



**Women's Major Group**  
**2019 High Level Political Forum Position Paper**  
**“Empowering people and ensuring inclusiveness and equality”**  
**1 April 2019**

**Executive Summary**

Women today find ourselves in very difficult times. We see this in rising protectionist governments; xenophobia, misogyny, and discrimination; governments turning more inward and backward to the detriment of the world; and power ever more concentrated among elite and corporations. We see this in environmental destruction, violations of women's human rights, privatization of public goods, and further marginalization and exclusion. It is hard to see a light at the end of a long and dark tunnel.

Colonialism and unbridled neoliberalism's effects - including massive poverty, unemployment, landlessness - interacting with patriarchy and other systems of oppression, reinforce inequalities, deny women agency, and block progress towards sustainable development.

Realising the transformative intent of the Sustainable Development Agenda and ensuring women's human rights and gender justice require more than just efficiency; it must be purposeful. We cannot allow for siloed responses to the world's multiple crises.

This Agenda's success necessitates political changes so the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) truly benefit the marginalised and systematically excluded. There must be a profound shift from the dominant yet discredited fixation on economic growth to institutionalised leadership for development, justice and peace. This means moving away from extractivist industries, military investments, and emaciated humanitarian, gender equality and human rights action, and reorienting towards empowering feminist and social movements and human rights for all. Governments, corporations, the military industrial complex, international financial institutions, and other power holders must be held accountable to human rights and commitments to leave no one behind.

The 2019 HLPF is critical because the goals under review speak to some of the most pressing structural challenges the world faces:

1. SDG 17 – Finance and trade rules that restrict poor countries' policy space to follow their human rights and development objectives must change.
2. SDG 16 – Militarized economies must shift to economies guided by human security of all -- women and girls, indigenous, LGBTI, disabled, refugee, and other marginalised communities across the lifespan -- for just, equitable, and nonviolent governance. Governments must prevent attacks and ensure safety and leadership of women human rights defenders, peace activists, and environmental defenders. Portability and progressivity of rights should be ensured.

3. SDG 13 – Unaccountable leaders guided by irrelevant ambitions are bringing irreparable consequences to our biosphere and population. Agenda 2030 is the lighthouse to guide measures to remain under 1.5 degrees, ensuring ecosystem integrity while promoting gender-responsive climate action and women’s participation.
4. SDG 10 – Policy coherence and strengthening the public sector is critical to reduce inequalities between and within countries. This requires reforming macro-economic dynamics. Goals 10, 16 and 17 are closely intertwined: illicit financial flows, unfair trade rules, debt unsustainability, and undermining by international financial institutions of developing countries’ right to development must be addressed.
5. SDG 8 – Corporations can help realise SDGs when they pay taxes, refrain from predatory practices, and ensure labour rights and decent work and working conditions. Social protection is a far more solid priority than private investment. It is also the entry point to macro-economic dimension of unpaid domestic and care work, and other challenges around women’s economic rights.
6. SDG 4 – We expect meaningful and comprehensive facilitation, support and strengthening of life-long education and learning. Austerity and other measures impede investment in transforming people’s lives.

Accountability cannot be postponed: Agenda 2030 was agreed voluntarily, but it should be technically and politically promoted by the High Level Political Forum. So far HLPF has proven a disappointing space. Unless it transforms modalities to deliver follow-up and review processes needed to advance the 2030 Agenda for women and girls of every age, place, ability and status, it remains an empty shell.

## I. Introduction

Today the world is off track to realising the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.<sup>1</sup> Since 1980, the top 1% of the population has captured twice as much global income growth as the bottom 50%.<sup>2</sup> Large amounts of wealth have shifted from public to private hands in all countries<sup>3</sup> Global exploitation of natural resources has more than tripled in 50 years.<sup>4</sup> The world is drastically off-course to realising the Paris Agreement on Climate Change.<sup>5</sup> Up to 82% of fragile and conflict affected states are off-track to achieve Sustainable Development Goal targets.<sup>6</sup>

Research shows that gender equality is the number one predictor of peace<sup>7</sup> and feminist movement building is the number one predictor of policies on reducing violence against women.<sup>8</sup> However, the World Economic Forum estimated that it would take 217 years from 2017 to close the gender gap in workplace equality, and 100 years to close the gap overall. Although inequalities may have narrowed on health and education, economic and political equalities are deteriorating.<sup>9</sup> Meanwhile, because gendered inequality acts as a risk amplifier, women and girls' participation, rights, livelihoods and access to justice are at the front lines of failures to adequately address sustainable development, climate change, build peace, eliminate inequalities, and realise development justice.

Realising the 2030 Agenda requires shifting structures of exploitation and violence toward cultivation and justice. It requires recognising that scarcity is a myth. The resources are there. They are simply stuck in a capitalistic, extractivist, militaristic, colonialist system. Systemic change requires an integrated approach and redistributive system that builds coherence to overcome systemic barriers leading to inequalities within and between countries; adequately addresses the gender and human rights dimensions of each goal and

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<sup>1</sup> Arab NGO Network for Development (ANND), the Center for Economic and Social Rights (CESR), Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era (DAWN), Global Policy Forum (GPF), Public Services International (PSI), Social Watch, Society for International Development (SID), and Third World Network (TWN), (2018) "Exploring New Policy Pathways: Spotlight on Sustainable Development 2018." Available: <https://www.2030spotlight.org/en>; UN Environment Programme (2019). Sixth Global Environment Outlook (GEO-6) Report: Healthy Planet, Healthy People. Available: [https://wedocs.unep.org/bitstream/handle/20.500.11822/27539/GEO6\\_2019.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y](https://wedocs.unep.org/bitstream/handle/20.500.11822/27539/GEO6_2019.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y)

<sup>2</sup> IISD (2018). "Experts Discuss Inequality in Preparation for 2019 Report": [www.sdg.iisd.org/news/experts-discuss-inequality-in-preparation-for-2019-report/](http://www.sdg.iisd.org/news/experts-discuss-inequality-in-preparation-for-2019-report/)

<sup>3</sup> Ibid

<sup>4</sup> Reuters (12 March 2019): "'No tomorrow' for many unless consumption falls - U.N.". Available: [www.news.trust.org/item/20190312175242-osa0i/](http://www.news.trust.org/item/20190312175242-osa0i/)

<sup>5</sup> UN Environment Programme (2019). Sixth Global Environment Outlook (GEO-6) Report: Healthy Planet, Healthy People. Available: [https://wedocs.unep.org/bitstream/handle/20.500.11822/27539/GEO6\\_2019.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y](https://wedocs.unep.org/bitstream/handle/20.500.11822/27539/GEO6_2019.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y)

<sup>6</sup> International Rescue Committee and the Overseas Development Institute (2018). "SDG Progress: Fragility, Crisis and Leaving No One Behind". Available: <https://www.rescue.org/press-release/82-fragile-and-conflict-affected-states-are-track-achieve-sustainable-development-goal>

<sup>7</sup> Hudson, Valerie et al. (2014), "Sex & World Politics." Columbia University Press

<sup>8</sup> Laurel Weldon and Mala Htun (2013). "Feminist Mobilisation and Progressive Policy Change: Why Governments Take Action to Combat Violence Against Women" *Gender and Development*, 21(2)

<sup>9</sup> Gita Sen (2019). "Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment: Feminist Mobilization for the SDGs". *Global Policy*, 10(1): 28-38. Available: <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/1758-5899.12593>; see also: UN Women (2018). *Turning Promises into Action: Gender Equality in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*. Available: [www.unwomen.org/-/media/headquarters/attachments/sections/library/publications/2018/sdg-report-gender-equality-in-the-2030-agenda-for-sustainable-development-2018-en.pdf?la=en&vs=4332](http://www.unwomen.org/-/media/headquarters/attachments/sections/library/publications/2018/sdg-report-gender-equality-in-the-2030-agenda-for-sustainable-development-2018-en.pdf?la=en&vs=4332)

linkages between goals; and commits to genuine accountability processes, including meaningful engagement of civil society and justice for women's human rights, peace, and environmental defenders.

## II. Addressing Systemic Barriers

Tackling systemic barriers and structural inequalities means recognising and responding to the intertwined systemic issues of neoliberalist capitalism, fundamentalisms, militarism, racism, ageism, colonialism, and patriarchy as systemic drivers of gender and other forms of inequality. It is imperative to take a democratization and rights-based approach with a clear and justice-focused definition of prosperity that fully recognises concepts such as *buen vivir*, ecological sustainability and sufficiency, and climate and development justice.

In this paper, the Women's Major Group highlights a set of systemic issues that diminish, undermine and infringe on women's human rights and the success of the SDGs: militarism, corporate influence, consumption and production patterns, and shrinking civil society space.

### *Militarism*

Militarism as a way of thought valorises violent masculinity and is institutionalised through political economies of war. Militarism affirms the idea that we live in a dangerous world and that we need stereotypically "masculine" warriors to protect weak citizens. It relies on gendered and racial understandings to value things associated with the military and devalue things associated with non-violence. Militarism and cultures of militarised masculinities create a climate of political decision-making in which resorting to the use of force becomes a normalised mode of dispute resolution. Militarism thus enables the legitimisation and continuation of violence.<sup>10</sup>

Militarised political economies increase poverty, inequalities and violence against women by limiting investment in gender equitable social development while devastating communities and economies affected by armed conflict, and prioritizing defence expenditures over social sector spending. Military activities also destroy land and resources, either as a tool of warfare, in acts of war, or in the aftermath of conflict. In 2017, there was a \$1.7 trillion arms trade, and in 2014, global military spending (also USD 1.7 trillion) was almost thirteen times higher than development aid allocations from OECD-DAC member countries (approximately USD 135 billion).<sup>11</sup> While security budgets increase, gender equality and human rights budgets remain inadequate. In 2015-2016, only 4% of aid on peace and conflict targeted gender equality as a primary objective<sup>12</sup> (up from 2% in 2012-2013<sup>13</sup> but down from 5% in 2014-2015).<sup>14</sup> This stands in direct opposition to the right to development, and the "innovative finance" called for from Agenda 21(1992) to Beijing (1995) to the 2030 Agenda (2015).

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<sup>10</sup> WILPF. (2016). Does Militarism Lead to Violence? Available: [www.peacewomen.org/sites/default/files/Fact%20Sheet%20Militarism.pdf](http://www.peacewomen.org/sites/default/files/Fact%20Sheet%20Militarism.pdf)

<sup>11</sup> UN Women (2015). "Preventing Conflict, Transforming Justice, Security the Peace: A Global Study on the Implementation of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325". Available: [https://www.peacewomen.org/sites/default/files/UNW-GLOBAL-STUDY-1325-2015%20\(1\).pdf](https://www.peacewomen.org/sites/default/files/UNW-GLOBAL-STUDY-1325-2015%20(1).pdf)

<sup>12</sup> OECD (2018). "Aid to gender equality and women's empowerment: An overview". Available: <https://www.oecd.org/dac/gender-development/Aid-to-gender-overview-2018.pdf>

<sup>13</sup> UN Women 1325 Global Study

<sup>14</sup> OECD (2017). "Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment in Fragile and Conflict Affected Situations: A Review of Donor Support" Available: [https://www.oecd.org/dac/conflict-fragility-resilience/docs/Gender\\_equality\\_in\\_fragile\\_situations\\_2017.pdf](https://www.oecd.org/dac/conflict-fragility-resilience/docs/Gender_equality_in_fragile_situations_2017.pdf)

## *Corporate influence*

Over the past 40 years, the world has been both encouraged and coerced into an era in which the most powerful law is not that of sovereignty but that of neoliberal capitalist supply and demand. In 2016, of the 100 largest economies in the world, 69 were corporations, and only 31 were countries.<sup>15</sup> Recent estimates suggest that 10% of global Gross Domestic Product (GDP) is held in tax havens.<sup>16</sup> The UN (conservatively) estimates that international financial flows out of Africa amount to \$50 billion per year.<sup>17</sup> According to a 2012 estimate, as much as \$32 trillion of wealth is held offshore.<sup>18</sup> Meanwhile, huge financing gaps on health, education and social protection persist.<sup>19</sup> This is a feature, not a bug: money is being leached from poor countries, and developed countries undermine opportunities for sustainable development and peace. The rising power and extended reach of corporations - at times exceeding the power of states - in the current era of globalisation, extractivism, impunity and extreme inequality is an urgent challenge.

