

## Beijing, Backlash and the Future of Women's\* Rights Dutch Civil Society Priorities for Beijing+25

The year 2020 will mark a number of UN anniversaries related to women's human rights, including the 5th anniversary of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the 1325 Resolution on Women, Peace and Security. Additionally, 2020 will mark 25 years since the adoption of the Beijing Platform for Action (BPfA), a historic roadmap signed by 189 UN Member States, that is still considered the most comprehensive blueprint for women's rights today. While this is cause for celebration, it also constitutes an opportunity for reflection and taking stock of the steps yet to be taken and the further funds required to ensure the full implementation of the BPfA. There has been progress over the last 25 years, but it has been slow and uneven, with stark differences between the global North and South.<sup>1</sup> Yet, even with regards to the European Union (EU), the Gender Equality Index shows persistent inequalities with only a marginal progress between 2005 and 2019, showing that even the EU has been moving towards gender equality at a snail's pace.<sup>2</sup> In addition, according to the World Economic Forum, at the current rate of progress, it may take another 202 years to close the economic gender gap globally.<sup>3</sup>

Moreover, the progress that has been realized has brought its own challenges. The present decade has witnessed a rise of conservative, populist and, in part, religiously-fuelled and fundamentalist social and political movements against the perceived threat of what has been called 'gender ideology.' This global gender backlash has been visible across continents and as such has been reflected in all UN bodies, including the UN Commission on the Status of Women (CSW), tasked with reviewing the implementation of the BPfA. The main areas of this backlash appear to be common across countries. They include the key areas of institutional and policy frameworks for gender equality, a wide range of policy fields, where anti-gender equality campaigners have gone so far as trying to overturn existing laws on basic human rights. The backlash has also been felt with regards to the operating space and funding for women's human rights NGOs. Consequently, both the gender equality agenda and the main actors promoting this agenda have faced severe challenges, with an ongoing trend of shrinking space for civil society and growing risks for women human rights defenders.

At the same time, the backlash has prompted a strong counter movement of resistance, of which #MeToo and SheDecides are but two examples. Realizing the importance of seizing the momentum that 2020 constitutes, Dutch civil society have come together to identify key steps to be taken in order to deliver the BPfA and SDGs (including SDG 5). Valuing the strong relationship with the Dutch government, especially in the current times of limited civic space globally, Dutch CSOs have compiled the present document with the aim of assisting the Dutch government in the run up to 2020. It focuses on those issues, within each BPfA Critical Area, that have been most affected by the backlash and are most at risk of moving backward rather than forward.

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\* When we use the term women in this document, we refer to women and gender non-conforming persons of all abilities, religions, ethnicities, classes, sexual orientations, sex characteristics, indigeneity, work status, HIV- or health status, gender identities and expressions, wherever they live or any other status that may impact on their life.

<sup>1</sup> UN Women, (2015) *The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action turns 20*, available here: <https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2015/02/beijing-synthesis-report>

<sup>2</sup> EU Agency for Fundamental Rights (2019) *EU Gender Equality Index 2019*, to be published 15 October 2019.

<sup>3</sup> World Economic Forum, *The Global Gender Report 2018*, available here: <https://www.weforum.org/reports/the-global-gender-gap-report-2018>

## Overarching: Leaving No one Behind

Women and girls are not a homogenous group. Acknowledgement of their diversity is crucial for the Beijing+25 outcome documents to have a positive impact on all women and girls. There are a number of marginalised groups of women and girls that face intersecting forms of discrimination and are disproportionately affected by the gender backlash. It is crucial that the Beijing+25 outcome documents recognize how gender norms, roles and stereotypes in society contribute to pertaining gender inequalities affecting women and girls and have an added disproportionate effect if gender intersects with disability status, refugee status, migrant status, pregnancy, single motherhood, sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, sex characteristics, HIV-status, rural status, indigenous status, being a human rights defender and sex worker status.

### In order to ensure that Beijing becomes a reality for all, we call on the Dutch government:

- To take into account these different factors in the implementation of all BPfA Critical Areas to **ensure that all women, girls and gender non-conforming persons can participate** and contribute to their full potential;
- To **recognize women and girls in all their diversity** as well as the diverse forms of households and families, and the needs and protection of the rights of all individuals in households and families;
- To guarantee that the voices of diverse groups of women are heard by **ensuring civil society can meaningfully participate** in the Beijing+25 process, including before and during the CSW64 deliberations on a political outcome;
- To call on all Member States to **provide the funding required to ensure the full implementation of the BPfA.**
- To recognize the importance of the **full engagement of men and boys** as agents and beneficiaries of change towards gender equality, and as strategic partners and allies in the full implementation of the BPfA.

For reasons of clarity and continuity, we have chosen to maintain the titles of the BPfA Critical Areas as headers, even though the wording is often not entirely inclusive.

