

FROM THE PANDEMIC TO 2030: FEMINISTS WANT SYSTEM CHANGE ADVANCING HUMAN WELL-BEING

"My orders to the police and the military, if anyone creates trouble, and their lives are in danger: shoot them dead. Do not intimidate the government. Do not challenge the government. You will lose."



-Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte following a protest by slum residents after not receiving relief supplies during the lockdown.

"We note that the anti-Covid measures have created an apartheid and occasioned avoidable suffering upon many vulnerable Ugandans especially women and low income earners who scrounge a livelihood in closed spaces, rental markets and other ordinary chores."

- Ugandan academic and activist Stella Nyanzi prior to her arrest at a protest



HOW DID WE GET HERE?

In 2015, the world agreed to a roadmap to sustainable development made up of 17 goals: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. If achieved, we would live in a more just world without poverty, with quality education, with clean water and sanitation, and with peace and justice, among other achievements. With this roadmap, achieving gender equality would be a goal in and of itself and a cross-cutting aim necessary to achieving the whole Agenda.

Even before the crises caused by the COVID-19 pandemic countries, we were not on track to achieve the Agenda because of systems, such as **patriarchy**, **neoliberalism**, **militarism**, and **authoritarianism**, which create and maintain the inequalities now exacerbated by the crisis.

Patriarchy has structured societies and economies to give women and girls' the primary responsibility for completing all care and domestic work. Societies and economies require this unpaid work to function. As a result, women and girls are poorer because they have less access to education, employment, and life opportunities than men and boys.

Driven by the demands of **austerity**, **neoliberal economic policy**, and **unfair trade agreements**, governments have been reducing funding for and **privatizing public services**, including through public-private partnerships (PPPs), as encouraged by the 2030 Agenda. This, in turn, has disastrous effects on the lives of women and girls, especially those from poor and marginalized communities who must fill in the gaps left by the state's retreat from the public sector and its human rights obligations.

Militarism demands large budgets for military and militarized police forces that deplete resources that could otherwise be available for public services that would improve people's lives. In addition, the use of militarized language to describe the response to the pandemic has been an attempt to mask the roots of how many countries have responded to the virus.

Driven by **authoritarianism**, governments attack or fail to protect their populations from violence committed by state and non-state actors. To distract from their own policies, minimize opposition, and unite populations through fear, authoritarian governments **demonize civil society groups, minorities, and human rights defenders** frequently targeting women and LGBTI+ communities first. Even as the world is grappling to stop the COVID-19 pandemic, these attempts intensify. These regimes undermine multilateralism and global solidarity and cooperation precisely when we need these qualities most.

As a result, we live in a world in which women and girls are poorer than men and boys, less covered by social protection programs, have lower educational attainment, bear sole responsibility for water collection in 80% of households without safe drinking water on site, and complete 2.6 times as much care and domestic work as men and boys. 3 billion people lack basic hand washing facilities, more than half of the world's population has no social protection, and in 2019 more than 300 environmental and human rights defenders were killed.

The COVID-19 crisis has and will continue to worsen this situation because: the care burden on women and girls has skyrocketed limiting their education and employment opportunities; girls will have a harder time returning to school if and when schools reopen; and women's poverty will deepen because they dominate the industries hardest hit by the crisis and have insufficient social protection coverage. In addition, authoritarian governments are limiting civic space, demonizing minorities, and failing to protect human rights defenders.

WOMEN'S MAJOR GROUP RECOMMENDATIONS

The COVID-19 pandemic does not have to lead to worse outcomes, however. By following these recommendations, we can emerge from the COVID-19 crisis ready to achieve the 2030 Agenda and build a just and equitable future for all.

- Permanently extend and increase funding for **social protection programs**, especially for informal workers and women who have been previously excluded from programs.
- Provide **unconditional cash transfers** to women and women-led businesses. For women without access to financial services, find innovative methods for delivering cash, and create long-term plans for increasing their economic empowerment.
- Refrain from implementing **austerity measures**, especially those related to social programs and public services. **End privatization** of public services.
- Fulfill girls' right to education, at all levels, by ensuring they have the necessary support and technology – without increasing the care burden on women – while schools are closed, and providing incentives to return to school once they open.
- Increase access to **water, sanitation, and hygiene services**, including and especially for hand washing and menstrual hygiene management. After the crisis ends, develop long-term gender-responsive solutions that focus on inequalities and treat water and sanitation as a human right and public good.
- All leaders should speak out against xenophobic, racist, and discriminatory hate speech that has arisen in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Avoid criminalized, militarized, or overly securitized responses to the pandemic and hold state and non-state actors accountable for human rights violations to prevent future violations, including those committed to purportedly respond to the crisis.

Ensure that any **emergency measures**, including **states of emergency**, are rights-based, legal, proportionate, necessary, and non-discriminatory. Redirect funds in **military budgets** to social protection and essential public services.