Since corporations are dedicated to making profit while states are obligated to uphold a social contract, disparities in power often create conflicts between action for profit and action guaranteeing human rights, peace, and sustainability. For example, forced evictions by mining companies in Guatemala involved gang rape (SDG 5)<sup>20</sup> while women in the mining sector in the Democratic Republic of Congo have no safe access to water (SDG 6), food (SDG 2), education (SDG 4), or health (SDG 3), while generally engaged in the most toxic work at the mining sites (SDG 8).<sup>21</sup> The private sector is held up as a source of innovative finance, yet corporate tax evasion, illicit financial flows and lack of transparency diminish public funding sources for sustainable development, gender equality and universal human rights.

## *Unsustainable consumption and production*

Unsustainable production and consumption patterns are inextricably linked to a neoliberal capitalist system that values growth and profit over justice, sustainability and sufficiency. These patterns exacerbate unequal distribution of resources and negatively impact achievement of gender equality and women's human rights. Feminists have pointed out how current rules about what count as consumption and production are also gendered: investments in human development such as health, education, childcare are currently treated as consumption expenditures in public finances. This is a backwards approach: fiscal rules should be reconfigured around what counts as consumption rather than investment.

Extractivist, profit-oriented patterns of production and consumption contribute to climate change (SDG 13), conflict (SDG 16), ocean acidification (SDG 14), pollution, excess traffic and waste (SDGs 6, 7, 8, 9, 11,

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<sup>15</sup> Oxfam (2016). "The world's top 100 economies: 31 countries; 69 corporations" Available: <https://oxfamblogs.org/fp2p/the-worlds-top-100-economies-31-countries-69-corporations/>

<sup>16</sup> Forbes (2017). "Tax Haven Cash Rising, Now Equal To At Least 10% Of World GDP". Available: <https://www.forbes.com/sites/kenrapoza/2017/09/15/tax-haven-cash-rising-now-equal-to-at-least-10-of-world-gdp/#64057eee70d6>

<sup>17</sup> UNCTAD (2018) "New project to measure illicit financial flows in Africa" Available: <https://unctad.org/en/pages/newsdetails.aspx?OriginalVersionID=1688> a

<sup>18</sup> Reuters (2012). "Super rich hold \$32 trillion in offshore havens". Available: <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-offshore-wealth/super-rich-hold-32-trillion-in-offshore-havens-idUSBRE86L03U20120722>

<sup>19</sup> See also: AWID (2017). "Illicit Financial Flows: Why we should claim these resources for gender, economic and social justice" Available: <https://www.awid.org/publications/illicit-financial-flows-why-we-should-claim-these-resources-gender-economic-and-social>

<sup>20</sup> WILPF. (2016). "Indigenous Women's Struggle Against Corporate Abuse in Guatemala." Available: <https://wilpf.org/indigenous-womens-struggle-against-corporate-abuse-in-guatemala/>

<sup>21</sup> WILPF. (2016). "Case Study: Corporations, Peace, and Gender Equality in the DRC". Available: [www.peacewomen.org/resource/case-study-corporations-peace-and-gender-equality-drc](http://www.peacewomen.org/resource/case-study-corporations-peace-and-gender-equality-drc)

12), which impact food security (SDG 2), health (SDG 3), gender inequality (SDG 5), water (SDG 6), soil (SDG 2) and air quality (SDG 13) for many, and bring prosperity (SDG 1) for few. These patterns are primary contributors to greenhouse gas emissions that are responsible for climate change and are the historic responsibility of developed countries, in the context of common but differentiated responsibilities. Further, the current practice of in-house consumption but outsourced production leading to carbon parking also needs to be addressed and changed.

In the larger context of inequality, racism and intersecting discriminations, the impacts from overproduction and consumption are more intense for marginalized populations whose neighborhoods are often the site of overcrowding, polluting industry and heavy traffic (SDG 10) including in fragile and conflict affected states (SDG 16). Additionally, due to gendered roles and stereotypes, it is most often women who are responsible for unpaid and devalued care work of children, the ill, persons with disabilities and older persons. As a result, they experience poverty, loss of health, education, time and income and social protection (SDGs 1, 4, 5) and suffer from a lack of access to justice (SDG 16), in law and in practice.

### ***Colonial legacy***

Colonial structures institutionalise foreign patriarchy into every aspect of social, economic, cultural, and political life from naming children and designating land titles and inheritance measures to cultural, economic, and political identification and classification of women. Colonial structures that overthrow original nations and original bodies of laws systematically disenfranchised women and made foreign men the leaders, legislators, and decision-makers of newcomer start-ups that misrepresent communities and nations, disregarding the participatory governance structures of colonized and/or occupied women. Colonial patterns also continue through extractivist industries and exploitation of developing countries by developed countries with attendant widening income gaps. This contributes to many forms of violence especially against women and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex and other sexuality, sex and gender diverse (LGBTI+) people, including violations of reproductive rights to systematic rape to hostage-taking and threats; it also undermines community health and resilience.

Sustainable development requires a financial framework that supports development justice, including by curbing illicit financial flows and progressive taxation to reduce concentrations of wealth and economic power. As the UN Secretary-General noted, investing \$2 million in prevention can generate net savings of \$33 billion per year from averted conflict. However, austerity measures and regressive taxation imposed by international financial institutions impede countries' ability to build foundations for sustainable development and peace.<sup>22</sup>

### ***Attacks on human rights and environmental defenders***

Growing repression and attacks on women human rights and environmental defenders (WHRDs) and women peace activists who stand up for their rights and the rights of their communities and environment also remains an urgent challenge. In 2017, the murders of 312 human rights defenders were committed across the globe, 80 percent of which occurred in Brazil, Colombia, Mexico and the Philippines. In 2018, 321 human rights defenders were killed, 126 in Colombia alone.<sup>23</sup> In addition to direct attacks, activists also face shrinking space including due to increasing militarisation worldwide: Regulations by the Financial Action Task Force delay, block, and overregulate activists due to risking criteria around counter-terrorism, which particular impact on women human rights and environmental defenders in conflict affected

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<sup>22</sup> WILPF. (2017). A Feminist Perspective on Post-Conflict Restructuring and Recovery: The Case of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Available: <https://wilpf.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/Feminist-political-economy-ENG-FINAL.pdf>

<sup>23</sup> Frontline Defenders Global Analysis 2018. Available: [https://www.frontlinedefenders.org/sites/default/files/global\\_analysis\\_2018.pdf](https://www.frontlinedefenders.org/sites/default/files/global_analysis_2018.pdf)

countries.<sup>24</sup> In 2018, the Special Rapporteur on Human Rights and Conflict found that counter-terrorism law and practice constitutes de facto and permanent states of emergency which undermine and violate human rights globally.<sup>25</sup> Many member states representatives called for the need to strengthen the participation of local communities in decision-making. Yet protecting defenders requires more concerted action.

### III. Coherence and interlinkages with other international processes

#### *Interlinkages*

At the High Level Political Forums in 2016, 2017, and 2018, a holistic approach to SDG commitments on policy coherence failed to be realised. Rather than creating integrated approaches through effective leadership on coherence and interlinkages that shift structures of exploitation and violence toward cultivation and justice, the predominant approach has continued to be incremental and sectoral. The HLPF is becoming a fair where developing countries come to share tourism-style videos and beg for aid from developed countries, or private-public partnerships from corporations.

We cannot continue the trend of having the transformative vision of the SDGs continually watered down.<sup>26</sup> We need a revolution in responsibility and accountability, not business as usual. The Women's Major Group stresses the need to recognise the challenge of properly addressing interlinkages at all levels in the implementation, as well as in the follow up and review in order to honor the ambition of the 2030 Agenda.

Rather than justifying existing priorities under select indicators, member states must make substantive shifts. A better approach is needed to assessing gendered, environmental, and peace risks, and developing policy priorities.

Realising the 2030 Agenda requires strengthening leadership to ensure holistic policy coordination and coherence, aligning budget with priorities for people and planet with a focus on gender equality, climate justice, and peace, and building data that enables more responsive governance. It requires strengthening risk assessment procedures to address gendered, environmental, and peace risks, and taking action on these assessments to not just evaluate sector risks within sectors (i.e., environmental risks in environmental work, or gender risks in social sectors), but holistically across sectors as well (i.e., assessing environmental, gender, and peace impacts of overarching fiscal priorities as well as addressing multiple risks within each sector). It requires taking action based on these assessments to shift away from traditional gender blind approaches that subsidize climate catastrophe and militarised violence. Instead, it requires shifting towards investment in gender equitable social protection systems, reparations, and the institutions guaranteeing women's human rights, including sexual and reproductive health and rights, livelihoods, and restorative justice systems. In Sweden, political leadership by Minister for Foreign Affairs Margot Wallström, resulted in the country becoming in 2014 the first country in the world to launch a feminist foreign policy,<sup>27</sup> this

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<sup>24</sup> Duke Law, IHRC, WPP. (2017). Tightening the Purse Strings: What Countering Terrorism Financing Costs Gender Equality and Security." Available: <https://law.duke.edu/sites/default/files/humanrights/tighteningpursestrings.pdf>

<sup>25</sup> 2018 Report of the Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms while countering terrorism on the human rights challenge of states of emergency in the context of countering terrorism (A/HRC/37/52) Available: [https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/Terrorism/A\\_HRC\\_37\\_52.pdf](https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/Terrorism/A_HRC_37_52.pdf)

<sup>26</sup> Sara Burke Bettina Luise Rürup (2019), "Political Thriller Exposes the Underbelly of Global Goals". Available: <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/1758-5899.12640>

<sup>27</sup> Handbook Sweden's feminist foreign policy. Available: <https://www.government.se/4abf3b/contentassets/fc115607a4ad4bca913cd8d11c2339dc/handbook-swedens-feminist-foreign-policy>

aimed at systematically integrating a gender perspective into the foreign policy agenda by “strengthen[ing] all women’s and girls’ Rights, Representation and Resources, based on the Reality in which they live.”

The interlinkages are varied and multidimensional, so we believe proper attention should be made to comprehend these. We cannot understand the environmental crisis without talking about violence against women or the extractive economic system. We cannot speak of decent work and economic development without talking about human trafficking, the crisis of care, the gendered division of labor, ageism and the heteropatriarchal system. We cannot ensure sustainable cities and communities, without recognising and addressing sexual violence and overuse of resources. And we cannot ensure healthy lives and wellbeing, without ensuring the bodily and sexual autonomy of women as well as retaining autonomy in decision making as they age or the integrity of our natural environmental systems.