## A. Women and Poverty

Between 1990 and 2010, the proportion of people in developing regions living below the threshold of \$1.25 a day (in terms of purchasing power parity), the international benchmark for measuring extreme poverty, fell from 47% to 22%.<sup>4</sup> Yet, progress has been uneven across regions and women still are more likely to live in poverty than men. The most crucial points to free women from poverty are the following:

### Key to realizing the objectives under critical area A:

- Collection of **gender-disaggregated poverty statistics**;
- Improving women's livelihoods through **access to land, property and productive resources** through: legal reform; the issuance of individual or joint land and property titles for women; housing subsidies and access to agricultural technologies, information and resources;

<sup>4</sup> UN Entities (2014), *UN Millennium Development Goals Report 2014*, available here: <https://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/2014%20MDG%20report/MDG%202014%20English%20web.pdf>

- Tackling the root causes of women’s poverty requires **removing gender inequalities in paid and unpaid work; ensuring social protection across the lifecycle and equal access to assets and increasing investments in infrastructure and basic social services;**
- Developing legally-binding instruments and measures to **stop the impunity of corporate human rights abuses and violations** that result in forced displacement of communities, loss of livelihood, precarious working conditions, environmental degradation, among other devastating outcomes, all pushing millions of women and girls into poverty.

## B. Education and Training of Women

Education is a human right. (Economic) empowerment of women and girls starts with the guaranteed access to, and equitable participation in, quality education from early childhood onward. While there has been significant progress, there is great variation between regions. Globally, 9 in 10 girls complete their primary education, but only 3 in 4 their lower secondary education. In low income countries, despite progress over the last two decades, less than two thirds of girls complete their primary education, and only 1 in 3 their lower secondary education.<sup>5</sup> Some children are at additional risk of bullying, early drop out or not accessing education due to for example their gender identity or having a disability. Concerted action must be taken to ensure that all women and girls are able to access continuing and lifelong education and training, both formal and informal, ensuring that women are able to adapt their skills to the changing world of work and are not restricted by stereotyped ideas of women’s and men’s societal roles and sectors, to prevent backlash in the future.

Key to realizing the objectives under critical area B:

- Increasing efforts to foster a safe and **gender-responsive school environment:** i.a. through addressing violence against girls and access to menstrual and sanitary services;
- Promoting the development of **gender-sensitive and gender-transformative curricula at all levels** and taking concrete measures to ensure that educational materials challenge social and cultural gender norms, by portraying women and men, youth, girls and boys in positive and non-stereotypical roles (particularly in the teaching of STEM subjects), in order to address the root causes of occupational segregation and the unbalanced division of unpaid care and domestic work;
- Ensuring the implementation of measures aimed at **making STEM more attractive for women and girls**, i.a. through curricula that highlight the broad societal applications of STEM; the exposure of girls and boys, women and men, to female role models in STEM and through sensitising parents, students, teachers and career counsellors, i.a. through a mandatory **training on gender sensitive teaching**, to make teachers more aware of gender differences, their own gender biases, and the way these biases contribute to perpetuating gender stereotypes;
- Ensure the integration of **comprehensive sexuality education (CSE)** in all curricula, that includes scientifically accurate non-judgmental information about sexuality, sexual and gender diversity, SRHR, HIV/AIDS and human rights. CSE challenges gender norms and stereotypes and increases awareness about healthy and respectful relationships based on gender equality.

<sup>5</sup> World Bank (2018), *Missed Opportunities: The High Cost of not Educating Girls*, available here: [http://www.ungei.org/resources/index\\_6513.html](http://www.ungei.org/resources/index_6513.html)

### C. Women and Health

As part of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development all countries have committed to achieving universal health coverage by 2030, including financial risk protection, access to quality essential health-care services and access to safe, effective, quality and affordable essential medicines and vaccines for all.<sup>6</sup> In order to achieve this, a gender perspective must be integrated. There are gender-based differences in life expectancy, healthy life years, health behaviours, mortality, and morbidity risks. This is partly due to socially constructed gender norms that influence the health conditions individuals are susceptible to, as well as access to and uptake of health services. Health data disaggregated by gender is critical for generating evidence in the development and utilization of health innovations such as drugs and medical equipment, as well as for the articulation of health interventions, programmes, and policies that advance gender equality. While progress has been made in the past two decades, medical research still routinely fails to consider the impact of sex and gender and researchers frequently do not enroll enough adult women in later stage clinical trials.<sup>7</sup> Gender discrimination systematically undermines women's and girls' access to healthcare, for reasons that include fewer financial resources and constraints on mobility.<sup>8</sup> In addition, poverty, low levels of education, and sexual and domestic violence hugely impact health outcomes.<sup>9</sup> Relatively low numbers of women in leadership positions in healthcare exacerbate the lack of a gender perspective in medical issues. These are all issues that require progress. However, nowhere has the gender backlash been more visible, than on issues related to Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR). In recent years, resurgent threats to women's SRHR have emerged throughout all continents. In all regions there are examples of laws and policies rolling back existing protections for SRHR, such as through the introduction of retrogressive restrictions on access to abortion and contraception and recriminalizing same sex sexuality. Courts in a number of countries have also been confronted with legal challenges threatening women's SRHR. The backlash has affected the work of many human rights defenders and health care providers providing SRHR and HIV prevention services to women and key populations.

