



**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**

**Amplifying Women's Voices and equal partnership in the
realization of the 2030 agenda for Sustainable
Development**

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

Background

“What is not counted does not count” It is a hard truth that today, many of the same barriers and constraints that were recognized 20 years ago by the Beijing signatories are still in force globally. There are bright highlights where progress has happened but the sad reality is that no single country in the world has achieved gender equality.

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development adopted by the Global Leaders in September 2015 at the UN Post 2015 Summits commits to achieve prosperity, protect the Planet and human rights of people. It emphasises peace and Equality and promises to leave No one behind.

Civil Society Organisations including women’s rights Organisations and Feminist groups all over the world played a key role to the formulation of the ambitious 2030 agenda for Sustainable Development.

The African Women’s Development and Communication Network (FEMNET), a Pan African Feminist Organisation whose role is to mobilise and amplify African Women’s and Girls’ voices to actively participate and influence policy discussions and outcomes worked tirelessly with other Women’s rights Organisations, alliances and coalitions to ensure that African Women’s voices, realities and experiences informed the 2030 agenda. FEMNET in partnership with Women Major Group, Post 2015 Women’s Coalition and UN Women boldly called for a Stand –Alone Goal on Gender Equality and Women’s empowerment and for integration of Gender targets and indicators in all the other goals and aspects of the 2030 Agenda including its financing and monitoring aspects.

Gender equality, the empowerment of women and the advancement of human rights of women and girls must be a central priority in the phase of review, monitoring and follow up mechanisms for the implementation of the 2030 agenda for Sustainable Development. The 2030 Agenda recognizes that sustainable development will only be possible if all women and girls are empowered to have control over and make decisions about all aspects of their lives, and barriers to their equality are eliminated.

Based on the lessons learnt from the implementation of the Platform for Action, urgent action is required in five priority areas to accelerate progress:

1. Transforming discriminatory social norms and gender stereotypes;
2. Transforming the economy to achieve gender equality and sustainable development;
3. Ensuring the full and equal participation of women in decision-making at all levels;
4. Significantly increasing investments in gender equality; and
5. Strengthening accountability for gender equality and the realization of the human rights of women and girls.

Transforming discriminatory social norms and gender stereotypes

The transformation of discriminatory social norms and gender stereotypes must be a priority for accelerating the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and for effectively moving towards gender equality, women’s empowerment and the realization of women’s and girls’ human rights. Women Rights organisations need to do the following:

- Strengthen programmes aimed at engaging Men and boys to challenge negative masculinities, discriminatory social norms and gender stereotypes and fostering positive norms of gender equality, non-violence and respect.
- Implement mass mobilisation and media programmes on the adoption of health and well-being frameworks for girls; and the enactment of laws and comprehensive policies to eliminate harmful practices such as female genital mutilation and address early childbearing, and early and forced marriages.

Transforming the economy to achieve gender equality and sustainable development

Achieving gender equality and women's economic empowerment requires transformative economic and social policy agendas that are firmly anchored within a human rights framework. Macroeconomic policies should expand the overall fiscal space, while a broad range of gender-responsive social, economic and environmental policies should prioritize increasing State investments in infrastructure, public services and social protection measures.

- Women's rights organisation have played and must continue to advance gender-responsive planning, budgeting and pushing for legal and policy reforms that protect rights to women's access to land and other productive resources.
- There is need for non-state actors to advocate and lobby Governments to guard against economic policy positions that lead to retrogression in the enjoyment of women rights, in the context of an increasingly integrated global economy, macroeconomic policy should reduce vulnerabilities.

Significantly increasing investments in gender equality

Over the years the financing for Gender and development activities through Women's rights organisations has sharply dwindled resulting into failure of women's rights organisation to fulfil their advocacy role on issues affecting women and girls. In order to rectify this persistent underinvestment, there is need for deliberate efforts from development partners to significantly increase financing for national, regional, global gender equality mechanisms that include women's organizations through the following;

- Developed countries should meet the 0.7 per cent target for ODA commitments, and ensuring a stronger focus on financing for gender equality, and remaining committed to supporting women's rights organisations.
- Global taxes, such as the proposed financial transaction tax, can also provide additional sources of revenue and ease financial constraints, particularly for lower income countries that have no provisions of supporting women's rights organisation to deliver their mandate.

Ensuring full and equal participation of women in decision-making at all levels

Despite some gains that have been made around participation of women in political and decision-making, there is still a very glaring gap in all spheres be it political, public or private spaces.

Through Governments/ CSOs joint effort, and in particular Women's rights organisations, some progress has been registered especially in the political spaces where even in Africa apart from the some developed countries, in the year 2014, there were three female Presidents; namely H.E's Ellen Johnson Sirleaf of

Liberia, Joyce Banda in Malawi and Catherine Panza in Central Africa but the number has again gone down to two as of 2016. (Liberia and Mauritius). Likewise, Rwanda tops the list with 56.3% women parliamentarians.

- Furthermore, at global level, we have examples of Canada that made it to 50/50 in cabinet level, but despite these gains, there is still a long way to achieve gender parity. It is therefore necessary for Women's rights organisation to enhance calls for;
- For legislated or voluntary quotas as well as temporary special measures like affirmative action that have worked for other countries as good and sound strategy for increasing women's representation in decision-making, to be replicated in countries that are lagging behind;
- Intensify programmes that are aimed at eliminating discriminatory culture of political institutions that perpetuate inequalities within the social fabric and leave women in the peripheral instead of being at the epicentre of development.

Strengthening Institutional mechanisms for the advancement of women

Despite the wide spread existence of institutional mechanisms to advance gender equality, the lack of adequate financial resources, low levels of technical capacity and lack of political will to prioritize gender mainstreaming in all government policies, are key challenges experienced across all regions.