We will not achieve the transformational aims of this agenda, if we silo our responses to the economic, ecological and social crises that we face. We therefore recommend one major measure to properly address the challenge of promoting interrelated measures:

1. The HLPF could consider, as part of its review in 2019, establishing a mechanism to monitor and review the interlinkages aspects of the agenda, including how the implementation is addressing systemic concerns such as international taxation, illicit financial flows, colonization and ODA.

### *Coherence*

The Sustainable Development Goals and 2030 Agenda is the articulation of a new kind of development for people and planet that must start with existing commitments on human rights, environmental protection, and international law. It was not drafted in a political or legal vacuum, but in the context of international agreements and conventions such as the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), the Beijing Platform for Action, the International Conference on Population and Development (Cairo, 1994), and the outcomes from processes on social development, urban development/cities, disasters, population, Indigenous Peoples, Women, Peace and Security, disarmament, climate change, and from regional bodies. These benchmark decisions come from the backs of hard fought women social movements around the world.

Ensuring policy coherence must therefore be aligned based on existing commitments.<sup>28</sup> This includes:

1. **On Financing:** Implement effective taxation of private and corporate wealth, assets and income, so that states could have the adequate fiscal space to pursue its duty-bearer responsibilities and finance the 2030 Agenda. The continued business as usual brings us 10 years into the last financial crisis, where some of the root determinants remain unaddressed, and where the number of Low-Income Countries facing debt crisis has doubled since 2013. Governments and private enterprises need to effectively implement the ILO Labour Conventions, the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights, the OECD Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises, and the UN Guiding Principles on Foreign Debt and Human Rights call to prioritize human rights spending over debt service when they allocate budget. Furthermore, there must be an international legally binding instrument on transnational corporations and other business enterprises, while recognising the trade related instruments of the Addis Agenda and the 2030 Agenda’s Means of Implementation, which include the conclusion of the Doha Development Round and the principle of Special and

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<sup>28</sup> See, e.g.,: Danish Institute for Human Rights. (2019). SDG - Human Rights Data Explorer. Available: [www.sdgdata.humanrights.dk](http://www.sdgdata.humanrights.dk)

Differential Treatment<sup>29</sup>. All this must be recognised and accelerated to truly finance a 2030 Agenda that leaves no one behind.

2. **On Peace:** Accelerate commitments including national and regional action plans on Women, Peace and Security (UN Security Council Resolution 1325) as a key priority for SDG16 in line with CEDAW General Recommendation 30 and Beijing Platform for Action Area E. Ensure extraterritorial accountability including on flows of small arms and light weapons (16.2) to strengthen prevention of gender based as well as all forms of violence (5.4, 16.1) in line with the Arms Trade Treaty gender criterion (Article 7(4)), including by strengthening implementation of national action plans on small arms and light weapons in line with the Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat, and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects (PoA). Strengthen coordination and accountability to reduce current expansion of militarised security and strengthen peace governance and protection of civilians (i.e., in line with Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, Convention against Torture and other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment).
3. **On Climate:** Accelerate action on the Gender Action Plan by the Parties to the Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and prioritise implementation of the gender equality and women's leadership priorities of the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction. Ensure UNFCCC climate change adaptation and mitigation policies that do not harm biodiversity, in order to reach the objectives of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) and Aichi Biodiversity Targets. Strengthen policy coherence between the 2030 Agenda and the three Rio Conventions for improved biodiversity policy and law.
4. **On Economic Prosperity:** Ensure social and environmental protection is not sacrificed to growth. Accelerate development for people and planet that ensures nondiscriminatory social protection in line with international human rights standards by strengthening mechanisms to: limit concentrations of wealth, strengthen tax justice, tackle illicit financial flows, create systematic debt jubilee or reparations, reform investment agreements, protect against financialization of public goods, ensure corporate accountability for human rights, and redefine consumption, production, and externalities for gender equitable and intergenerational accounting (i.e., consistent with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Convention on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women, Convention on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, Convention on Persons with Disabilities, Convention on Migrants W, Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples) and labor conventions (i.e., ILO conventions on discrimination, equal remuneration for work of equal value, maternity protection, minimum wage fixing, social protection floors, child labour, forced labour, migrants and migration).
5. **On Inequalities:** Prioritize mitigating discriminatory laws, policies, and norms as a top priority in all areas in line with international law through comprehensive impact assessments and follow-up (i.e., consistent with the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Racial Discrimination, Convention on the Rights of the Child, Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, Convention on the Protection of the Rights of all Migrant Workers and Members of their Families, Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights).
6. **On Education and Lifelong Learning:** Ensure free and compulsory formal, non-formal, and informal education as a fundamental human right. Ensure the state as duty bearer provides accessible, relevant, participatory, democratic, publicly-funded, and scientific-based education as a public good. SDG 4 must also address fair and living wages for public school teachers and student resource staff. These principles along with education as rights-based for girls and for all women to

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<sup>29</sup> Civil Society Financing for Development (FfD) Group (2018) "Civil Society FfD Group's Statement to the 2018 ECOSOC FfD Follow-up Forum." Available: <https://csoforffd.org/2018/05/05/civil-society-ffd-groups-statement-to-the-2018-ecosoc-ffd-follow-up-forum/>

achieving gender equity and economic mobility must align with the Convention against Discrimination in Education, the UN General Assembly Resolution on the Right to Education in Emergency Situations, the 2015 Incheon Declaration, the Education 2030 Framework for Action, and the Brussels Declaration of the 2018 (UNESCO) Global Meeting on Education.

**The HLPF should recognise that a rights-based approach to sustainable development is not an option, but an obligation.** As the HLPF has a mandate of sharing and peer-learning, utilizing the existing human rights review mechanisms presents an opportunity to transform the Sustainable Development Agenda from burgeoning rhetoric into rights realisation. In this way, we will ensure that women's voices are not only heard, but answered and incorporated into all processes. This is the essence of accountability. In addition, public-private partnerships should not be advanced unless they are accountable to citizens, ensuring ex-ante and ex-post compliance with human rights, gender equality, and labour and environmental standards, through a legally binding corporate accountability mechanism.

#### IV. Priority Goals

##### ***SDG 17. Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development***

The adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development came at a time when our world was facing multiple and interconnected crisis of worsening inequalities, increasing climate threats, food and energy price, rising insecurity, attacks on participatory democracy and growing fundamentalisms. It has been nearly five years since the adoption of Agenda 2030. However, unfortunately, the lived realities of women across the globe, particularly from the global south, do not show much progress since 2015.

Gender equality and the realisation of the human rights of all women and girls are clearly stated in the objectives of the SDGs as well as included in one of the Goal 5 targets that talks about ensuring women's full and effective participation in political and economic life, and recognising and valuing unpaid care and domestic work, among others. However if we look deeply into the key financing strategies that have been prioritised and promoted, we realise it fundamentally is in contradiction with the commitment with even a risk to jeopardise any progress feminist and women's rights movements have been able to achieve to date.

The key financing strategies prioritised for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda includes trade and investment liberalisation, a significant influential role of the private sector through public-private partnership and international private finance. This all greatly undermines mobilisation of domestic resources, particularly in developing countries, despite the considerable emphasis put onto the role of domestic resource mobilisation as a source of financing for development.

##### Impacts on women and girls / gender equality

###### **1. Trade and investment liberalisation**

- a. *Domestic resource mobilization:* Trade liberalisation results in significant reductions in government revenue due to cuts in domestic trade taxes, including tariffs; and most often the loss or reduction in government revenue is either replaced by regressive taxes such as goods and services or value added taxes, or reduced/privatized public services. Regressive tax and cuts on public services are felt more acutely by women who constitute a large part of the poor and informal working sectors in the global south. Even the IMF<sup>30</sup> finds that

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<sup>30</sup> Thomas Baunsgaard and Michael Keen (2005) "IMF Working Paper WP/05/112". Available: <https://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/wp/2005/wp05112.pdf>

low-income countries largely fail to recover revenue they have lost as a result of trade liberalisation from other domestic sources.

- b. *Investor State Dispute Settlement (ISDS) provisions*: Enables foreign investors to bring a claim in an arbitration tribunal against a government for a breach of a provision of an agreement or treaty for the loss of their ‘expected’ profits. ISDS has been tactically used by multinational corporations to challenge and undermine actions taken by government to protect human rights, environment or promote equitable development. There are numerous cases where ISDS have been used to challenge government’s regulatory capacity and human rights obligations, e.g. right to safe and healthy environment, water and sanitation, tax justice, minimum wage, affirmative actions for women’s human rights. Furthermore, the secrecy of trade and investment negotiations is a direct attack to participatory democracy as in most of the cases, even parliamentarians do not have access to information on the trade negotiations, while if the ISDS case is brought the cost (e.g. in average US\$ 8 million per dispute) will be paid by taxpayers, including in countries where people do not have access to basic, essential public services.
- c. *Women’s labour and decent work*: Goal 8 of the SDGs aims to “promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable growth, and full and productive employment and decent work for all”. However the decent work agenda is fundamentally impaired as it is linked with economic growth agenda, which drives economies to be more competitive and attractive to foreign investors at the cost of people’s lives and the environment. Worse, the driving force of these economic reforms is neoliberal capitalism, which treats women as a mere capital to maximise profits, e.g. women mostly work in labour-intensive, undervalued, unregulated, informal or ‘flexible’ export oriented industries and unpaid care work (including care for children or the elderly) remain unaccounted for.

## **2. Private finance and public-private partnership**

- a. Challenges experienced by women include reductions in social protection coverage (through rationalising it), privatisation of essential public services such as health care system reform which includes raising ‘user’ fees, reduced access to clean energy and safe water, labour flexibilisation, which include revising minimum wage and regressive taxes.
- b. By its nature, privatisation puts profits over social goals, and that very fact is fundamentally in contradiction with government’s human rights obligations. Overall, Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs), a popular form of privatisation or private investment, receive a global average of 12 per cent profitable return on their investments; however, in developing nations, companies expect a much higher profit -- on average 25 per cent. When they come into developing countries, they offer deals which are abusive: they are profiting even higher from deals with the public sector than they would in the regular market. However, this is a bad deal for people: governments bear the risk of partnership, while companies make high profits even in the case of a failure with the project. When public services are cut or privatised, women are forced to fill in those gaps providing unpaid care and household work: globally women on average provide 2.5 more times more unpaid care work than men. Funding toward the public good and services would have a greater impact on achieving Goal 5, 8 and 10 in particular, and would prevent adverse impacts on women due to privatization.
- c. Combined with a sovereign debt crisis and austerity/structural adjustment programmes enforced by international financial institutions, privatisation or cuts in public spending as a means of SDGs implementation put the rights of women and girls and gender equality at greater risk.