#### Key to realizing the objectives under critical area C:

- Ensuring **universal health coverage for all**, meaning all people and communities can use the promotive, preventive, curative, rehabilitative and palliative health services they need, of sufficient quality to be effective, while also ensuring that the use of these services does not expose individuals and families to financial hardship. This includes those women who are marginalized and face intersecting forms of discrimination (for listing: see overarching);
- **Realization of SRHR** through the availability, accessibility, affordability and funding of youth-friendly, gender-responsive quality Sexual and Reproductive Healthcare services, commodities, information and education, including affordable contraception for all and safe and legal abortion. Services must furthermore include the prevention, screening and treatment for viral hepatitis and cervical cancer, as well as other sexually transmitted infections, including human papillomavirus, and services to respond to sexual and gender-based violence while noting the particular vulnerability of women and girls to these co-infections and co-morbidities;

<sup>6</sup> UN (2015), *2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*, available here: [A/RES/70/1](#)

<sup>7</sup> National Institutes of Health *Office of Women's Health*, available here: <https://orwh.od.nih.gov>

<sup>8</sup> UN Women, <http://www.unwomen.org/en/news/in-focus/women-and-the-sdgs/sdg-3-good-health-well-being>.

<sup>9</sup> Maas AH, van der Schouw YT, Regitz-Zagrosek V, et al. Red alert for Women's Heart: the urgent need for more research and knowledge on cardiovascular disease in women. *Eur Heart J* 2011; 32(11):1362-8.

- **Recognizing that the human rights of women include their right to have control over and decide freely and responsibly on all matters related to their sexuality**, including sexual and reproductive health, free of coercion, discrimination and violence, as a contribution to the achievement of gender equality and the empowerment of women and the realization of their human rights;
- **Collection of health data disaggregated by gender** (this includes research on the female body and gender differences in symptoms and reactions to medication) for the development and utilization of health innovations such as medicines and medical equipment, as well as for the articulation of health interventions, programmes, and policies that advance gender equality;
- **Acknowledge the intersection of sex work, migration and health policies** and their impact on the living and working conditions of migrant workers and sex workers. Adopt a stance that is based on **non-discrimination, and inclusion**.

#### D. Violence against Women

Gender-based violence (GBV) is one of the most wide-spread, persistent and devastating human rights violations in our world today, affecting women and girls in all their diversity, and constitutes both a cause as well as a result of persisting gender stereotypes. It comes in many forms, including physical (domestic) violence, sexual violence, human trafficking, cyber violence, traditional practices (such as child or early marriage and female genital cutting) and femicide. It occurs worldwide, cutting across all generations, nationalities, communities and spheres of our societies, irrespective of age, ethnicity, disability or other background. Evidence suggests, however, that certain characteristics of women, such as sexual orientation, Women Human Rights Defender status, environmental activist status, gender identity, sex worker status, migrant or refugee status, disability status or ethnicity, and some contextual factors, such as humanitarian crises, including conflict and post-conflict situations, may increase women's vulnerability to violence.<sup>10</sup> While it constitutes an integral part of the BPfA and has received renewed attention due to the worldwide #MeToo campaign, the WHO still speaks of a global health problem of epidemic proportions, that leads to such health impacts as depression, alcohol use problems, STDs, unwanted pregnancies (and abortions), injury and ultimately death.<sup>11</sup>

Key to realizing the objectives under critical area D:

- Recognizing that GBV is rooted in **historical and structural inequalities in power relations and that it is a violation of human rights**. Persistence of gender stereotypes and discriminatory norms perpetuates GBV. Therefore, support initiatives which address the norms, attitudes and behaviours underlying GBV and actively engage men and boys. Ensure adequate, increased and stable **resourcing for prevention** of gender-based violence;
- Investing in **capacity development for organizations providing critical support services**. A standardized and accredited programme of training could target professional and lay counsellors, health workers, clergy and pastoral workers, social workers, community development workers, welfare officers, youth workers, school guidance officers and peace mediators;
- Providing **strong and comprehensive legal and policy frameworks** along with adequate resourcing for implementation;

<sup>10</sup> EU Fundamental Rights Agency (2014), *Violence against Women: an EU-Wide Survey*, available here: [https://cdn.atrria.nl/epublications/IAV\\_B00109560.pdf](https://cdn.atrria.nl/epublications/IAV_B00109560.pdf)

