

Implementing the 2030 Agenda to Accelerate Realization of Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women and Girls

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Panel 4: Participation and leadership of women’s organizations and gender equality advocates

Remarks by Eleanor Blomstrom, Women’s Environment and Development Organization (shortened for delivery)

Thank you for convening this important session. For this topic on women advocates in particular I look forward to hearing from participants that aren’t sitting on the panel.

As WEDO is an international advocacy organization, that is the perspective I bring. In addition, WEDO is deeply engaged with multiple networks, alliances and constituency groups that link to regional/national/local work of many women’s and feminist organizations – and others working on issues of women’s human rights, gender equality, justice and sustainable development.

To the title of this panel, I would add that this participation and leadership is critical to success of the 2030 Agenda and is already ongoing worldwide – but it needs to be supported and amplified.

I’d venture to say that most of us can agree that Agenda 2030 success includes: diverse and inclusive leadership; participatory and gender-responsive processes and budgets; changes to current norms of over-consumption, wealth accumulation and discrimination; new economic models that ensure redistribution and well-being; halting climate change; and achieving women’s human rights and gender equality – for all people of all ages.

Success will also mean systemic change that overcomes structural barriers to equality and thus sustainable development.

First, what is the role of networks/ alliances/major groups/ women’s movement broadly? They are already working together, looking at the intersections of issues like trade, decent work, transportation, climate change and gender equality. They are thinking across the agenda and across levels/areas of government.

As we look at setting priorities and monitoring implementation of the 2030 Agenda, it’s important to acknowledge the role of civil society and major groups in the process to create the Agenda. Without these constituencies, particularly those that include rightsholders, fewer voices of and people living in poverty and the most marginalized would have arrived at and been heard here at the UN. For example, the Women’s Major Group includes hundreds of organizations working at all levels and across all sectors that were able to contribute experiences, best practices, challenges, and ideas to the international process and also engage at the national level. That is the kind of structure that can support governments in their work now.

In addition to the Women’s Major Group, other constituencies are already working cross-sectorally. One example is the Women and Gender Constituency for the UN climate change process. Other networks exist around 1325, Beijing, DRR, HABITAT and FFD - that bring diverse expertise together. My colleague

Rosa Lizarde earlier spoke of the Women's Working Group for FfD. Many of us will come together at CSW60 to strategize and provide direct inputs and recommendations.

All of these networks have, at their core, organizations working nationally and locally. Governments and national machineries for gender equality can coordinate with them as part of their strategies for implementation and monitoring, including especially the development of national action plans that should include autonomous civil society more broadly. These action plans will identify needs and priorities, set ambitious benchmarks towards achievement of the sustainable development goals in a manner consistent with their human rights obligations, including national-level indicators that complement the global indicator framework in order to track progress in implementing the plans.

To conduct monitoring and review of implementation, Governments should establish a new multi-constituency body or appoint an existing body or bodies. Further, given that women's priorities are underrepresented in national plans and budget allocations, the WMG has recommended that women's and gender constituencies be created to engage in national level implementation, monitoring and review, after the example of the Women's Major Group.

Second, What is participation? What is leadership? Participation includes giving and receiving information, gender balance and consultations, at a base level, but it should be more meaningful and inclusive. Beyond this, we should incorporate women as experts, undertake bi-directional capacity building and work with qualitative and quantitative data that women's organizations generate and collect.

Governments should engage with and directly fund women's organizations that can link to the most marginalized – in addition to directly working with the most marginalized – to design community reporting on implementation that builds on existing and indigenous knowledge in specific areas of interest/focus of diverse women's organizations.

Third, Governments generally, and national machinery for gender equality specifically, need to seek innovative ways to identify who to approach as they build partnerships with women's organizations for implementation. Generally, finance – whether climate finance or sustainable development finance – doesn't get to the smaller on-ground projects run by less traditional women's organizations or others in the women's movement that are the ones actually demonstrating multiple benefits. Thus governments could facilitate consortiums, aggregate projects or undertake other systems to bridge this gap. At the same time, governments need to be conscious not to co-opt movements but rather to support and amplify.

These partnerships with women's human rights and feminist organizations should be prioritized over public-private partnerships, which have a profit motive and are generally less accountable potential adverse human rights impacts and may create perverse incentives that undermine independent public policy making.

Fourth, it's important to reach out to women's organizations to input to the full agenda – not to pigeon-hole women to Goal 5. We know gender is cross-cutting and even (or especially) where the Agenda doesn't mention women or gender equality, the gender lens should be used. For example:

- Creating infrastructure (goal 9) that is gender-sensitive is important in achieving safe living conditions that respond to the specific housing, transportation and employment needs of

women. Due to the long life of infrastructure and its role in shaping patterns of work, leisure, education, commerce, inclusive development of the infrastructure must be a focus.

- Localized energy that is safe, sustainable, renewable and socially and environmentally sound is an important development tool for communities and women should and do play a role in all levels of sound energy generation, distribution and use. (goal 7)
- Goals 12 (SCP), 14 (oceans, marine resources), 15 (ecosystems, forests, land, biodiversity) and 16 (peace, justice, effective institutions) fail to make any mention of gender or women; but each has clear gender aspects and must be addressed in a gender-responsive way, which would better build community participation/leadership.
- Cities (goal 11) play critical role in implementation. Many initiatives are already underway (Cities for CEDAW can link to SDGs) that provide models for working across different sectors/departments to implement integrated policies and programs that contribute to gender equality; transportation, sustainable energy and public/green space are examples linking with safety/health/education/rights for girls and women of all ages.

I'll conclude by saying that solutions for implementation are out there, and they need support and amplification. For example, I was in Paris for the climate conference of the UNFCCC in December. We all know that climate change is cross-cutting and must be urgently addressed to avoid further derailing existing sustainable development progress. The Women and Gender Constituency held a 'Gender Just Solutions' context and published a booklet of the top entries. The solutions were categorized as technical, non-technical and transformative, ranging from solar installation and training to relocation of island communities on the Cartaret Islands. They were selected for addressing more than climate change, with criteria including that the initiatives were women-led, didn't add burden to women's workload, ensured sufficiency and low input of resources, empowered women through a range of 'multiple benefits', had results that can be shared, spread and up-scaled, and do not increase conflict potential.

The solutions are there – we need to find them, fund them, implement and amplify them.