## Recommendations

1. **Restore the primacy of human rights over inconsistent international obligations (policy coherence).** The provisions of trade and investment agreements that are found to be inconsistent with the human rights obligations of governments should be revised or terminated. Article 103 of the UN Charter, by which all UN Member States are bound, states: ‘In the event of a conflict between the obligations of the Members of the United Nations under the present Charter and their obligations under any other international agreement, the obligations under the present Charter shall prevail’. This call has also been put forth by the UN Independent Expert on the Promotion of an Equitable and Democratic International Order.
2. **Conduct Ex-ante, periodic and ex-post human rights and environmental impact assessment must be made compulsory for all trade and investment agreements.** This recommendation would be in line with the Guiding Principles on Human Rights Impact Assessments of Trade and Investment Agreements as formulated by the UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food; Guiding Principles on Human Rights Impact Assessments of Economic Reforms by the UN Independent Expert on Foreign Debt as well as the recently adopted Human Rights Council resolution A/HRC/40/L.13<sup>31</sup>; and the commitment made in the Beijing Platform for Action nearly 25 years ago.
3. Establish **transparent, accountable and progressive tax systems as well as a global tax body within the UN** to facilitate this. Tax is the primary source for domestic resource mobilization. However, it is extremely concerning to see tax avoidance and evasion becoming a common incentive for corporations to attract investments. When corporations don’t pay their fair share of taxes, there is less money to invest in public services, social protection and sustainable infrastructure.
4. Support and commit to the process of the **Human Rights Council’s Binding Treaty on Transnational Corporations and Other Business Enterprises with respect to Human Rights.** It is of critical importance to restore sovereign nations’ regulatory capacity and obligations in order to regulate and hold the private sector accountable to its human rights violations and to ensure access to justice to those whose rights have been violated.
5. End austerity, curb illicit financial flows and consider establishing a sovereign debt restructuring mechanism within the UN.
6. Ensure gender-responsive, participatory budgeting systems in public, private and donor agencies.

### ***SDG 16: Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels***

Today, the world is spending money on violence and war rather than gender justice and peace. In 2018, there was a \$1.7 trillion arms trade. However, in 2014-2015, only 5% of aid on peace and security targeted gender equality as a primary objective. Meanwhile, the number of forcibly displaced people has increased by over 50 per cent between 2007 (42.7 million) and 2017 (68.5 million) as a result of persecution, conflict, or generalised violence.<sup>32</sup>

According to a 2018 Institute for Economics and Peace report,<sup>33</sup> the economic cost of violence globally in 2017 was \$14.7 trillion (12.4 % of global GDP or \$1,988 per person), a 16% increase since 2012. The single

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<sup>31</sup> “The effects of foreign debt and other related international financial obligations of States on the full enjoyment of all human rights, particularly economic, social and cultural rights”

<sup>32</sup> UNHCR. (2017). Global Trends: Forced Displacement in 2017. Available: <https://www.unhcr.org/en-us/statistics/unhcrstats/5b27be547/unhcr-global-trends-2017.html>

<sup>33</sup> IEP. (2018). The Economic Value of Peace 2018. Available: [www.economicsandpeace.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/Economic-Value-of-Peace-2018.pdf](http://www.economicsandpeace.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/Economic-Value-of-Peace-2018.pdf)

largest contributor to this (37%) was military expenditure, followed by internal spending on security (police, judicial, and prison system outlays) (27%). The production and use of weapons negatively affects the environment, often impeding use of land and water by poisoning natural resources or physically blocking access to resources. Military activities further destroy land and resources, either intentionally as a method or tool of warfare, inadvertently in the acts of war, or in the aftermath of conflict, with particular impact on at risk groups. Environmental watchdogs have noted that the US military is the single larger global polluter.

The current crisis-response approach to conflict and violence is not sustainable. Realising SDG16 on peaceful, just, and inclusive societies requires a power shift that re-centres work on equality, development, and peace around voices, human security, and rights of women and those most marginalised. This requires not just technical fixes, but structural transformation that moves from institutionalising war governance to institutionalising peace governance, for people and planet.

#### Impacts on women and girls / gender equality

Current militarised approaches to peace and security consistently exclude and undermine women's participation, protection, and rights, and systematically undermine opportunities for long term and sustainable peace.

Between 1990 and 2017, women constituted only 2 percent of mediators, 8 percent of negotiators, and 5 percent of witnesses and signatories in all major peace process.<sup>34</sup> In Syria, women civil society have led rebuilding of communities through track 3 mediation to reconcile communities and designed plans for a post-conflict Syria based on nondiscrimination and women's human rights. Yet, women continue to be tokenized in formal peace negotiations.

Political economies of war invest in corporate and state power at the expense of people and planet. Civil society shadow reports found that arms sales from Germany<sup>35</sup>, Spain<sup>36</sup>, Sweden<sup>37</sup> were linked with gender based violence and violence against women (SDG 5) in Brazil, Cameroon, Colombia, India, Indonesia, Iraq, Kazakhstan, Mexico, Namibia, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and United Arab Emirates. Civil society reports also found that arms transfers from the United Kingdom,<sup>38</sup> Sweden,<sup>39</sup> and France<sup>40</sup> violated obligations on economic, social and cultural rights in Yemen including on health (SDG 3), education (SDG 4), and housing (SDG 11). Environmental contamination from nuclear waste has occurred around the world due to the creation, testing, and storage of nuclear weapons, with particular impact on low income minorities with

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<sup>34</sup> UN Women (2018) Facts and Figures: Peace and Security. Available: [www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/peace-and-security/facts-and-figures#\\_Notes](http://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/peace-and-security/facts-and-figures#_Notes)

<sup>35</sup> ECCHR and WILPF. (2017). The Impact of Germany's Arms Transfers on Women. Available: [www.reachingcriticalwill.org/images/documents/Publications/CEDAW-Germany.pdf](http://www.reachingcriticalwill.org/images/documents/Publications/CEDAW-Germany.pdf)

<sup>36</sup> WILPF (2017). Spanish Arms Trade and Risk Assessments. Available: [www.reachingcriticalwill.org/images/documents/Disarmament-fora/att/ATTCaseSpain\\_Final.pdf](http://www.reachingcriticalwill.org/images/documents/Disarmament-fora/att/ATTCaseSpain_Final.pdf)

<sup>37</sup> WILPF. (2016). The Swedish Arms Trade and Risk Assessments: Does a Feminist Foreign Policy Make a Difference? Available: [www.reachingcriticalwill.org/images/documents/Publications/swedish-arms-trade.pdf](http://www.reachingcriticalwill.org/images/documents/Publications/swedish-arms-trade.pdf)

<sup>38</sup> WILPF (2016). "Explosive Weapons and the Right to Health, Education, and Adequate Housing: Extraterritorial Obligations of the United Kingdom under CESC" Available: <http://www.reachingcriticalwill.org/images/documents/Publications/wilpf-cescr-uk.pdf>

<sup>39</sup> WILPF (2016). "Explosive Weapons and the Right to Health, Education, and Adequate Housing: Extraterritorial Obligations of Sweden under CESC" Available: <http://www.reachingcriticalwill.org/images/documents/Publications/wilpf-cescr-sweden.pdf>

<sup>40</sup> WILPF (2016). "Explosive Weapons and the Right to Health, Education, and Adequate Housing: Extraterritorial Obligations of France under CESC" Available: [www.reachingcriticalwill.org/images/documents/Publications/wilpf-cescr-france.pdf](http://www.reachingcriticalwill.org/images/documents/Publications/wilpf-cescr-france.pdf)

limited political power, such as Latinx and Native American populations at the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant, in Carlsbad, New Mexico, United States, and populations of nuclear test sites in the South Pacific, Nevada, Kazakhstan, China, India and Pakistan.

#### Structural issues, barriers, and the actors

Feminists have pointed out how unpaid care work subsidizes economies of societies while perpetuating social, economic, and political discrimination against women. The flip side of this is that purveyors of violence are being subsidized by communities. Arms exports continue to be facilitated and subsidized directly, indirectly, through export financing schemes, marketing subsidies, operational support, and payment of initial research and development costs. Military budgets are too often a black box, and military lines are treated as sacrosanct.

Making explicit the global cost of violence and identifying and accounting for (redistributing) responsibility to the source is critical moving from economies of war to economies of gender justice and peace. Strategies for moving in this direction should include: 1) demilitarizing defence, 2) demilitarizing society, and 3) investing in gender equitable and resilient societies. In Colombia, women human rights defenders have called through their “Mas Vida, Menos Armas” (“More Life, Less Arms”) campaign for not just demilitarization of the FARC, but demilitarization of society as a whole. In Uruguay after the dictatorship, leaders were able to shift certain positions from military to civilian control, and reduce and control military budgets.

Developed countries must be held accountable on extraterritorial human rights obligations, including around arms transfers with gendered risks and illicit financial flows that reinforce corporate power. Linking up commitments on Women Peace and Security aimed at peace and security that work for women and all people with action on the SDGs will be important if we are to have transformative change that overturns systems of power and privilege for justice and peace.

#### Progressivity of rights

Goal 16 offers the opportunity to guarantee human rights and to aim towards progressivity of rights. Target 16.9 aimed at providing legal identity for all should be a starting point to ensure portability of rights to migrant population. In the same manner, this target should be the point of entry to guarantee human rights for LGBTI population: the right to identity goes hand in hand with the acknowledgement of citizenship and the legitimate exercise of rights, such as employment, social protection, marriage, adoption, housing and many others. This is linked to target 16.B referred to the Means of Implementation for this Goal, addressing the promotion and enforcement of non-discriminatory laws and policies for sustainable development.

In this context, now more than ever, target 16.10 (Ensure public access to information and protect fundamental freedoms, in accordance with national legislation and international agreements) is core to ensure human rights defenders have full guarantee of their human rights, dignity, freedom, safety and liberty. This is more relevant now because there is arise of criminalization of political activities and dissent: human rights defenders involved in agrarian, environmental or labor struggles are being prosecuted, arrested, falsely charged with inciting to rebellion, accused of terroristic activities, murdered, or disappeared.

#### **Recommendations**

In the short term, take action to #MoveTheMoney:

1. Accelerate implementation of 1325 National Action Plans (NAPs) as part of realising SDG 16
2. Shift from funding the military to funding human security: invest in social protection over crisis response for just, equitable, and nonviolent governance that work for all women, indigenous, LGBTI, disabled, refugee, and other marginalised communities across the lifespan

3. Disarm defence by shifting power from military to civilian control
4. Prevent criminalisation and attacks on women human rights defenders and peace activists
5. Prevent attacks, criminalisation, and undermining of women human rights and environmental defenders and peace activists, and ensure their safety and leadership
6. Report on military versus social spending for SDGs in line with Beijing E2 and Agenda 21 (22.16)
7. Ensure portability and progressivity of rights, including for migrant population, LGBTI population and other groups suffering structural inequalities.

In the long term, take action to govern for nonviolence and gender justice:

8. Regulate to increase accountability for power-holders (i.e. militaries and private military corporations), and free up space for marginalised communities (i.e., women's and social justice movements)
9. Institutionalise leadership for peace (i.e., ministries of reincorporation, de-colonialization, peace, women) and support feminist peace movement building and leadership
10. Tax expenditures on violence over expenditures on care (i.e., global arms tax)
11. Strengthen coordination between political and economic processes from a gender perspective (i.e., international financial institution support for joined-up peace processes and post-conflict peacebuilding for gender equality)
12. Stop militarisation of development aid (i.e., militarisation of OECD-DAC ODA rules) and promote development justice (debt forgiveness/ reparations)
13. Promote cultures of peace by strengthening nonviolent, non-stereotypical, and gender equitable media and education

### ***SDG 13: Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts***

Gender inequality persists while global greenhouse gas emissions rise,<sup>41</sup> and researchers have demonstrated the critical 11-year window we have to achieve system transformation to avoid the worst impacts of climate change.<sup>42</sup> Substantial and damaging impacts, meanwhile, continue to accumulate, with natural disasters as well as slow-onset events exacerbated by climate change taking lives, affecting livelihoods, and disrupting economies and societies.