<sup>11</sup> WHO (2018), *Global and Regional Estimates of Violence against Women*, available here: [https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/85239/9789241564625\\_eng.pdf?sequence=1](https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/85239/9789241564625_eng.pdf?sequence=1)

- Ensuring **accessible, gender-responsive, youth-friendly and high-quality services** for survivors, inclusive to all, including sex workers, migrant women, LHBTI women;
- Ensuring the **protection of Women Human Rights Defenders (WHRDs)**, including girl and young women WHRDs, LGBTI activists, sex worker rights activists, migrant rights activists and environmental activists;
- **Substantial training on** the protection of victims, on the different forms and on the impacts of **cyber violence against women and girls** should be provided to all law enforcement personnel, especially to first responders in the police and the justice sectors, for them to be able to rapidly respond to complaints and prosecute perpetrators.

## E. Women and Armed Conflict

Both women and men are victims of war and conflict, and flee their homes. Women and girls, however, generally face greater hardship than men in these situations, based on their gender. Personal circumstances can make the journey more difficult for women, such as breastfeeding, menstruation and pregnancy, or responsibility for children or other family members.<sup>12</sup> Additionally, refugee women and girls and LGBTI people are more prone to falling victim to (sexual) violence, exploitation and human trafficking than men.<sup>13</sup> Moreover, Sexual Gender Based Violence (SGBV) such as rape, forced marriage, forced impregnation, forced abortion, torture, trafficking, sexual slavery and the intentional spread of STDs, including HIV/AIDS, are still weapons of warfare in many conflicts.<sup>14</sup> Despite the growing evidence that underlines the importance of inclusive peace processes – part of the BPfA - women remain significantly underrepresented in high-level peacemaking, such as mediating (2%), witnesses and signatories (5%) and negotiating (8%).<sup>15</sup> The BPfA furthermore called for a reduction in military spending.

Key to realizing the objectives under critical area E:

- **Implementation of the full global women, peace and security (WPS) agenda**, including the reinforcement of all commitments made in previous resolutions of the WPS agenda, through gender-responsive policies in all policy areas, ensuring women's equal participation, representation and the protection of women's rights in peace processes. The protection of sexual, reproductive and bodily autonomy rights, including the protection of women human rights defenders remains a vital part of the WPS agenda. To this end, commitment to and improvement of the collection and use of **gender-disaggregated data for gender-sensitive conflict analysis** (including qualitative and quantitative impact indicators) and policy making areas is imperative to understanding the root causes of conflict and policy-making in conflict-affected areas.

<sup>12</sup> Women's Refugee Commission (2016), *No Safety for Refugee Women on the European Route: Report from the Balkans*, available here: <https://www.womensrefugeecommission.org/gbv/resources/1265-balkans-2016>

<sup>13</sup> Amnesty International (2016), *Female Refugees Face Physical Assault, Exploitation and Sexual Harassment on their Journey to Europe*, available here: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2016/01/female-refugees-face-physical-assault-exploitation-and-sexual-harassment-on-their-journey-through-europe/>

<sup>14</sup> UNSG (2019), *Conflict-related Sexual Violence: Report of the Secretary General*, available here: <https://www.un.org/sexualviolenceinconflict/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/report/s-2019-280/Annual-report-2018.pdf>

<sup>15</sup> European Parliament FEMM Committee (2019), *Women's Role in Peace Processes*, available here: [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2019/608869/IPOL\\_STU\(2019\)608869\\_EN.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2019/608869/IPOL_STU(2019)608869_EN.pdf)

- Increasing the budget to WPS work and funding to women's rights organizations to **allocate at least 15% of Member States' aid budget to WPS work**, which thus far has been structurally underfunded and insufficiently covers other relevant WPS domains;<sup>16</sup>
- **Implementing and strengthening all accountability mechanisms of the WPS agenda**, including public yearly country reports to the UNSG, a structural WPS paragraph in the periodic CEDAW reports and National Action Plans on WPS.
- Proactively supporting **women and youth-led community level peace initiatives to feed and gain access to and national, political, level men led peace processes**, thereby implementing Member States' commitments to support women's and youth's participation in peace processes,<sup>17</sup> i.a. through continuous investment in women's economic recovery and resilience, including during crisis situations; through core funding of local women's groups to ensure women representatives to sustain their links with their constituencies, by providing capacity building and by training women to fully understand the political peace processes;
- Ensure a **strong legal framework both on national and international level protecting women and girls in and from armed conflict**, including making use of informal community-level justice systems and implementing and strengthening accountability mechanisms.<sup>18</sup> Additionally, introducing gender-sensitivity training to the justice and security sector, including asylum centres, will foster a better understanding of SGBV;
- Actively working towards **general and complete disarmament** under strict and effective international control; including negotiations on the conclusion, without delay, of a universal and multilaterally and effectively verifiable comprehensive nuclear-test-ban treaty that contributes to nuclear disarmament and the prevention of the proliferation of nuclear weapons in all its aspects. Instead of investing in excessive military expenditures and arms race, funds must be reallocated for social and economic development, particularly for the advancement of women.

