



**Commission on the Status of Women
Sixtieth Session**

**Women's empowerment and its link to sustainable
development**

**INTERACTIVE EXPERT PANEL
Key strategies for gender-responsive implementation of the
2030 Agenda**

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* The views expressed in this paper are those of the author and do not necessarily represent those of the United Nations.

Distinguished delegates, fellow panelists, compañeras from women's movements, I am honored to engage with all of you in this interactive panel discussion. UNW invited me to frame my contribution around two questions: 1) How can we integrate gender equality and sustainability in implementing the 2030 Agenda?; and 2) What accountability mechanisms are needed to achieve this?

Let me highlight three sustainability-related goals – food security, energy and climate change. With each goal I would like to share our ongoing strategies to implement these goals in three regions: in Africa, the Caribbean, and the Pacific. In doing so I will highlight a global structural obstacle – such as financial, trade and investment rules – to achieving these goals as well as how we are working to challenge these global obstacles through greater regional solidarities across ministries and across social movements.

First, SDG 2¹ to end hunger, achieve food security and promote sustainable agriculture

Within this goal one target explicitly makes the link to women's rights – double agricultural productivity of small scale food producers including women by 2030, through equal access to land and other productive resources, and opportunities for value addition.

We know that agriculture continues to be significant for women's livelihood in sub-Saharan Africa, with women mostly producing, processing, and selling food consumed at home and in local markets. But agricultural productivity has stagnated in many countries in the region and agricultural subsidies in the global North threaten the livelihoods of many African farmers. The net result is that the number of people lacking food security has increased from 175 million in 1990 to 214 million in 2012. So what are the structural obstacles that we need to overcome to achieve the goal on food security?

- The WTO Agreement on Agriculture comes in the way of efforts of many developing countries to meet their food security needs, because it fundamentally restricts efforts to increase agricultural productivity or incomes of small-scale food producers.
- Developing countries have been advocating for food security investments to be allowed under WTO rules, but their demands have so far been blocked. Even programs for public stockholding to feed their citizens, which would reduce hunger and poverty among farmers and consumers, are illegal under the WTO.
- Furthermore there is extensive evidence on the impacts of deregulating the agrarian sector, how climate change has led to droughts and widespread hunger, or financialization of and speculation in the commodities market leading to volatility in world food prices, in which speculators get rich, but prices stay low for poor producers and high for consumers.

¹ 2.3. By 2030, double the agricultural productivity and incomes of small-scale food producers, in particular women, indigenous peoples, family farmers, pastoralists and fishers, including through secure and equal access to land, other productive resources and inputs, knowledge, financial services, markets and opportunities for value addition and non- farm employment.

2.4. By 2030, ensure sustainable food production systems and implement resilient agricultural practices that increase productivity and production, that help maintain ecosystems, that strengthen capacity for adaptation to climate change, extreme weather, drought, flooding and other disasters and that progressively improve land and soil quality

2.5. By 2020, maintain the genetic diversity of seeds, cultivated plants and farmed and domesticated animals and their related wild species, including through soundly managed and diversified seed and plant banks at the national, regional and international levels, and promote access to and fair and equitable sharing of benefits arising from the utilization of genetic resources and associated traditional knowledge, as internationally agreed.

So how is the region challenging these structural obstacles?

- In June 2015 the African Union launched a process to agree on a Continental Free Trade Area. This effort towards meaningful economic integration would enable African countries to increase their intra-continental trade (currently only at 12% of overall trade volume from Africa). As a strong regional initiative, the CFTA has the potential to challenge the marginalization of African economies in the global trade regime and the imbalances of the World Trade Organization that I mentioned earlier.
- This presents an important political opportunity for women's movements and women's ministries to engage with trade ministries and advocate feminist and heterodox trade policy as one tool to achieve a much-needed agrarian transformation.
- We are currently engaged in a pan-African effort to identify progressive and feminist policymakers and proposals towards the CFTA. This is starting next month in East Africa by engaging the East African Community in political dialogue and debate around fundamental questions of how CFTA/trade can contribute to structural economic transformation in a way that benefits the continent.

The second and third goals I'd like to speak to are SDG 7² on access to sustainable and modern energy and SDG 13³ to combat climate change

Women are mentioned explicitly only in relation to “raising capacity for effective climate change- related planning and management in least developed countries and small island developing States.” However, we need to acknowledge some key wins and silences in both these goals:

- In the related goal 12 on sustainable consumption and production the mention of rationalizing inefficient fossil-fuel subsidies by restructuring taxation and phasing out those harmful subsidies is an important win.
- However there is insufficient language on phasing out of burning fossil fuels. There is also a complete lack of mention of the environmental impacts of large-scale development projects including extractive industries and hydropower projects.
- In relation to the climate goal, while the chapeau mentions the need to keep global atmospheric pressure under 2 degrees Celsius, which is a win, it is not as an action point of the climate goal.