Countries and institutions continue to treat gender considerations as a programmatic “add-on” rather than fundamental to the achievement of SDG 13: only 64 of the Nationally Determined Contributions even mention the words gender or women.<sup>43</sup> While there are signs of progress—for example, the number of gender and climate change focal points appointed by Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change more than doubled over the course of 2018, they are usually tempered by the pace of progress—fewer than 25% of Parties have appointed national gender and climate change focal points.<sup>44</sup> Climate action is also crucial for achieving gender equality, and Parties’ current commitments and (lack of) follow-through on their Nationally Determined Contributions under the Paris Agreement, particularly Parties most responsible for the current state of affairs, are utterly failing to address the gravity of this challenge with the depth of transformation necessary to protect our planet and people.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Olhoff, Anne, and John M. Christensen. "Emissions Gap Report 2018." (2018).

<sup>42</sup> Masson-Delmotte, Valérie, et al. "Global warming of 1.5 C." *An IPCC special report on the impacts* (2018).

<sup>43</sup> Gender Climate Tracker: [www.genderclimatetracker.org](http://www.genderclimatetracker.org)

<sup>44</sup> UN Climate Change. "National Gender & Climate Change Focal Points. Available: <https://unfccc.int/topics/gender/resources/list-of-gender-focal-points-under-the-unfccc>

<sup>45</sup> Climate Action Tracker: 2100 Warning Projections. Available: <https://climateactiontracker.org/global/temperatures/>

Without the comprehensive inclusion, participation, and leadership of women and gender-responsive policy frameworks, climate change will continue to be inadequately and inefficiently addressed, with disjointed and under-committed efforts that fail to recognise the interconnectedness of gender, environmental, and climate justice. Committing to system transformation to limit warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius would additionally safeguard food sovereignty and promote resilient agricultural landscapes (SDG 2); result in improved health (SDG 3); require improved education (SDG 4), educational equality (SDG 5), and clean energy (SDG 7); support access to clean water (SDG 6); facilitate a just transition (SDG 8); entail cities that are sustainable (SDG 11); craft sustainable production and consumption cycles (SDG 12), protect our waters and lands while benefiting from their ecosystem functions (SDG 14 and 15), and indicate that institutions are accountable and just to the communities most vulnerable and least responsible for climate change (SDG 16).

### Impacts on women and girls / gender equality

Not only are women and girls critical, equal actors in achieving SDG 13, but the design and implementation of gender-responsive policies and programs that support gender equality is essential for enacting and sustaining effective climate action. Solutions that do not consider rights, responsibilities, resources, and opportunities with a comprehensive gender-lens, informed by sex and age-disaggregated data and gender analyses, are destined to replicate and even exacerbate existing inequalities and perpetuate the unjust social and environmental regimes that have catalyzed climate change. Research has also highlighted that greater equality is central for effective environmental policymaking: countries with higher proportions of women in their national legislative bodies are more likely to approve environmental agreements,<sup>46</sup> and countries in which women are closer to men in status, rights, and opportunities have lower per capita emissions of heat-trapping carbon dioxide.<sup>47</sup>

Women's work, leadership and contributions are integral to achieving SDG 13, from creating resilient agricultural systems to supporting sustainable production and consumption to rethinking the ways in which our cities and world are connected via transportation. Women make up 43% of the formal agricultural labor workforce in developing countries,<sup>48</sup> and women in forest communities are able to generate more than 50% of their livelihood from forests, compared with about one third for men.<sup>49</sup> Globally, women drive 70-80% of all consumer purchases through a combination of buying power and influence.<sup>50</sup> The majority of the household functions women support and lead are connected to—either enabled or limited by—the mobility, or transportation, choices<sup>51</sup> women must make.

Limitations and marginalization across sectors have resulted in women often being disproportionately impacted by climate change.<sup>52</sup> Women's roles, rights, knowledge, and access to resources and services are

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<sup>46</sup> Norgaard, Kari, and Richard York. "Gender equality and state environmentalism." *Gender & Society* 19.4 (2005): 506-522.

<sup>47</sup> Ergas, Christina, and Richard York. "Women's status and carbon dioxide emissions: A quantitative cross-national analysis." *Social Science Research* 41.4 (2012): 965-976.

<sup>48</sup> Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations: The Female Face of Farming. Available: <http://www.fao.org/gender/resources/infographics/the-female-face-of-farming/en/>

<sup>49</sup> World Bank, FIAT PANIS, IFAD. (2009). "Gender in Agriculture Sourcebook." Available: <http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTGENAGRLIVSOUBOOK/Resources/CompleteBook.pdf>

<sup>50</sup> Bloomberg. (2018). "Top 10 things everyone should know about women consumers." Available: <https://www.bloomberg.com/diversity-inclusion/blog/top-10-things-everyone-know-women-consumers/>

<sup>51</sup> Institute for Transportation and Development Policy (2018). Access for All Series: Policies for Inclusive TOD. Available: <https://www.itdp.org/2018/05/21/access-for-all/>

<sup>52</sup> Gender, Global, and Climate Alliance. "Gender and Climate Change: A Closer Look at Existing Evidence." *Global Gender and Climate Alliance: New York, NY, USA* (2016).

perpetually hindered and marginalized due to entrenched patriarchal systems. Despite the pivotal role of women in household and global economies, 90% of 173 economies have at least one law impeding women's economic empowerment.<sup>53</sup> When women have less economic power, their level of risk already- greater vulnerability to natural disasters<sup>54</sup> is compounded.<sup>55</sup> Particularly marginalised women, including sexual and gender minorities and older women, face particular discrimination and inability to access social services in the wake of disaster.<sup>56</sup> Socio-cultural systems may limit women's voice and agency in decision-making, especially where they are ignored, excluded, or not represented as stakeholders.

### Structural issues, barriers, and the actors

The Governments most responsible have failed to adequately address climate change and its gendered dimensions through lack of political will and commitment, undermining innovation with continued investment in fossil fuels, under-funding grassroots solutions while using climate change as an excuse to support private industry and large-scale infrastructure with top-down approaches, and failing to take seriously the interlinkages between climate change and gender equality.

Gender-just solutions embed effectiveness and sustainability into climate action, yet women's environmental activism and community-led projects are drastically underfunded. In 2014, programs focusing on women and the environment accounted for less than 3% of all philanthropic environmental giving, at only \$110.2 million dollars.<sup>57</sup> Furthermore, less than 10% of international climate financing in 2016 was directed to the local level,<sup>58</sup> often leaving the structure of climate action in the hands of international actors with insufficient incentive and/or interest in understanding the community dynamics that will be at the heart of social change.

Women's participation and leadership in environmental policymaking remains limited, with under-representation the rule rather than the exception. Women hold only 30% of environmental ministerial positions,<sup>59</sup> made up only 38% of delegates at COP24, while only 22% of the Heads of Delegation were women. On the 24-member board of the Green Climate Fund, no more than six women have ever served on the Board at one time.<sup>60</sup>

### **Recommendations**

1. *Embed gender into national policies, strategies, and planning for climate change and disaster risk reduction.* Gender-mainstreaming is critical to the effectiveness of any climate-focused program, and realising women's human rights contributes to achieving SDG 13.

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<sup>53</sup> World Bank. *Women, Business and the Law 2016: Getting to Equal*. World Bank Group, 2015.

<sup>54</sup> Neumayer E, Plümper T (2007) The gendered nature of natural disasters: the impact of catastrophic events on the gender gap in life expectancy, 1981–2002. *Ann Assoc Am Geogr* 97(3):551–566.

<sup>55</sup> Austin KF, McKinney LA (2016) Disaster devastation in poor nations: the direct and indirect effects of gender equality, ecological losses, and development. *Soc Forces*. doi:10.1093/sf/sow056.

<sup>56</sup> Dwyer, E and L Woolf 2018, *Down by the River: Addressing the Rights, Needs and Strengths of Fijian Sexual and Gender Minorities in Disaster Risk Reduction and Humanitarian Response*, report prepared for Oxfam.

<sup>57</sup> Our Voices, Our Environment: The State of Funding for Women's Environmental Action. Available: [https://www.bothends.org/uploaded\\_files/document/Our\\_voices\\_our\\_environment\\_march\\_2018.pdf](https://www.bothends.org/uploaded_files/document/Our_voices_our_environment_march_2018.pdf)

<sup>58</sup> IIED (2017). "Effective climate action needs more money directed to local levels". Available: <https://www.iied.org/effective-climate-action-needs-more-money-directed-local-levels>

<sup>59</sup> UN Environment: Gender and Environment: Support Kit for UN Environment Staff. Available: [https://wedocs.unep.org/bitstream/handle/20.500.11822/25348/Gender\\_Environment\\_Kit.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y](https://wedocs.unep.org/bitstream/handle/20.500.11822/25348/Gender_Environment_Kit.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y)

<sup>60</sup> Gender Climate Tracker Website. Available: <https://www.genderclimatetracker.org>

2. *Educate girls and women.* For every additional year of schooling a girl receives on average, her country's resilience to climate disasters can be expected to improve by 3.2 points on a country vulnerability scale.<sup>61</sup> Achieving universal education in low and middle income countries would result in 51.48 gigatons of emissions reductions by 2050<sup>62</sup> and would require only 2% of global military expenditures, \$39 billion a year in funding.<sup>63</sup> Education should be provided for women across the lifespan, including girls and older women, to open doors to their participation and leadership in decision-making.
3. *Provide access to sexual and reproductive health and rights.* Women's sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) are rights within themselves, and the negative impacts of climate change are proving that the violations to SRHR may enhance public health challenges, such as Zika. Women having the ability to choose the number of kids they want to have contributes to greater resilience for families in the face of climate change. For example, women's access to the sexual and reproductive healthcare they identify as needing would require \$5.3 billion, less than one-half of 1% of total military expenditures.<sup>64</sup>
4. *Ensure women have access to economic rights, opportunities, and assets.* Access, use and control of productive resources as well as secure land tenure rights are in particular critical to ensuring women's contributions to the land are fully realised.
5. *De-militarize and end fossil fuel subsidies.* Moving funds toward the undeniable threat of climate change moves toward the peaceful world that is the foundation for climate justice to be realised. The entirety of the fossil fuel subsidies provided in 2015, 373 billion dollars,<sup>65</sup> should instead support holistic, gender-responsive, transformative solutions rooted in respect for human rights and ecosystems.
6. *Deliver adequate funding for adaptation and loss and damage.* Climate change will not be fully addressed without reaching above and beyond the current commitments to deliver funding based on need, funding adaptation at \$140-\$300 billion a year<sup>66</sup> and loss and damage at \$50 billion annually by 2022, and up to \$300 billion each year by 2030.<sup>67</sup>
7. *Implement appropriate funding structures/mechanisms.* Decisions among and distribution of grants, loans, guarantees and other financing options must not serve as a give-away to the private sector, push Global South countries further into debt to the Global North, nor focus on large-scale infrastructure at the expense of more comprehensive solutions.
8. *Provide funding for scaling and replicating local-level solutions.* Support the scaling up and appropriate adaptation of decentralized efforts that are community-led and implemented with strong attention to gender-responsiveness, human rights, and meeting the needs of the most vulnerable and/or marginalized groups and individuals.