## F. Women and the Economy

A range of barriers continue to prevent women from full economic participation. Overall progress in women's economic empowerment has been slow and many of the objectives – developed in 1995 – are as relevant today as they were 25 years ago. In 2018, worldwide women's labour participation stands at 48.5%, 26.5 percentage points below men's. Globally, women and girls perform more than three-quarters of the total amount of unpaid care work: women spend 3.2 times more hours than men on unpaid care,<sup>19</sup> severely impacting their opportunity to enter and stay in employment or entrepreneurship and the quality of jobs they perform. When they do work in paid jobs, women continue to earn significantly less than men. The gender wage gap is estimated at 23%.<sup>20</sup> Additionally, women face the motherhood wage penalty: a difference in wage between women with

<sup>16</sup> UN Women (2015), *Financing of the Women, Peace and Security Agenda*, available here:

<https://wps.unwomen.org/financing/>

<sup>17</sup> See UN Security Council Resolutions 1325, 1889, 2122 and 2242. Also see: <https://dppa.un.org/en/women-peace-and-security>

<sup>18</sup> UN Women, World Bank and IDLO (2019), *Justice for Women, High-Level Group Report*, available here:

<https://reliefweb.int/report/world/justice-women-high-level-group-report-executive-summary-and-key-messages-march-2019>

<sup>19</sup> ILO (2018) *Care work and care jobs for the future of decent work*, available here:

[https://www.ilo.org/global/publications/books/WCMS\\_633135/lang--en/index.htm](https://www.ilo.org/global/publications/books/WCMS_633135/lang--en/index.htm)

<sup>20</sup> UN Women (2018), *Facts and Figures on Economic Empowerment*, available here: <https://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/economic-empowerment/facts-and-figures#notes>

and without dependent children, which increases with the number of children a woman has.<sup>21</sup> Women are more likely than men to be employed in precarious, informal, low-paid forms of work with exploitative and unequal working conditions. Women who choose to set up their own businesses, equally face challenges. Although women's access to microfinance has grown exponentially in the last 20 years, in developing countries the finance gap for micro-, small and medium sized enterprises is gaping. 80% of women owned businesses with credit needs are either un- or underserved – a 1.7 trillion USD financing gap.<sup>22</sup> Globally, 980 million women do not have a bank account. Unbanked people worldwide are twice as likely to live in the world's poorest households. There is a global 7 percentage-point gender gap in financial access, 9 in the developing world—unchanged since 2011.<sup>23</sup> In old age, gender inequality continues. Pension systems grossly fail to produce equal outcomes for women. In most countries, women are less likely than men to receive a pension at all or they have lower benefits. Gendered labour market and life course patterns lie at the roots of women's disadvantage in old age, but their impact can be magnified or mitigated by specific features of pension system design.

Key to realizing the objectives under critical area F:

- **Implementation of policies to recognize, reduce and redistribute unpaid care work**, which is essential to promoting women's economic rights and independence. This includes social protection policies and an increased investment in care services, incl. quality childcare. Parental leave should be enshrined and enforced in national law, be equal for parents - recognizing the diverse forms of households and families - and offered to *all* caregivers, non-transferable and paid according to each parent's salary;
- Ensuring that **part-time and temporary work** – in which women are over-represented – is decent work, by ensuring equal treatment for women and men in non-standard jobs vis-à-vis standard workers with regards to entitlements and benefits on a pro-rata basis;
- Implementation of policies that **support women's enterprise development** in the context of decent work, which will include banking the unbanked, financial inclusion of women, training, positive government procurement commitments and sectoral policies that unlock credit and access to markets for women's enterprises (particularly in STEM-related fields);
- Investment in **financial sector accountability on diversity and inclusion**, enforcing mandatory disclosure of data on serving women-led micro- small and medium-sized enterprises, making the financing gap and the social and cultural norms holding women entrepreneurs back, more visible.
- Urging Member States to **ratify and fully implement ILO Convention 190 on Eliminating Violence and Harassment in the World of Work** and its accompanying Recommendation No. 206 and Resolutions.
- Promote a **safe and supportive legal environment** for sex workers as well as migrant workers to work, self-organize and demand good working conditions, including Recognizing their the right join or set up their own **trade union**, independent from the work being in the formal or informal labour sector in their given context;
- **Expand non-contributory social pensions** that provide basic income security for all regardless of individual labour market trajectories or contributory records.