- Cross-sectoral collaboration that involves other stakeholders such as Women rights organisations would strengthen coordinated action on gender equality.

Strengthening accountability for gender equality and the realization of the human rights of women and girls

All relevant stakeholders have the right to participate in the implementation of the programs and policies that affect them, including women, young women and girls; marginalized and disadvantaged groups; women human rights defenders; and feminist, women's and girls' organizations. The right to participation is a prerequisite for successful implementation of the 2030 Agenda and is enshrined in various international agreements including the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Conference on Population and Development Programme of Action, the Rio Declaration, the Beijing Platform for Action, as well as the 2030 agenda itself.

The 2030 Agenda also recognises a need to build and strengthen a global partnership at all levels across all sectors if the 2030 agenda is to be achieved.

In recent times, however, we have seen the right of Civil Society to participate effectively being denied through increasing shrinking space for Civil Society to operate and independently voice out their views and opinions.

The other major constraint affecting Women's rights Organisations and their ability to contribute effectively is limited funding to enable them to effectively mobilise and engage.

These challenges must be addressed urgently if indeed the role of Civil Society in the implementation of the 2030 agenda is to be effective.

Given the urgency and scale of the task ahead, women's civil society organizations and gender advocates together with Member States and all other stakeholder must not work in silos but rather take immediate action for the full integration, effective and accelerated implementation of both the 2030 agenda. It must also be recognised that the 2030 Agenda is to compliment other already existing important instruments on Women's rights and Gender Equality including the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, ICPD, UN Resolution 1325, CEDAW and regional Instruments such as the Maputo Protocol in Africa. The agendas have not been fully implemented and their agendas are still relevant and required. The implementation of 2030 agenda must therefore be done alongside the implementation of these equally important instruments.

The Role of Women's Rights Organisations in the realisation of the 2030 agenda

Evidence shows that Women's human rights and feminist organisations have been essential to advance, sustain, protect and implement women's human rights. A Research done by AWID in 2013 shows that had it not been for the local active women's rights movements, there would not have been the progress made today.¹

Below is the key role that I foresee Women's Rights and Feminist Organisations play in the implementation of the 2030 agenda for Sustainable Development;

- Women's Rights Organisations will mobilise and ensure that all women especially the most marginalised women such as women in rural areas, women with disabilities, young women, elderly women, sexual minorities understand the importance of the 2030 agenda are effectively and meaningfully participating in its implementation.
- Women's organizations will play an important role in supporting different stakeholders including Governments in mainstreaming gender in the implementation of the entire 2030 agenda. It is important not to pigeonhole women's rights Organisations to Goal 5 on Gender Equality and Empowerment of Women only. We know that gender is cross-cutting and all the goals even where the gender or women are not mentioned have gendered impacts and implications. For example the Goal 16 on Peace, although it does not address gendered impact of war, we know that we cannot achieve peace and security without recognising the role of women and how war affects women and children.
- Women's Rights Organisations will also support governments to develop national plans and budgets that respond to the needs and interests of all citizens of all the genders from all the areas. Women's Rights Organisations have been key in supporting gender budgeting and monitoring/tracking expenditures to ensure that men and women are benefiting from the countries' resources equally. They will therefore continue to play this critical role through mobilising women and girls especially the most marginalised groups of women to have their voices heard in policy making, planning and budgeting.

¹ Sources: AWID 2013 'Watering the leaves, starving the roots', <http://www.awid.org/publications/watering-leaves-starving-roots/> Htun and Weldon, 2013. 'Feminist mobilisation and progressive policy change: why governments take action to combat violence against women'

- Women's Rights Organisations will also play a key role in designing monitoring/tracking tools to measure the progress on implementing the SDG indicators with a particular focus on measuring how the gendered indicators and outcomes are being delivered. Women's Rights Organisations have already proven expertise in this area, for example the SADC Gender Barometer that measures progress on implementing the SADC Gender Protocol.
- In the framework of multi-stakeholders approaches and advancement of all sectors including Private sector to play a role in implementing the 2030 agenda, Women's Rights Organisations will continue to hold Governments accountable as the major duty bearers to fulfil their duty to protect the human rights of their citizens including women's human rights.

Conclusion

Excellences, The immediate focus of our attention today is the 2030 agenda with Voice, choice and control for women as key watchwords. We now have the opportunity to move from rhetoric to action. Well done is better than well said. In our nations, around Africa and the world over, we are still grappling with tendencies where women and the girl child are still regarded as second-class citizens in society.

In wrapping up the presentation, it is necessary to remind ourselves of Thomas Sankara's words – undoubtedly an inspiration for Burkina Faso's popular uprising: **“there is no true social revolution without the liberation of women. May my eyes never see and my feet never take me to a society where half the people are held in silence. I hear the roar of women's silence. I sense the rumble of their storm and feel the fury of their revolt.”** May we never be silenced, and may our storms be ones that advance our causes of justice, dignity and equality for all.”

Excellences: It has been 21 years since Beijing and yet its promise is yet to be realised, the women of are tired of waiting. The countdown to 2030 has already started and therefore this panel discussion is crucial as it provides us with a platform to plan, strategize and reprioritise

As women, we have a reason enough to rise up, speak up, speak out and do something about it for a change. Progress of a nation requires the contribution of all and leaving women behind is suicidal as women have a great part to play in various development processes. Let me echo Nelson Mandela's words: **"WE MUST USE TIME WISELY AND FOREVER REALIZE THAT THE TIME IS ALWAYS RIPE TO DO RIGHT;** and this is the right time to utilise the 2030 agenda, this is time for **Results and Actions** and no more rhetoric. **Yes we can, the time is now!!!!**