



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

Women's empowerment and its link to sustainable development

INTERACTIVE EXPERT PANEL

**Participation and multi-stakeholder partnerships for gender-responsive
implementation of 2030 Agenda**

**A New Way of Doing Business for Gender-Responsive
Implementation of the 2030 Agenda**

By

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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.

I. An Integrated Agenda That Requires a Collective Response

The adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in September of 2015 came with the realization that “business as usual” is no longer an option to meet the pressing development challenges that the world is currently facing. There is a need to rally all nations around a new common vision, and to ensure that the corresponding strategies will be fully integrated, taking into account every dimension of development. The success of the 2030 Agenda depends on sound partnerships and a robust public commitment towards its realization.

Ambitious multi-stakeholder partnerships are an important aspect of this agenda. Partnerships enable diverse actors to work together towards clearly identified common goals in achieving the sustainable development targets. Governments can be leaders in fostering this approach by creating spaces and mechanisms for systematic, continuous engagement. The role of other partners will be to organize change by identifying their respective strengths and needs, and by pooling together their “knowledge, expertise, technology, and financial resources to support the achievement of the SDGs,” as stated in Target 17.16 of the Agenda. Cooperation will be critical if this effort is to succeed, because progress depends on the ability of different actors to work together in synergy and to capitalize on joint efforts.

II. The Importance of Public Engagement and Multi-stakeholder Partnerships to Support the Achievement of Gender Justice

The emphasis on partnerships in the 2030 Agenda marks a shift towards a philosophy of far-reaching engagement of States with other stakeholders. Partnerships are recognized as one of five key dimensions of the 2030 Agenda, along with People, Planet, Prosperity, and Peace. This emphasis on partnership is not merely a rhetorical shift. It signals a new outlook based on the understanding that robust partnership is not limited to observatory roles or funding support.

Effective partnerships go beyond mere coordination or consultation. Partnership requires systematic cooperation among diverse actors whose opinions are genuinely valued. The 2030 Agenda emphasizes the need for States to conduct inclusive implementation reviews with the engagement and participation of citizens in the decision-making process, as well as public input in all stages of the design, implementation, and monitoring of sustainable development strategies. In particular, spaces need to be created for regular and interactive dialogues to foster a common understanding of development challenges, and to generate innovative and gender-sensitive solutions. The role that each partner will play in implementing those solutions needs to be clearly delineated. Some examples of thematic partnerships could be geared towards facilitating women’s transition to work, or increasing women’s access to finance.

Partnership is a continuum. Grassroots initiatives are the starting point for a transformative approach to partnership. These initiatives can allow local women to be part of the process of setting priorities for local government spending, and they can provide opportunities to monitor the quality of public services through scorecards or SMS-based systems. A second level of partnership will involve national multi-stakeholder dialogues and the establishment of citizens’ committees, as well as parliament hearings of women’s groups and other civil-society voices. This is a means to ensure effective engagement of citizens in the national decision-making process. Finally, a third level of partnership will be created when national response strategies for implementing the Sustainable Development Goals are informed by this civic dialogue and participatory process. The tangible benefits of these national responses should be trickled down to citizens on the grassroots level, thereby creating a feedback circuit of participatory engagement.

Authentic multi-stakeholder partnership is a transformative process that goes beyond mere equality and focuses strongly on gender-justice. The Arab region is currently in the midst of a vibrant intellectual discussion about the nature of gender justice. A culminating document of this engagement is the Muscat Declaration, in which Arab Ministers adopted a broad definition of gender justice as both a formal process and a substantive outcome. The formal process of seeking gender justice is focused mainly on accountability, but the substantive outcome is a society in which women enjoy equality with men at the practical level. Partnerships should be geared towards advancing gender justice through the adoption of a twin-track approach, considering (1) establishing thematic partnerships geared towards gender justice, including its two elements of accountability and equality, and (2) ensuring that any partnership will take gender perspectives into consideration.