<sup>21</sup> ILO (2015), *The Motherhood Pay Gap 2015*, available here:

[https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/@dgreports/@dcomm/@publ/documents/publication/wcms\\_348041.pdf](https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/@dgreports/@dcomm/@publ/documents/publication/wcms_348041.pdf)

<sup>22</sup> United Nations Secretary-General's Special Advocate for Inclusive Finance for Development (2018): *Annual Report to the Secretary-General. Financial Inclusion: Technology, Innovation, Progress*, available here:

[https://www.unsgsa.org/files/1715/3790/0214/\\_AR\\_2018\\_web.pdf](https://www.unsgsa.org/files/1715/3790/0214/_AR_2018_web.pdf)

<sup>23</sup> World Bank Group (2018), *The Global Findex Database 2017: Measuring Financial Inclusion and the Fintech Revolution*, available here: <http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/332881525873182837/pdf/126033-PUB-PUBLIC-pubdate-4-19-2018.pdf>



## G. Women in Power and Decision-Making

Governance systems, structures and processes are ultimately weaker where they do not fully include women's voices, talents, experiences and perspectives. Women's equal and meaningful participation, and influence - on an equal footing with men - in public, political and economic decision-making at all levels, and in both formal and informal spaces, is fundamentally a question of social justice – women have the right to participate in decisions which affect their lives. Women's equal participation and influence in decision-making is required for responsive and accountable governance to ensure that the priorities, skills and needs of women are fairly reflected in policies, laws, institutions and service delivery by community, local, national and international governance structures. Despite the steady increase in women's political representation in parliaments, with a median of 26%, women remain significantly under-represented at the highest levels of political participation as well as across the public and private sectors. Women's unequal access to resources and opportunities, in addition to discriminatory social norms across societies and gendered power imbalances within households and communities, impact women's participation and influence at all levels of decision-making, including the extent to which they are perceived as effective leaders.<sup>24</sup>

Key to realizing the objectives under critical area G:

- Capacity gaps mean women are less likely than men to have the education, contacts and resources needed to become effective leaders. **Training and capacity building** are the main method of supporting women in politics. Particular focus is needed to increase the participation and influence of poor and marginalized women. Women's collective action and women's rights organizations which provide critical support for elected and aspiring women leaders, must be adequately resourced and supported;
- Programmes and policies to promote and support women's equal participation must tackle **discriminatory social norms that constitute a barrier to women's participation** in decision making at all levels. This should include attitudes that perpetuate the myth that women are not suitable public and political leaders. This will require a long-term approach and must continue once women become leaders;
- As of February 2019, 50 single or lower houses were composed of 30% or more women.<sup>25</sup> More than half of these countries have applied some form of quotas. Member States and public and private institutions should thus **consider temporary special measures** as a potentially effective tool to increase the number of women in leadership positions;
- Developing, supporting and protecting an enabling environment for the full, meaningful and equal **participation of women's rights organizations, feminist groups and women and girl human rights defenders, youth-led and community-based organizations** in the creation, design and implementation of all legislation and policies relevant to substantive gender equality. This includes supporting **WHRDs' participation** in public life and international decision-making forums. This means addressing restrictions such as travel bans, providing legal, psychosocial and financial support and investing in the resilience of WHRDs and their organizations, including providing core funding and movement building, capacity building and actively protecting WHRDs' right to association.

<sup>24</sup> GAD Network, *Turning Promises into Progress: Gender Equality and the Rights of Women and Girls – Lessons Learnt and Actions Needed*, available here:

<https://static1.squarespace.com/static/536c4ee8e4b0b60bc6ca7c74/t/550abed7e4b0e98cc45eb20c/1426767575563/Turning+Promises+into+Progress+-+Part+two+-+section+4+-+Women%27s+Participation+and+Influence+in+Decision+making.pdf>

<sup>25</sup> Inter-Parliamentary Union, *Women in Politics 2019 Map*, available here: <https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2019/03/women-in-politics-2019-map>

- Ensure the **meaningful participation of (migrant and mobile) sex workers** in the design, development, implementation and evaluation of migration and sex work policies, particularly in their impact on gender equality institutional mechanisms.

## H. Institutional Mechanisms for the Advancement of Women

The BPfA formulated three components to advance towards gender equality institutional mechanisms: create or strengthen national machineries and other governmental bodies; integrate gender perspectives in legislation, public policies, programmes and projects; and generate and disseminate gender-disaggregated data and information for planning and evaluation. 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, remain key challenges across all regions. While the production of gender statistics on a limited number of issues has increased in recent years, gender-disaggregated data still lack in other areas, e.g. on gender-based violence or unpaid care work.