² 7.1 By 2030, ensure universal access to affordable, reliable and modern energy services

7.2 By 2030, increase substantially the share of renewable energy in the global energy mix

7.3 By 2030, double the global rate of improvement in energy efficiency.

7.a By 2030, enhance international cooperation to facilitate access to clean energy research and technology, including renewable energy, energy efficiency and advanced and cleaner fossil-fuel technology, and promote investment in energy infrastructure and clean energy technology.

7.b By 2030, expand infrastructure and upgrade technology for supplying modern and sustainable energy services for all in developing countries, in particular least developed countries, Small Islands Developing States, and land-locked developing countries, in accordance with their respective programmes of support.

³ 13.1. Strengthen resilience and adaptive capacity to climate-related hazards and natural disasters in all countries.

13.2. Integrate climate change measures into national policies, strategies and planning.

13.3. Improve education, awareness-raising and human and institutional capacity on climate change mitigation, adaptation, impact reduction and early warning.

13.c Promote mechanisms for raising capacity for effective climate change-related planning and management in least developed countries and Small Islands Developing States, including focusing on women, youth and local and marginalized communities.

Once again, as with agricultural subsidies in the North, the issue of global subsidies to the fossil fuel industry is a significant structural obstacle to achieving the energy and climate SDGs, among others. The IMF estimates that the global subsidy (direct and indirect) to the fossil fuel industry in 2015 alone is \$5.3 trillion dollars; which is about fifty three times more than what the Paris Agreement allocated to assist developing countries develop low-carbon infrastructure and adapt to the changing climate. We clearly need to massively cut subsidies and have a meaningful discussion of the much larger level of reparations necessary for developing countries to actually transition towards a low carbon and climate resilient future.

So how can we confront these obstacles? I'd like to share two experiences from our work at Regions Refocus, which is an institute for progressive and feminist policy housed at the DHF that I co-founded a year and a half ago.

1. The first experience is from the **Caribbean** region on the need to create concrete mechanisms for women's organizations and other social movements to engage with policy makers and co-construct progressive domestic and regional development plans.

As a region facing frontline effects of climate change, the Caribbean must have a coherent regional strategy towards access to climate finance and the implementation of gender-sensitive climate policies that will benefit the region. We are currently envisioning a series of national public hearings to democratize the debate around development choices and how they are financed. These would co-organized – along with the University of the West Indies, which has regional reach through three campuses – will lead to a regional exchange with policy makers to influence the economic development choices of key regional bodies including the Caribbean Development Bank. Our intention is to **co-construct sustainable mechanisms that advance heterodox and feminist policies while holding accountable both public and private finance** – both climate finance and financing for development.

2. The second experience is from the **Pacific** on the need to boost the capacity of national gender machineries to influence climate and sustainable development policies. This capacity is also critical to create coherence between macroeconomic policy and gender equality goals.

In 2014 we gathered national women's machineries from 12 Pacific countries along with a cross section of Ministries of Home Affairs, Internal Affairs, Environment, Climate Change, Youth, and Social Affairs to engage in collective policy work.

The joint statement (first civil society + national women's machineries statement in the region) that emerged from this workshop includes progressive language on infusing gender analysis into the mainstream policy discussions on climate change mitigation and adaptation, climate finance, and disaster risk reduction. The statement also addresses structural issues of trade and corporate accountability (challenging the Trans-Pacific Partnership Agreement and insisting that trade agreements must not supersede national legislation or allow infringement by corporations on human rights or national policy space).

The civil society-government partnership that emerged from this gathering has already influenced the Pacific Island Development Forum to reflect progressive positions on women's rights and civil society participation. Next steps are to identify feminist policies and government representatives who can champion these policy proposals across ministries, which we will do at a follow up gathering to strengthen the initiative later this year.

Conclusion

Both the Pacific and Caribbean examples of co-constructing progressive policies through equitable modes of engagement between civil society and governments provide a counter to the prevailing model of "partnerships" primarily between private sector often large corporations and governments.

In implementing SDGs 2 (Ag), 7 (Energy), and 13 (climate change) – as well as with a cross-cutting gender perspective through the whole 2030 Agenda – it is critical that women’s movements seek and build alliances with progressive and feminist policy makers to address the structural obstacles that have created gender and other inequalities. We need feminist policies that are grounded in regional realities and that do not pit gender justice against ecological or economic justice. It’s encouraging in 2016 to find policy makers in every region who are now able to listen and implement what has become dead clear – if we are to achieve the Beijing and 2030 agenda, we must reorient macroeconomic policies to address inequalities and deprivation, we must regulate transnational corporations, we must reclaim not only national but regional development institutions to rebuild regional solidarities for gender, ecological, and economic justice, and we must sustain strong women’s movements to co-construct progressive and feminist policies in every region.