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## **A gender reality check in global health**

Introductory remarks by Ambassador Hans Brattskar, Permanent Representative

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### ***How to advance women's leadership in health?***

Thank you for the invitation to this important debate. This should be a debate on HOW to advance women's leadership in health, and not about WHY that is necessary. But I still need to make a few points in this regard, since these are factors that in the long run influence the availability of women to assume leadership positions; also in the area of health – be it at global or national level.

Women's overall participation in the labour market is important because; (i) it is an important step towards equality between women and men – not only an individual gain; (ii) it is an important factor in the creation of wealth and development. Gender equality is smart economics, and for most countries necessary in order to achieve prosperity. This is not only about justice; it is about hard economic facts. Bringing women into the labor market has contributed more to Norwegian economic development during the last 50 years than the exploration of oil and gas.

Why is the issue of gender important when it comes to health?

It *does matter* who is holding the decision making positions; women often take a wider perspective or different factors into consideration when prioritizing compared to men.

Women often need other or additional health services compared to the needs of men. This is especially true regarding sexual and reproductive health services. Availability of such services is of course dependent on this need being sufficiently recognized by those who set priorities.

This brings me to the HOW; how to advance women's leadership in health – with a view to reaching gender parity?

Although women's participation in the health labour market surpasses that of men's, we are far from experiencing gender parity in health leadership positions. This is the case for national health systems as well as for international organisations such as WHO.

This to me is not a paradox; it reflects that health is no different compared to other sectors or organisations; the same basic mechanisms that impede women's rise to leadership positions in other sectors, also affect women's opportunities in the health sector - Meaning that women's leadership in global health is first and foremost an issue of women's general leadership opportunities in the labour market.

What can be done to encourage and facilitate women leadership, including in health?

Norway is generally seen to have succeeded in including women in the work force. In the 1970s, only half of all women held a paid job. Today, women are represented in the (paid) work force at almost the same level as men. However, it is worth noting that significantly more women work part-time than men do.

Regarding women leadership, we face the same challenge as everyone else; while figures are improving, only 25 % of the top leaders are women. There is parity in the public sector, but leadership positions in the private sector are heavily skewed in favor of men.

I will attempt to point to some measures, including measures that have been successfully adopted in Norway. **Education** is key to empowering girls and women. Women's leadership starts here. We have made it a priority in our development assistance.

Domestically, we have for many years invested in;

- the availability of kindergartens, including at subsidized prices
- flexibility regarding work hours
- the right to paid leave when the child is ill
- universal welfare schemes such as an extensive parental leave scheme, from 18 weeks in 1977 to 49 weeks with full pay today, including rights for both mother and father
- policies includes a strong focus on the role of the fathers, and the importance of strengthening this for the good of the entire family
- a legal framework supporting women's participation in the labor market, including from discrimination in relation to maternity leave

What role does affirmative action policies play? Actually; not a significant one. There is a law on gender balance in board of directors which was necessary, given the huge disparities in representation, and which serves its purpose well. But the general approach in national policies has been one of introducing facilitating measures rather than requirements.

Organizations must themselves come forward as attractive places to work for women, including in leadership positions, and with supporting policies.

On a final note;

In terms of recruitment, I regret that Norway does not have a particular record of success – for neither men nor women - to leadership positions in UN and other international organizations. This starts with Junior Professional Officer (JPO) positions (where a majority of the officers recruited are women), and continues throughout. Why do they not decide to remain?

The main reason has been lack of rights – compared to what is available if you work in Norway – that makes it possible to strike a healthy balance family life and work life. This goes for men as well as women.

A culture for working effectively while at work, but not being required to regularly stay late at work, is one such measure. And not having to participate in meetings beyond ordinary working hours on a Friday night...

Thank you.