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<sup>61</sup>IIED (2017). "Effective climate action needs more money directed to local levels" Available: <https://www.iied.org/effective-climate-action-needs-more-money-directed-local-levels>

<sup>62</sup> Drawdown: Women and Girls Educating Girls. Available: <https://www.drawdown.org/solutions/women-and-girls/educating-girls>

<sup>63</sup> Drawdown. Women and Girls Educating Girls. Available: <https://www.drawdown.org/solutions/women-and-girls/educating-girls>

<sup>64</sup> SIPRI. (2018). "Global military spending remains high at \$1.7 trillion." Available: <https://www.sipri.org/media/press-release/2018/global-military-spending-remains-high-17-trillion>

<sup>65</sup> UNFCCC Standing Committee on Finance 2018 Biennial Assessment and Overview of Climate Finance Flows Technical Report. Available: <https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/resource/2018%20BA%20Technical%20Report%20Final%20Feb%202019.pdf>

<sup>66</sup> Drawdown. Women and girls Educating Girls. Available: <https://www.drawdown.org/solutions/women-and-girls/educating-girls>

<sup>67</sup> Climate Action Network (2018). Submission on the Scope of the Technical Paper Exploring Sources of Support for Loss and Damage and Modalities for Accessing Support. Available: [www.climatenetwork.org/sites/default/files/can\\_loss\\_and\\_damage\\_submission\\_022018.pdf](http://www.climatenetwork.org/sites/default/files/can_loss_and_damage_submission_022018.pdf)

9. *Ensure women's organisations are recipients of funding and partners in projects.* Allow direct, quick access to funding for women-led initiatives as well as the integration of women's groups' expertise throughout all projects, beginning at project conception.
10. *Do not fund false solutions, including solar radiation management, carbon dioxide removal, and large-scale biomass plantations.* These false solutions, among others, endanger biodiversity and ecosystem integrity, promote investment flows to the private corporations currently burning and profiting from fossil fuels, and distract attention from true solutions.
11. *Ensure indigenous and community land rights.* Maintaining and restoring indigenous and community land rights is the first step in supporting rights-based land management that promotes biodiversity, including through forest ecosystem restoration, and safeguards food security and livelihoods all while sequestering carbon, resulting in up to 14.77 gigatons of carbon sequestered or avoided by 2050.<sup>68</sup>
12. *Integrate rights-holders and communities into decision-making.* Prioritize the voices of rights holders and ensure that community stakeholders have the ability to both speak and vote/input during decision-making.
13. *Support energy democracy.* Reverse top-down energy production, distribution, and control so that women, households and communities can access and own their energy systems.

### ***SDG 10: Reduce inequality within and among countries***

There are more than 700 million people, mostly women and young girls, living below the poverty line of 1.90 USD a day, accounting for about 10% or more of the world population. In, sub-Saharan Africa and in South Asia, people living in poverty are about half and one-third of the total population, respectively. On average, income inequality increased by 11% in developing countries between 1990 and 2010. These figures show that outcomes of economic growth are not distributed equally to all people. The economic inequality does not only have negative impacts on the stable growth and sustainability, but is also a factor for political instability and protracted wars. Inequalities also lead to more migration and movements of people from South to North, which imposes risk on their lives. This income inequality is on the rise, with the richest 10 % earning up to 40% of total global income. The poorest 10% earn only between 2% and 7% of total global income. Therefore, and at the current rate of progress, it may take 217 years to close the gender gap in employment opportunities and pay. These widening disparities require the adoption of sound policies to empower women, who are deemed as the bottom percentile of income earners, and promote economic inclusion of all regardless of sexual orientation and gender identity, race, ethnicity, age, ability, class, or other intersecting identities.

They suffer from extreme poverty with shrinking social spaces and limited livelihood programs. Eighty percent of the those affected by poverty live in rural areas, 40% are under 14 years old, and 40% lack access to formal education, while women are considered the most disadvantaged population group in this equation.

#### Impacts on women and girls / gender equality

Institutional inequalities of social, political, and legal system generate income discrepancies and further leads to gender and social inequalities in various aspects of societies. Although social security is expanding globally, healthcare and medical expenditure for women especially those with disabilities is five times higher than the average. Additionally, the probability of maternal death in childbirth among women in rural areas is three times higher than that in urban areas.

Income inequality is a global problem that requires global solutions. The global pay gap between men and women will take 202 years to close, due to the slow pace of change. On average, women across the world

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<sup>68</sup>CLARA. Missing Pathways to 1.5°C: The Role of the Land Sector in Ambitious Climate Action.. Available: <https://www.climatelandambitionrightsalliance.org/report>

are paid just 63% of what men earn. There is not a single country where women are paid as much as men. In the Middle East, countries such as Yemen, Syria and Iraq have the biggest pay gaps with women being paid less than 30% the level of men's wages. In the workplace, women still face significant obstacles in taking on senior official roles, as only 34% of global top officials are women. Women are far behind in politics, and it is estimated that at the current pace of change it will take 107 years until there are as many female politicians as male. Inequalities of outcome, such as low income, lack of access to health care services, including reproductive health services, and formal education, stem from the structural inequality and failure of redistribution of resources both domestically and internationally.

### Structural issues, barriers, and the actors

In order to realise sustainable and inclusive growth and reduce inequalities of outcomes, it is necessary to ensure equal opportunities of education, healthcare and employment, and to revise discriminatory laws, policies and practices. To achieve SDG 10 and eventually inclusive societies, it is also necessary to address other SDG targets, such as strengthening the means of implementation, equal opportunities to education, healthcare and economy, as well as creating synergies among these goals. Undoubtedly, if we want to reduce poverty in an inclusive way, it is essential to create a different kind of economic prosperity that rectifies economic inequality. This involves improving the regulation and monitoring of financial markets and institutions, encouraging development assistance and foreign direct investment to regions where the need is urgent. Facilitating the safe migration and mobility of people is also key to bridging the widening divide.

As for inequalities within a country, progressive taxation and transparent fiscal expenditure can help redistribute income and promote an economy-wide action. Regarding inequalities between countries, it is necessary to guarantee equal economic opportunities through migration and mobility of people, and adjustment of international financial services, and to redistribute financial resources through ODA and foreign direct investment.

### **Recommendations**

1. *Reduction of inequalities within the country:*
  - a. Take action against inequalities of opportunities caused by income disparity and structural discrimination against age, sexual orientation and gender identity, disability, race, ethnicity, religion, and region, by raising the income of the poor, especially women from disadvantaged social groups (including: young girls and older women, single mothers, women with disabilities, LGBT communities, indigenous peoples, refugees and others).
  - b. Overturn discriminatory laws and policies to ensure substantive equality
  - c. Ensure equitable and just redistribution of resources through taxation, wage and social security policies
  - d. Provide gender disaggregated, timely data for country, regional and global levels, to identify gaps and set plans to narrow the inequalities.
2. *Reduction of inequality between countries:*
  - a. Take action against inequalities among countries caused by unfair trade and finance, which will lead to a more just wealth distribution between north and south
  - b. Strengthen regulations and monitoring of global financial markets and institutions, ensure effective financing mechanisms to development of strategies and accelerate implementation of poverty reduction policies.
  - c. Enhance the representation and give domestic policy space for developing countries in decision-making processes in international economic and financial institutions.

- d. Address the root causes of migration of people and improve systems and regulations to ensure organized, facilitated and safe migration and mobility of people, and portability of rights.
- e. Implement preferential treatment for developing countries in trade and economic prosperity policies to ensure the development of their employment frameworks and reducing poverty levels.
- f. Improve access to clean, efficient and affordable energy to reduce the burden on women caused by household energy provision.

***SDG 8: Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all:***

To realise the SDGs and ensure women's rights and gender justice including economic empowerment, we need a human economy that works for women and those most marginalised, not just the richest 1%.<sup>69</sup> However, feminists have shown that current systems of economic growth, including the macroeconomic environment, are systematically biased against women.<sup>70</sup>

According to the International Labour Organization (ILO), "decent work" refers to working 'in conditions of freedom, equity, security, and human dignity' for both women and men. This includes but is not limited to ensuring a workplace that offers the space for personal development and encourages social integration; gives the workers the freedom to express their concerns and participate in the decisions that affect their lives; and guarantees equal opportunities and treatment for all<sup>71</sup>. Women and girls disproportionately assume the responsibility of unpaid and domestic care work, doing ~2.6 times as much unpaid care work as men and more work overall when paid and unpaid work are counted. This unfair distribution of the burden of care affects other areas of life including paid work, rest and education. Gender equality requires recognising, valuing care work and redistributing it across households and public services (CW63 Key Msgs).<sup>72</sup>

Women and girls lack access to the labour market and opportunities that can offer them decent work and employment. Women and girls' lack of autonomy over their health can limit their outcomes on education (SDG 4), sanitation and hygiene (SDG 6) and employment (SDG 8), among others. Denying women their sexual and reproductive health and rights and services, which are directly linked to reductions in maternal mortality (SDG 3) and ending communicable diseases like HIV and AIDS (SDG 3) greatly impedes achievement of these goals.

Graduates in Africa will spend an average of five years searching for a job. African women are particularly underserved when it comes to both secondary and higher education. Across sub-Saharan Africa, 75% of girls start school, but only 8% finish, and even fewer go on to the tertiary level.

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<sup>69</sup> An Economy that Works for Women: Oxfam Briefing Paper (2017). Available: [www-cdn.oxfam.org/s3fs-public/file\\_attachments/bp-an-economy-that-works-for-women-020317-en.pdf](http://www-cdn.oxfam.org/s3fs-public/file_attachments/bp-an-economy-that-works-for-women-020317-en.pdf)

<sup>70</sup> Bretton Woods Project (2017). "The IMF and Gender Equality: A Compendium of Feminist Macroeconomic Critiques." Available: <https://www.brettonwoodsproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/The-IMF-and-Gender-Equality-A-Compendium-of-Feminist-Macroeconomic-Critiques.pdf>

<sup>71</sup> See: UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights General Comment No. 18: The Right To Work (Article 6 of the Covenant). Available: <https://www.refworld.org/docid/4415453b4.html>

<sup>72</sup> See also: ILO (2018). "ILO: Women do 4 times more unpaid care work than men in Asia and the Pacific". Available: [https://www.ilo.org/asia/media-centre/news/WCMS\\_633284/lang--en/index.htm](https://www.ilo.org/asia/media-centre/news/WCMS_633284/lang--en/index.htm)

### Impacts on women and girls / gender equality

Gender inequality in the economy costs women in developing countries \$9 trillion a year.<sup>73</sup> Access to decent work remains a global challenge for young people, especially young women. Young people make half of the world's population and the highest group at risk of unemployment and unstable employment. An estimated 628 million young people are not engaged in employment, education or training (NEET) (World Bank). The situation is even worse for young women who are more likely to be unemployed than young men, and when they do work, they are more likely to be found in part-time formal work and their wages are on average 32% less than men's (WEF). Three quarters of women's employment in developing regions is informal, vulnerable and unprotected (UN Women), and globally, women spend at least twice as much time as men undertaking unpaid care work (World Bank). It is a fact that the challenges to access decent work increase for marginalized groups, amongst whom women are even more negatively impacted

Women entrepreneurs account for up to a third of all business people operating in the formal economy worldwide. However, the majority of those who live in the Global South are engaged in small and microenterprises, with little potential for growth (IFC). Women entrepreneurs are also more likely to be in the unprotected informal sector. Women often face barriers to starting a business because of social attitudes and norms, and those who do try are often confined to the informal economy due to the existence of systemic barriers (ILO). In 2016, according to the 'Women, Business and the Law' report, 90% of countries had at least one law that was discriminatory towards women in terms of economic empowerment.

