG or part of any CSAG selection process.

While there is not a "one-size fits all" approach to setting up the CSAGs, the following principles apply:

The CSAGs are to have a small (7-10 members), manageable number of individuals.

The members of the CSAGs must be eminent civil society representatives with strong credentials as gender equality advocates, a proven record within the women's movement and understanding of the UN and UN Women context, priorities and mandates.

The CSAGs must include strong representatives from important constituencies such as progressive faith based groups and men and boys' organizations working on gender equality. The Groups should include strong youth advocates (with a suggested quota of 30%).

CSAG members join the advisory groups as eminent individuals and not as representatives of their organizations; while they bring the strength of their organization and constituency to the CSAG, within the CSAG they will operate in their individual capacity as a gender equality leader; the appointment will be for a fixed period of time, on a renewable basis and their membership is rotational. They may belong to organizations that are implementing partners of UN Women. However, the goal must be to avoid conflict of interest. Hence, the CSAGs should not have any oversight, monitoring or decision-making role in UN Women programming activities.

CSAG members must be able to devote time and attention to participate in this body. The CSAGs members should, therefore, actively engage with other members (national, regional and global) and provide valuable inputs to the work as needed.

Selection process of the CSAGs

The selection will be made in accordance with practices well-suited to local and national contexts to achieve a just, balanced and diverse membership.

The selection must be made through a broad and transparent call for nominations. However, UN Women can encourage eminent civil society leaders to apply.

While civil society may take the lead, UN Women cannot abrogate responsibility as the CSAG is ultimately a UN Women mechanism. Therefore, the selection of individuals is to be determined by UN Women in consultation with leading civil society voices.

The selection committee must be composed of eminent feminists and gender equality advocates who have reputation, standing and authority that makes them appropriate candidates for this task. UN Women, in consultation with civil society leaders should select the members of the selection committee who cannot offer themselves as members of the CSAG. Some good practices from CSAGs set up thus far suggest that the selection committee should include those members who have proved to be strong during the previous CSAG term.

UN Women offices must play a strong oversight role in the selection of the members and work closely with the Civil Society Section at HQ for advice, support and assistance in the selection processes.

Rotation and renewal of CSAGs membership

Continuity is key for the functioning of the CSAG. In terms of continuity, if there are strong CSAG members who will provide continuity, then a few of them should continue in the new CSAG to share good practices and lessons learned from the previous Group.

Alternatively, the new CSAG can be composed of entirely new members if that is what is deemed suitable by UN Women. These issues can be decided in consultation with the CSAG members, UN Women country/regional offices and the Civil Society Section at HQ.

Note: The partnership between UN Women and Civil Society Advisory Groups is based on mutual respect and understanding. While CSAG members are independent civil society actors, CSAG members, individually or as the CSAG body, may neither speak on behalf of UN Women nor cite the support of UN Women on issues without UN Women's explicit consent. They may, however, refer to their CSAG membership in public fora including using the designation "member of the xxx CSAG" in any official capacity, including business cards, email signatures, formal presentations, social media, etc.

UN WOMEN IS THE UN ORGANIZATION
DEDICATED TO GENDER EQUALITY
AND THE EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN. A
GLOBAL CHAMPION FOR WOMEN AND
GIRLS, UN WOMEN WAS ESTABLISHED
TO ACCELERATE PROGRESS ON
MEETING THEIR NEEDS WORLDWIDE.

UN Women supports UN Member States as they set global standards for achieving gender equality, and works with governments and civil society to design laws, policies, programmes and services needed to implement these standards. It stands behind women's equal participation in all aspects of life, focusing on five priority areas: increasing women's leadership and participation; ending violence against women; engaging women in all aspects of peace and security processes; enhancing women's economic empowerment; and making gender equality central to national development planning and budgeting. UN Women also coordinates and promotes the UN system's work in advancing gender equality.



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