Key to realizing the objectives under critical area H:

- Continuous **capacity strengthening and technical support and the allocation of sufficient human and financial resources** should be prioritized;
- In this light, the de-funding of regional and international human rights systems, including the United Nations and its respective committees and working groups that have been instrumental in advancing women's rights across the globe, is of particular concern. **We thus urge Member States that have not done so, to pay their assessed contributions without further delay.** Furthermore, Member States should initiate, in due time ahead of the 2020-2021 budget negotiations, discussions on how to reverse the trend of reduced regular budget for OHCHR and assuring that the UN's human rights mechanisms are not disproportionately affected by over-all cuts to the UN budget;
- Improving the collection, analysis and dissemination of **gender-disaggregated statistics** should be made a priority.

## I. Human Rights of Women

The BPfA calls on all Governments to: promote and protect the human rights of women, through the full implementation of all human rights instruments, especially the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW); ensure equality and non-discrimination under the law and in practice; and achieve legal literacy. Despite progress in reforming laws, discrimination against women in the law remains pervasive in several areas, particularly in the area of family law. Even when laws guaranteeing equality and non-discrimination are in place, there remain significant obstacles for women to enjoy their human rights in practice.

Key to realizing the objectives under critical area I:

- Strengthening **accountability mechanisms and implementation** of policies/resolutions;
- Challenging **overuse and misuse of the criminal law** which puts marginalized women, including sex workers, migrant women and LGBTI women at particular risk of facing punitive laws and policies;

- A greater effort needed to realize the human rights of women and girls who experience **multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination** through the adoption of laws and services and targeted services;
- Feminist human rights organizing is direly under-resourced, which greatly undermines the capacity of women's, trans and non-binary groups to effectively counter various forms of discrimination, inequality and violations of rights. **Donor governments must commit to feminist foreign policies that include a floor of 85% funding for gender equality as a principal or significant objective (per OECD-DAC) and a floor of 20% of funding for gender equality as a principal objective, substantially increasing direct flows to women's rights organizations and movements.**

## J. Women and the Media

Media play an important role in influencing perceptions of women, raising awareness about gender inequality, and in eliminating gender stereotypes. Gender inequality, however, remains present both in the content that the media produce, as well as in the positions held by women in the media sector. The most recent Global Media Monitoring Project (GMMP) shows that media content is far from gender sensitive and is often presented from a male-dominated perspective.<sup>26</sup> Women remain only 1 in 4 of protagonists in the all media news outlets since 2010, their viewpoints are often not included and they are often portrayed according to stereotypes. Additionally, the safety of female journalists is a serious concern both in the field and in the work place. According to findings of the International News Safety Institute<sup>27</sup>, two thirds of women journalists are harassed and intimidated in their own office, mostly by their male colleagues and superiors on account of their gender, race, age or professional experience. This often leads to self- and social-censorship driven by fear, emotional effects or psychological trauma and even giving up journalism entirely. Apart from challenges women experience in the newsrooms, the International Women's Media Foundation study of 2018 highlighted an increase in (online) harassment of female journalists.<sup>28</sup>

Key to realizing the objectives under critical area J:

- Encouraging the media industry, especially public media, **to produce gender-transformative content and develop self-regulatory policies which create non-discriminatory working conditions** for women in the media, including access to decision-making positions, and setting up monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to assess the progress and need for action within the sector, thereby creating gender equality in their content, workplace and management;
- Advancing gender equality and women's empowerment through media and ICT's requires the **formulation of gender-responsive ICT and media strategies and related policies** which seek to improve the relevance or representativeness of content and services;
- Increasing investments and financial incentives from government for investment in gender equality measures in media and ICT sectors and the establishment of monitoring mechanisms that integrate gender perspectives for **increased accountability around implementation of commitments**;

<sup>26</sup> [http://cdn.agilitycms.com/who-makes-the-news/Imported/reports\\_2015/highlights/highlights\\_en.pdf](http://cdn.agilitycms.com/who-makes-the-news/Imported/reports_2015/highlights/highlights_en.pdf)

<sup>27</sup> Barton, Alana and Helena Storm (2014) *Violence and Harassment against Women in the News Media: A Global Picture*. International News Safety Institute & International Women's Media Foundation, available here: <http://www.iwmf.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/Violence-and-Harassment-against-Women-in-the-News-Media.pdf>

<sup>28</sup> <https://www.iwmf.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/Attacks-and-Harassment.pdf> :

- **Investing in the protection of women in the media sector from violence, including cyber violence**, to reverse the trend of the global epidemic of trivialising online gender-based abuse and provide **access to justice** for all;
- The judicial system and the police need to **prioritize the protection of women in the media** and this should be combined with specific training for women journalists (e.g. on conflict management).<sup>29</sup> Most of the current pushback on online harassment includes prevention measures and advice to those who are attacked giving perpetrators an opportunity to escape the prosecution.