Multi-stakeholder partnerships will advance gender justice in the following ways:

- **Amplify voices for gender equality** by bringing different actors from various levels of society around the same table to work on a common agenda.
- **Establish a platform for exchanging knowledge and experience** as the basis for coordinating efforts in various fields, conducting progress reviews, and replicating and scaling up successful initiatives.
- **Create synergies and promote coordination** by building on each partner's core competencies towards transformative change.
- **Foster the elimination of all forms of discrimination and violence against women** through incorporating a gender-sensitive perspective in policies, strategies, and programmes, while also promoting more integrated and comprehensive protection and prevention services for women.
- **Tailor solutions to regional and national contexts** by facilitating consultations with relevant stakeholders, thereby localizing SDGs, within the overarching context of a global response.
- **Ensure an effective use of resources** by avoiding the duplication of work, and by allowing better allocation of financial and human resources.

III. The Role of Governmental Institutions

Challenge the traditional functioning of public institutions in order to create an enabling environment for partnerships to flourish. Policy-makers at all levels will need to demonstrate strong leadership and political will to advance a new approach to governance based on citizen engagement, participatory decision-making, and synergetic and strategic partnerships geared towards gender justice. Governmental leaders need to promote the understanding that a culture of partnerships and mutual accountability is the only way to create more responsive development policies, as well as the only way to secure the legitimacy of government interventions both in the short term and in the long term. This outlook may also involve delegating responsibilities to local governments as appropriate.

Design strategies for governmental institutions' strategic engagement with citizens. Governmental institutions, particularly ministries of planning, agencies for development, and national gender equality mechanisms, should convene policy dialogues and engage civil society representatives and other relevant actors. Civic engagement should be a guiding principle in the elaboration, implementation, and review of gender equality policies and other

development efforts. Sufficient human and financial resources need to be allocated to achieve these partnership strategies.

Position national women's machineries as leaders in the development of partnerships for gender justice. Through their mandated functions, national gender women machineries regularly interact with major stakeholders in the field. Many of them have already initiated joint programmes with civil society organizations, the private sector, or other relevant actors, but such activities often take place on an ad-hoc basis. It would be desirable for national women's agencies to conduct a comprehensive national needs assessment, and then devise mechanisms for effective consultations with civil society representatives for the elaboration, monitoring, and review of gender policies. National women's machineries will also need step up strategic alliances with the private sector and academia, in order to support gender equality within specific local areas of focus.

IV. The Role of Civil Society Organizations

Become part of a broader governance system. Forming partnerships with governmental institutions can be an effective means for civil society organizations to advance the gender equality work that they are already successfully doing. It is also a way to promote social accountability mechanisms that rely on civic engagement to hold public and private officials accountable. Civic society organizations have a valuable role to play in providing data and proposed solutions at the community and district levels, as well as participating in consultations at the global, regional, and national levels. They can also extend their influence by preparing relevant policy reviews for governments and for United Nations organizations.

Play an enabling and catalytic role. Civil society organizations can play an important role in raising awareness of the gender-related targets in the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals, and in advocating for policies that are consistent with this development agenda. The role of civil society partners should not end at the sensitization stage, however, but should also extend to mainstreaming a gender perspective in programmes and projects that are created as part of national strategies for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. Facilitating citizen engagement in democratic government through the use of information and communication technology is a particular area in which a vibrant civil society has an important role to play. This will be instrumental in facilitating the participation of the public and shaping inclusive policy dialogue on the local and national levels.

Adopt a "bottom-up" approach to increased outreach that leaves no one behind. Civil society organizations have a tremendous outreach capacity, which should be capitalized upon to facilitate citizen engagement by reaching out to marginalized groups. By forming partnerships with the appropriate governmental institutions, civil organizations can help to articulate the concerns of women who might otherwise not be heard because of existing power structures, geographic location, or challenges related to literacy and policy comprehension. Civil organizations can also design tailor-made grassroots programmes and interventions that make tangible contributions to the advancement of women, such as the support of women's livelihoods and the delivery of services to survivors of violence.

V. The Role of the Private Sector

Lead by example, starting internally and expanding externally. The most important contributions of private sector is to start internally through establishing gender balance in recruitment, to ensure that women are equally

represented at the senior levels of companies, and to create robust gender-oriented accountability systems. Internal measures must also include strong sexual harassment policies and the facilitation of life–work balance. Leading by example does not end with the company’s internal employees; it should also be extended to the entire value chain to ensure that workers in supplying companies enjoy the same rights. Businesses must ensure that their products and services do not contribute to human trafficking or to the exploitation of women.