### Structural issues, barriers, and the actors

Feminists have shown that current macroeconomic situation undermines women's rights due to: narrow and human rights-blind definition of macroeconomic goals; gender biases in macroeconomic analysis and policy making; insufficient focus on decent work; informal employment, and social policies; failure to maximise fiscal space for women's rights and gender equality; and absence of women's collective voice in political and economic decision making such as the right to unionize. Economic systems require radical structural changes which rethink goals of growth and stability and assumptions of gender and political neutrality if they are to support, rather than undermine a world of equality and justice. This requires systematic changes including in fiscal policy, expenditure policy, and labour market policies including by addressing informal economies and care work.<sup>74</sup>

In developing countries, 89% of work is in the informal sector, and women are more at risk in times of economic stress. Girls face additional barriers with discrimination and societal norms that reduce their education and job opportunities. The youth not in employment, education, or training (NEET) rate is twice as high for female youth than for male youth (ILO, 2017).

Africa's rapidly growing economy is projected to create between 54 million and 72 million new wage-paying jobs by 2020. The problem is a serious talent gap, for example, nearly half of East African employers in a 2014 survey cited lack of skills as the major reason for vacant positions. Additionally, employers found that up to 63% of graduates from East African universities were lacking job market skills. The simple truth is that secondary and higher education institutions in the region are not preparing their graduates for the workforce. Young women in Africa continue to be discriminated against and continue to lack access to decent jobs and working conditions. There is also an increase of high intensity jobs in Africa with very low wages. It is critical to strengthen education systems, build life skills, and access to decent work and livelihoods opportunities in an ever changing job market.

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<sup>73</sup> An Economy that Works for Women: Oxfam Briefing Paper (2017). Available: [https://www-cdn.oxfam.org/s3fs-public/file\\_attachments/bp-an-economy-that-works-for-women-020317-en.pdf](https://www-cdn.oxfam.org/s3fs-public/file_attachments/bp-an-economy-that-works-for-women-020317-en.pdf)

<sup>74</sup> Bretton Woods Project (2017). "The IMF and Gender Equality: A Compendium of Feminist Macroeconomic Critiques." Available: <https://www.brettonwoodsproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/The-IMF-and-Gender-Equality-A-Compendium-of-Feminist-Macroeconomic-Critiques.pdf>

It is a global problem that women and girls face problems in getting employment, and unequal pay, but it is also another issue when LGBTI+ women and people are rejected or face discrimination because of their Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity and Expression, and Sex Characteristics (SOGIESC). The limited opportunities in education, lack of legislative basis to support LGBTI+ people and discrimination at the workplace all result in their poor participation in the economy.

### **Recommendations**

1. Promote tax justice including by implementing progressive taxation including on corporations and wealth; refraining from regressive and gender-biased consumption taxes; addressing tax abuse as a priority for domestic resource mobilisation
2. Reconfigure fiscal rules to prioritize investments in human development such as health, education, and childcare as investment, rather than consumption, expenditures in public finances.
3. Strengthen decent work, social protection, and support collective bargaining rights
4. Prevent privatization of public assets and services
5. Conduct consistent ex-ante and post gender and human rights impact assessments on all economic policy, not just those explicitly related to gender
6. Increase girls' participation in STEM and avenues for entrepreneurship. Enable adolescent girls to gain confidence and overcome the barriers that prevent them from fully participating in the workforce. Include career guidance, apprenticeships and work experience programmes.
7. Include unpaid care work in national accounts in order make its social and economic value visible.
8. Challenging stereotypes, harmful social norms and gender bias to enable women and girls to have fair and equal learning and career opportunities for productive employment
9. Promote co-responsible time use for unpaid domestic and care work, with measures such as paid maternity, paternity and parental leave, among others.
10. Promote safe workplaces, violence and harassment free work environment for women
11. Ensure adolescent girls can find productive work, take decisions that affect their lives, and access decision making and leadership spaces.
12. Promote the best development of rural and indigenous women, offering opportunities to strengthen their capacities in favor of their own communities, respecting their environment and culture
13. Ensure that women receive equal pay for work of equal value, and also equal pay for equal value

### ***SDG 4: Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all***

Public Education is part of broader social protection systems which have been increasingly under attack as part of a hollowing out of the welfare state. Education and development of skills empower women. However in many countries, safe and inclusive access to educational opportunities are out of reach. The dangers faced by girls and adolescents due to unsafe roads, lack of infrastructure and inadequate services especially at the secondary school level, e.g. inadequate and inappropriate sanitation facilities and services are among the factors that hinder girls and adolescent to attend school. At the same time, harmful gender stereotypes, as well as the lack of inclusive and quality learning environments, in conditions of integrity, remain key obstacles. As Reid, Waring, Rodriguez and Shivdas note, "Current approaches to social protection can reflect, reinforce, or worsen existing inequalities and patterns of stigma and discrimination or protect and transform."<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> Elizabeth Reid, Marilyn Waring, Corina Rodriguez Enriquez, and Meena Shivdas (2013). "Embracing Disruptions, Responding to Uncertainties, Valuing Agency: Situating a Feminist Approach to Social Protection." Available: [www.forum.awid.org/forum12/2013/04/embracing-disruptions-responding-to-uncertainties-valuing-agency-situating-a-feminist-approach-to-social-protection/](http://www.forum.awid.org/forum12/2013/04/embracing-disruptions-responding-to-uncertainties-valuing-agency-situating-a-feminist-approach-to-social-protection/)

Ideological-political approaches that are spreading worldwide limit equitable education through their impact on school curricula. This includes by impeding comprehensive sexuality education in schools and portraying stereotypical roles in curricula and class settings, which particularly impact the independent development of women, girls and LGBTI+ people. This is a constraint to learning and teachers role in promotion of free and equal rights to girls education. This situation and its challenges also negatively impact minorities, ethnic-cultural population diversity, sexual diversity, vulnerable populations, the disabled and LGBTI+ people.

Education is a human right and plays a key role in the construction of sustainable, inclusive and resilient societies. Linkages between education are evident across the SDGs. In particular, access to quality and affordable education is related to SDG 8 and 9, which focuses on crucial issues for access to the labor market and decent work. Related to political participation, education is linked to SDGs 10 and 16 that refer to the empowerment of women and girls in the promotion of peaceful and inclusive societies. Other synergies of SDG 4 include the promotion of economic empowerment and financing, poverty eradication (SDG 1), the participation of women in improving agricultural productivity (SDG 2), strengthening their participation in decisions about their health (SDGs 3 and 5), contribution to adaptation and management of climate change impacts (SDG 13) and the use and sustainable management of the oceans (SDG 14) as well as land resources (SDG 15). In particular, universal access to sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights (SDG 5.6) and comprehensive sexuality education is a prerequisite to ensure sexual and reproductive health (SDG 3), guaranteeing healthy lives and access to services across the life course, and is directly related to the reduction of maternal mortality and the elimination of communicable diseases such as HIV and AIDS (SDGs 3 and 4).

Data availability is a central responsibility for monitoring SDG 4. There is a lack of timely and consistent national data with a gender approach in the education sector. Lack of allocation of resources to monitor results is another limiting factor. Several of the gender specific indicators in SDG 4 are not yet fully developed (level II & III), making comprehensive monitoring difficult. The challenges remain in education indicators, particularly to capture the results of basic education (such as literacy achievement) and the percentages of children, especially girls, who do not attend school. Another difficulty is that some populations are still out of reach, particularly girls and older women in marginalized population groups. Furthermore, enrolment rates and numbers outside the school only give a partial picture of gender equality in education. Likewise, the lack of data limits the ability of other actors to monitor progress. Finally, the age of 64 years should be eliminated as the upper limit for data recording, as educational variables after this age continue to matter and should be captured.

#### Impacts on women and girls / gender equality

Girls school enrolment has increased in the last decade. However, they continue to face multiple barriers based on gender and their intersections, such as age, ethnicity, poverty, geographical areas, and disability, among others. Role models are also often missing: According UNESCO's Atlas of Gender Inequality in Education, only about 29% of the world's researchers are women. Such barriers impede the the right of women and girls to non-discriminatory and quality education.

There are particular obstacles for marginalised women and girls. Discrimination based on sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, and sex characteristics (SOGIESC) results in numerous problems that prevent people to access quality education in schools. There are very few opportunities for older women to learn how to read and write, which is necessary for their involvement in their daily lives and for their enjoyment of their rights. Women and girl refugees and migrants - who have been displaced due to conflict, persecution, violence, disparities in access to food, water, education, health, employment, economic vitality, political agency, stability, environmental security, and religious tolerance and freedom - often face challenges in accessing quality education, including due to gaps in documentation; as a result,

they also face other risks, including of sexual, gender based, and other forms of violence, including trafficking.

### Structural issues, barriers, and the actors

To achieve gender equality and SDG 4, all must take measures to overcome the systemic barriers that lead to inequalities within and between countries. Addressing education from a feminist perspective requires addressing broader issues of prioritising gender sensitive social protections that support economic, social and cultural rights without discrimination. Social protection policies and public services that recognise and support women's productive and reproductive lives, and reduce and redistribute unpaid domestic and care work, are key for women to improve income, reduce time poverty and help poor households meet basic needs. Ensuing inclusive and equitable quality education requires addressing unpaid and devalued domestic and care work, addressing feminization of the education workforce, and rethinking how institutions such as school, work, and environment support or undermine the lives and rights of women and girls.

The failures to ensure social protection, and high cost of education hinders the implementation of SDGs at all levels. SDG 4 should be considered as a component of a complex set of core competencies that require sustained learning and updating.

### **Recommendations**

1. Remove the systemic barriers that lead to inequalities within and between countries and adequately address the gender and human rights dimensions of SDG 4. This includes articulating synergies with the other SDGs.
2. Increase and improve financial investments to achieve the financing of SDG 4, including girls', adolescents', and adult women's, formal, non-formal, and informal learning and education.
3. Support and dignify the conditions in which teachers carry out their work
4. Support qualified teachers trained in gender equality issues, human rights, nonviolence, and sexual diversity teaching methodologies, including specialized teaching methodologies for older illiterate women.
5. Remove gender biases in textbooks, create safer school environments, provide better hygiene facilities and organize counselling and mentoring programs. Specify an inclusive approach to education for the displaced and migrants, including education for children with disabilities. Include girls and adolescents with early pregnancies.
6. Support parents in their role as educators by providing parenting education, to avoid perpetuating gender stereotypes in the raising of children of all genders
7. Design and implement strategies to guarantee equal access to quality education for women and girls.
8. Reduce distances of students to schools, particularly in the case of rural communities
9. Promote equal opportunities in learning and education to boost employment and the empowerment of women, economic prosperity and their contribution to the well-being of girls. Girls and adolescent women should be encouraged to study science, math, engineering and technology from the outset, including from primary school.
10. Review goals and indicators to truly reflect the concept of lifelong learning, including the entire age spectrum, without limits.
11. Promote education in mother languages. For indigenous and Afro-descendants, the educational structural programs contents must integrate their culture and norms, to share their innovations and developments with social, cultural, economic and political participation.