## K. Women and the Environment

According to the most recent estimates by the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC) no less than 21 million people have been displaced by natural disasters every year since 2008. Natural disaster displacements now outnumber new displacements associated with conflict and violence by 3 to 1,<sup>30</sup> thus illustrating the severity of the current climate crisis. Women's dependence on and unequal access to land, water, and other resources and productive assets, which are compounded by limited mobility and decision-making power in many contexts, mean that they are disproportionately affected by climate change, while at the same time, they are underrepresented in decision-making and negotiation structures regarding climate and environmental issues. Even where infrastructure is physically available, the poor and women are often hindered in the actual access to energy and other resources, due to lack of finance, appliances, information, training and education. Yet, unlocking access to energy for women, comes with substantive developmental and environmental benefits. Key to effectively combating climate change, is systemic change and the empowerment of women and girls. Additionally, in order for women to take on roles as agents of change, greater efforts must be made to combat the backlash constituted by the increasing rate of killings, violent acts, threats, harassment, intimidation, smear campaigns, criminalization, judicial harassment, forced eviction and displacement of environmental WHRDs, including indigenous activists, and WHRDs addressing issues relating to land rights, their family members, communities, associates and legal representatives.<sup>31</sup>

### Key to realizing the objectives under critical area K:

- The appointment of a **UN Special Rapporteur on Gender and Climate Change**;
- Ensuring that the terms and conditions for eligibility for benefiting from **The Green Climate Fund are gender sensitive**;
- Ensuring that the data used to implement the promises made in climate change conventions are **gender-differentiated** so that the position of women and girls becomes explicit;
- Commit to supporting **women as leaders and agents of change**, on all levels of decision-making, especially in the area of natural resource management;

<sup>29</sup> M.W.A. Odekerken & L.E. Das, MA (2017), *Een onveilig klimaat: Verslag van het onderzoek 'Bedreigingen van Nederlandse journalisten*, available here: <https://www.svdj.nl/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/Een-dreigend-klimaat-Odekerken-Breninkmeijer.pdf>

<sup>30</sup> IDMC, *Disasters and Climate Change*, available here: <http://www.internal-displacement.org/disasters-and-climate-change>

<sup>31</sup> UNHRC, *Recognizing the contribution of environmental human rights defenders to the enjoyment of human rights, environmental protection and sustainable development*, available here: <https://undocs.org/A/HRC/40/L.22/Rev.1>

- Ensuring that sufficient resources are dedicated to **innovation for adaptation to climate change and actively involving women and girls** in the development of new (gender sensitive) technologies and strategies;
- Ensuring that women and girls, including rural and indigenous women and girls in remote areas, have **access to and control over resources and the expertise and funding** required to efficiently and sustainably cultivate the land they live on, as well as to ownership over aforementioned land and resources;
- Developing, supporting and protecting an **enabling environment for the full, meaningful and equal participation** of women's rights organizations, feminist groups and women and girl human rights defenders, youth-led faith-based and community-based organizations in the creation, design and implementation of all legislation and policies relevant to climate change;
- Urge Member States to develop climate policies from a gender perspective.

## L. The Girl Child

While issues of concern to girls and young women cut across all 12 critical areas, the BPfA gave specific attention to the persistent discrimination against and violation of the rights of the girl child. While there has been progress to realize the rights of girls and young women, efforts are often fragmented and inconsistent and fail to recognize girls' and young women's specific experiences across policy areas. Improving girls' and young women's wellbeing requires a comprehensive approach, including gender-responsive legislation and policies in all areas such as health, including sexual and reproductive health, nutrition, educational and economic outcomes across different stages through early childhood, adolescence and young adulthood, and by addressing issues of fundamental safety and integrity of person, including prevention and protection from violence, harmful practices and discrimination based on age and gender, but also additional factors such as disability, sex characteristics or gender identity.

### Key to realizing the objectives under critical area L:

- **Eliminating harmful practices** through the implementation of education programmes, mass mobilization and media campaigns;
- The adoption of **health and well-being frameworks for girls and young women**; and the enactment of laws and comprehensive policies to eliminate female and intersex genital mutilation/cutting;
- Addressing **early childbearing and child, early and forced marriage**.
- Implementing **gender-responsive child protection legislation, policies and services**.
- Member States should invest in **age-, sex- and gender-related disaggregated data** to adequately reflect girls' and young women's realities in policies;
- Improving access to a **gender-responsive education environment**, such as through abolishing school fees; addressing violence against girls; integrating comprehensive sexuality education in school curricula and providing adequate sanitation facilities in the effort to better respond to girls' needs;
- Developing, supporting and protect an enabling environment for the full, meaningful and equal participation of girl human rights defenders and youth-led organizations in the creation, design and implementation of all legislation and policies relevant to substantive gender equality. This includes the **protection of girl and young women WHRDs**, acknowledging that girls and young women not only face gender discrimination but also age discrimination and have limited mobility, access to information and legal representation compared to adult activists, particularly male adult activists.