Develop a sound corporate leadership. The traditional role of the private sector in providing philanthropy through donations and aid needs to be replaced by innovative corporate social responsibility programs that have women’s financial inclusion at their core. This will not happen until businesses fully engage with women and adopt gender-aware outlooks as key policy directives. In addition, businesses need to expand their relationships to women’s small-scale and micro-scale enterprises and create gender-sensitive models that allow women equal access to credit. The promotion of decent work is at the core of this new model, and particularly the promotion of woman’s economic participation and the support of small business led by women.

Traditionally gendered business models are not an option. Private-sector partners will support national and local initiatives that advance gender equality. They will challenge traditional gender roles, create and expand women’s economic opportunities, contribute to skills development that ensures a smooth school-to-work transition, and increase women’s access to business networks and global markets as a way to promote exposure and inclusiveness. The impact of private-sector interventions will be measured not only in terms of monetary contribution, but also by non-financial qualitative indicators such as the company’s overall contribution to the integrity of the community and to social justice.

VI. The Role of the United Nations in Supporting Multi-stakeholder Partnerships

Convene all stakeholders to discuss common issues and reach joint solutions. The United Nations has an unparalleled ability to bring together diverse actors who are working for sustainable development in general and for gender justice more specifically. Existing institutional arrangements at the UN – notably including the High-Level Political Forum, the Commission on the Status of Women, various mechanisms under CEDAW, the Regional Forums for Sustainable Development, and specific committees at the regional level – should be capitalized upon as venues to facilitate partnerships and to ensure that all women’s voices are heard.

Build the capacity of various stakeholders to enact effective partnerships. The United Nations has an important role in developing the capacity of stakeholders to effectively contribute in global, national, and local initiatives. In particular, the United Nations encourages partners to participate in progress reviews of programmes related to CEDAW, the Beijing Platform for Action, and the International Conference on Population and Development. It is in the continuity of the United Nations’ mandate to help strengthen the ability of all actors to sustain effective partnerships, and to help disseminate examples of successful alliances.

Launch new and innovative partnerships. In recent years the United Nations has launched a variety of ambitious multi-stakeholder partnerships, particularly in the field of women and girls’ health and education. It will be important to maintain the momentum of these initiatives, while at the same time laying the foundation for new ones. The United Nations can also promote innovative thinking in the area of partnership-building. In the Arab region, for example, the UN has regularly partnered with religious organizations, which if properly engaged have significant leverage to combat violence against women and to contribute to a culture of inclusiveness. New and innovative

partnerships will require strengthening the civil society consultative arrangements in the General Assembly of the UN by facilitating the process of obtaining consultant status and providing stronger funding mechanisms for civil society initiatives, while also ensuring a robust outcome-oriented accountability.

VII. The Need for Institutional Structure

Good intentions are not always sufficient to sustain partnerships between actors who may have very different interests and diverse ways of functioning. Therefore, it will be necessary to maintain a solid institutional structure to support good will and to ensure the sincere and genuine engagement of all partners in a transparent manner. It will be important to carefully consider the actual impact and effectiveness of partnerships, and to refrain from assuming that any kind of partnership is automatically effective. In particular, for partnership to be a transformative process it is important that the role of each partner should never be limited to mere observation or to purely monetary terms.

Effective multi-stakeholder partnerships will need to be supported by sound mechanisms and institutional structures. At the global level, such efforts can be coordinated by the United Nations' Commission on the Status of Women. Partnerships and inclusive reviews can be reinforced at the regional level through Regional Forums for Sustainable Development and other regional mechanisms dedicated specifically to gender equality, such as the ESCWA Committee on Women. At the national level, the establishment of similar institutional mechanism is critical to institutionalize the engagement of the private sector, civil society organizations, and other local actors. These national structures will enable systematic engagements, including dedicated permanent consultative councils to ensure the implementation of nationally adopted development goals through effective partnerships.