## V. Accountability, Follow-up and Review

Accountability for gender-responsive, inclusive, holistic and comprehensive implementation of the 2030 Agenda is a cornerstone of the High Level Political Forum. While SDG 5 is not specifically reviewed in depth every year, gender equality is a cross-cutting issue like inequality and poverty that must be integrated to every regular national, regional and global review of the SDGs in order to properly measure progress. The reviews at all levels should incorporate all actors, including duty-bearers, decision-makers, and rights-holders - governments, private sector and civil society and communities, particularly women and feminists women's groups, CBOs and NGOs.

At national level, the reviews must be undertaken in close consultation and collaboration with the people, including women's and feminist organisations. Countries should establish a coherent national strategy for implementation of all the SDGs that institutionalises collaboration and coordination between different national level agencies and prioritizes country needs. A robust national level process will provide regular dialogue between government agencies and civil society, including women's and feminist non-governmental and civil society organisations, whether it is a specific mechanism or not. By engaging throughout the year, and over the course of years, national reporting will better reflect the reality on the ground, governments will be able to draw from citizen reporting to fill in gaps in knowledge and to develop joint strategies to meet the goals and targets.

The regional level has not yet lived up to its potential as a space of peer learning and dialogue where similar countries can share experiences, best practices and lessons learned; review, monitor, and uphold human rights instruments; identify regional-level trends and challenges; facilitate cooperation and implementation; identify priorities as well as strategies to address challenges, including through cross-border approaches; and facilitate south-south and triangular cooperation to accelerate implementation, as well as other means of implementation. The regional level fora should also ensure robust participation mechanisms for major groups, recognised constituencies and rights holders – developed with civil society and adequately funded. The participation should include space to interact regarding VNRs, especially on issues more specific to national and regional context including on women's rights.

The global level HLPF remains the time and space to understand global progress and challenges in addressing the SDGs and related structural inequalities, while also facilitating global understanding of national progress and challenges. As the foremost accountability space for Agenda 2030, member states should present a holistic and interlinked assessment of progress and open a dialogue about achievements and challenges that support learning and help the HLPF to fulfill its goals, which include political leadership, guidance and recommendations for sustainable development as well as agenda-setting to advance sustainable development. The global HLPF should be a time for civil society to interact with governments, particularly their own Voluntary National Review presentations, including on the global structural issues. The HLPF ensures participation by the Major Groups and Other Stakeholders (MGoS), with specific rights, including to attend, speak and make recommendations to the HLPF, and this needs to be evaluated and strengthened in terms of its uptake to the HLPF process and outcomes, as the MGoS bring extensive and unique expertise, experience and evaluatory perspectives that enhance impact of HLPF.

As we prepare for the 2019 review of the HLPF modalities (GA Res 67/290), the Women's Major Group strongly advocates for an updated HLPF format to better reflect the transformative spirit and potential of the 2030 Agenda as well as to accelerate learning and progress. Initial recommendations include:

1. The HLPF MGoS Coordination Mechanism and its role must be supported and strengthened, procedurally, politically and financially, including by increasing its interlinkages with human rights mechanisms (i.e., CEDAW, UPR, ESCR). It is a critical aspect of the HLPF, allowing networking and solidarity among MGoS from different countries and constituencies to actively support

participation of constituents and their critical and relevant commentary in the VNR sessions, roundtables and throughout the HLPF.

2. The HLPF must make extensive changes to the schedule and the methodology to ensure sufficient support and meeting time for the HLPF, including sufficient meeting time to conduct 40-50 reviews each year that allow meaningful dialogue and participation of the MGoS.
3. The current VNR process should be reviewed and revisioned, in terms of time and content and MGoS engagement.
  - a. The Guidelines to Member states must be revised and become more directly oriented to its achievements through the evaluation of the indicators and building on existing human rights reviews such as CEDAW and Universal Periodic Review (UPR) reporting. (Guidelines should be more specific and link to human rights and international law to ensure these issues are included in presentations)
  - b. The time allotted is insufficient to meet the stated goals of VNRs at the HLPF. This should change. Participation should build on good practice existing around human rights bodies as well as Rio Principle 10, which commits to information, access, and accountability in the process.
  - c. Member states typically report achievements rather than taking a critical eye to their progress or sharing challenges and lessons learned, for example, in impacting structural issues. They tend to report by specific goals and many of them fail to present their progress in a holistic or interlinked way. They also rarely consider extraterritorial obligations and impacts, or what role the private sector has played in implementing/hampering the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. This is particularly problematic for the goals under review this year, especially climate and peace. This approach should change: member states should conduct reviews holistically and building on existing human rights reviews such as CEDAW and Universal Periodic Review (UPR) reporting and ensuring both domestic action and extraterritorial accountability that goes beyond development aid.
  - d. All countries, especially voluntary reporting countries, should communicate ambitious, human rights-based goals and incorporate lessons learned into implementation strategies and actions, sharing at the national level, as well as globally.
4. The Women's Major Group urges the HLPF to establish formal mechanisms to receive and support dialogue around parallel reports by women's groups and others within the MGoS, especially rightsholder groups. This would make the VNR sessions more robust than the current process, where women's groups and a broad range of civil society participation in the VNRs is almost non-existent.
5. The 2-5 minutes allotted for questions submitted on behalf of all stakeholders are not enough. The process itself is conducive for Member States to avoid answering the questions. The contribution of MGoS has not been reflected in the sessions and do not adequately contribute to constructive dialogue or on-going learning. The result of this is an increasing active resistance on behalf of civil society to engage at the global level. Therefore, there is a need to promote meaningful participation and ensure safety for people working on the Sustainable Development Agenda, so that their inputs are adequately reflected officially in the different spaces and formats during HLPF.
6. The Women's Major Group categorically objects to the request of submitting in advance the specific questions that our members will deliver to Member States during the VNR sessions in the HLPF. It is not a rule, it is not a formal procedure and it has been proven to be a measure through which some Member States intimidate, harass and endanger the safety of our members. We endorse the measure that was promoted by the HLPF Major Group and Other Stakeholder System (MGoS)

Coordination Mechanism during 2018 HLPF, in which a list of general questions and topics was submitted in advance to Member States so that they are aware of the nature of stakeholders concerns and they are able to deliver a thorough and informed answer. By no means we will endure any coercion against our members to submit in advance questions that will risk the dignity, safety and freedom of any of our members. This is not conducive to any dialogue. The Women's Major Group will reconsider its position on this issue of submitting in advance the specific questions to Member States once HLPF undergoes a formal transformation in which the safety of all actors is considered along an accountability mechanism.

7. At HLPF, the private sector needs to be held accountable to their human rights, environmental, and peace impacts by incorporating reports on the impact of their activities. Clear standards and accountability for partnerships must be established with the private sector to avoid human rights violations and perverse incentives. Member States should support a binding treaty on transnational corporations as part of synergies in work on the 2030 Agenda.
8. The HLPF must be more action-oriented, ensuring that the HLPF outcomes, including the Ministerial Declaration, codify actions that can be revisited as part of follow-up, review and accountability.

## VI. Recommendations

Gender equality, fair governance, respect for human rights and access to justice are critical enablers and drivers of shared prosperity and sustainable development. Rights holders and duty bearers must work together to amplify voices and actions that address the systemic barriers to sustainable development.

The Women's Major Group calls on the international community to take action for an ambitious implementation of the 2030 Agenda:

1. **Guarantee women's human rights.** Take a democratization and human rights-based approach to SDGs implementation.
2. **Recognise the contribution of women human rights defenders, environmental defenders, and peace activists** in defending human rights and fundamental freedoms, rule of law and sustainable development as well as the risks and threats they face as they continue their work; **strengthen protection mechanisms and their access to justice, at all levels**, to enable them to do their work free from violence, fear of imprisonment, or other human rights abuses.
3. **Ensure all women's full, effective, and meaningful democratic participation at all levels of decision-making in political, economic, social and public life.** This includes government's efforts to combat all forms of attacks on participatory democracy, freedom of association, ageism and women's rights at workplace including the rights to organise, collective bargaining and strike. It also means ending discrimination and support specific mechanisms for training and promoting all women into positions of leadership - from political participation to peace processes - considering quotas as well as awareness and capacity-building programs. Ensure women's meaningful participation rather than tokenized representation from the onset through follow-up
4. **Promote tax justice** including by implementing progressive taxation including on corporations and wealth; refraining from regressive and gender-biased consumption taxes; addressing tax abuse as a priority for domestic resource mobilisation
5. **Reconfigure fiscal rules** to prioritize investments in human development such as health, education, and childcare as investment, rather than these being considered as "consumption"
6. **Prevent privatization** of public assets and services
7. **Strengthen public expenditure** by means of gender responsive budgeting

8. **Directly resource women's rights groups and fund dedicated gender equality programming** as a priority
9. **Conduct consistent ex-ante and post gender and human rights impact assessments** on all economic policy, not just those explicitly related to gender
10. **Strengthen policy coherence** and address "spillover effects" including regarding violence due to arms transfers. Ensure effective, holistic, and accountable cross-sectoral coordination, bearing in mind the environmental, economic and social dimensions of sustainable development to strengthen women's participation, protection, and rights in conflict prevention through post-conflict reconstruction.
11. **Keep global warming below 1.5 degrees**, ensuring the sustainability of our planet.
12. **Shift from extractivist and predatory practices** and remain within planetary boundaries for the wellbeing of life and ecosystem integrity to thrive.
13. **All actors must take responsibility for Agenda 2030**, noting that **states are duty bearers** and that **the private sector adhere to human rights obligations**. All actors must analyze and commit to change traditional patterns to incorporate joint work based on a human rights framework for democratic peace, people, and planet.

## VII. Conclusion

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) aspire to leave no one behind. However, they have failed to address how the current discredited neoliberal paradigm based on assumptions of an unequal sexual division of labor has brought on the multiple crises in the economy, environment and societies - and deepening inequality, exclusion and marginalization, especially of poor women from poor communities in the South. They have failed to recognise how rich countries are undermining other countries efforts to achieve the SDGs through weapons exports, tax havens, and environmental damages in trade flows which undermine peace and security, economic stability, and environmental flourishing.<sup>76</sup> They have ignored how current social, economic, and political institutions rely on and reinforce systems of coercion and control of women, marginalised communities, and our planet and reinforce power and privilege of men, the rich corporations, and the global north.

Realising the transformative vision of the 2030 Agenda requires creating political rather than technical shifts. It requires moving from current failed approaches and towards nonviolent, equitable, justice based, and feminist alternatives that support the participation, rights, livelihoods of those most marginalised and the planet we live in.

Delaying action for women and girls is not an option. The time is now for women's leadership and a women's rights and peace agenda for every woman and every girl of every age, place, ability and status, and for all of us!

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<sup>76</sup> Guillaume Lafortune, Guido Schmidt-Traub and Grayson Fuller (2018). "Stronger Leadership From Rich Countries Needed To Achieve The Goals". Available: <http://www.sdindex.org/news/2018/07/09/stronger-leadership-needed-to-achieve-the-sdgs/>

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