Thank you to everyone who joined our meeting, both virtually and in-person! January’s monthly meeting focused on creating transformative change and meaningful opportunities for participation through shifts in power. Expert speakers also discussed the importance of gender-responsive institutions and accountability measures. The meeting was moderated by Yvonne O’Neal, a NGO CSW / NY Member-at-Large and UN Representative for the Africa Development Interchange Network. Featured speakers were H.E. Koki Muli Grignon, former Deputy Permanent Representative to UN from Kenya; Ms. Aparna Mehrotra, Director of the Un System Coordination Division, UN Women; Ms. Sheila Dallas Katzman, Former Chief of UN Public Information; and Dr. Yasmine Ergas, Director of Gender and Public Policy Specialization at the School of International and Public Affairs, Columbia University.

H.E. Koki Muli Grignon discussed the importance of advocacy and activism, and the importance of civil society organizations holding their governments accountable for actions. She noted that although it is not easy to affect change, doing so is crucially important, particularly changing people’s attitudes and perceptions on the issue of gender equality. Ambassador Koki also emphasized that the biggest change comes from what we are doing for ourselves, yet too often, we think of what we can do for the movement as a whole. While this is important, change can be achieved through dividing large movements into smaller, achievable steps. Furthermore, creating gender-specific and gender-sensitive institutions, said Ambassador Koki, requires an investment in resources. In closing, she stated, “it is never good to compare yourself with other people, but rather to compare yourself of yesterday to yourself of today, which will prepare you for yourself of tomorrow.”
Yasmine Ergas began her remarks with a discussion on the importance of knowledge as a crucial and necessary resource in informing our participation. She also stated that we cannot forget the context in which we are working, one in which is marked by a ‘backlash against the backlash’, in which the rights of women are being threatened and the space for civil society mobilization is being restricted. In this context, we must assure that the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) in March is a civilized process through which voices can be heard. While participation is critical, Ergas argued, we need to provide the conditions for participation. Furthermore, she stated that accountability is not a given, but rather, needs to be pushed for and checked on. In closing, Ergas discussed gender-responsive institutions, although too often defunded or marginalized, has the potential to give power for making our voices heard.

Aparna Mehrotra emphasized previous points regarding breaking down bigger goals into smaller steps, and finding the energy to do so through outreach and solidarity networks. Smaller, achievable actions will result in execution, which will make the biggest difference. Mehrotra discussed a two-stage Accountability Framework. The framework called for taking functions that are common to entire systems or institutions, and articulating a gender component for each of these functions. This, she said, will hold people accountable because such functions apply to everyone. In addition, Mehrotra discussed the importance of emotion in fueling movements, and that emotion is the difference between thinkers and doers. She emphasized responsiveness, and that responding to people means acknowledging them, whereas not doing so results in marginalizing them. She concluded, “I believe committed people are forward-thinking. Their ideas have a space, we should follow. If these ideas are broken down into pieces, it can be accomplished.”

Sheila Dallas Katzman began her remarks by discussing human rights as an entitlement, and the necessity of a paradigm shift with regard to human rights guarantees. She continues her discussion through analyzing the difference between
equity and equality, and assuring that a shift in power does not create greater inequalities. Furthermore, Katzman analyzes the role of the media, and discusses a push to restructure the media at every level, and assuring participation and accountability. She emphasizes that the shift must be made with the media and that we must make the media responsible, because they shape our lives everyday and influence what we think.

Q & A:

Questions from the audience reflected how we might use or mobilize our power base to implement best practices, and how we can change the mindsets of people who are creating policies so that it trickles down and benefits the common, everyday people. Answers from the panelists included a discussion of top-down and bottom-up approaches - creating awareness and pressuring those working on responding to indicators from the top, but also pushing for local initiatives, such as through cities for CEDAW. Ambassador Koki formed her response by highlighting the importance of women in leadership positions, and states, “when you put women in the right positions and the right places, they will deliver because they are mothers.”

NGO CSW / NY Updates:

- We have scheduled 550 Parallel Events! An email has been sent to organizers regarding rules and expectations.

- Conversation Circles: a schedule has been posted on our website at ngocsw.org/ngo-csw-forum/
  - These discussions will be a mix of structured discussions, relaxation space, regional caucus meetings, and brown bag lunch workshops.

UN Women Update from Victoria Diaz

- Registration for CSW64 is now closed.

- Key events include a Youth Dialogue on 9 March at UNICEF and a High-Level Interactive Dialogue on 16 March
- A Political Declaration is expected to be adopted on the first day of CSW.
- Please email csworkunwomen.org for any additional inquiries.