ACHIEVE GENDER EQUALITY AND EMPOWER ALL WOMEN AND GIRLS:
Implementing the pledge

CONTEXT

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development provides an important opportunity for action to achieve gender equality, empower all women and girls, and realize their full enjoyment of all human rights. Gender equality targets are embedded in 11 of the 17 goals, with SDG 5 specifically focusing on gender equality and empowerment. This is reflective of the cross-cutting nature of gender inequality and hence the importance of gender-responsive implementation of the SDGs in order to end poverty and hunger, combat inequalities within and among countries, build peaceful, just and inclusive societies, protect and promote human rights, ensure the lasting protection of the planet and its natural resources, among other issues.[1]

Of the 47 countries submitting VNR reports in 2020, 44 provided information on efforts to realise gender equality, which was slightly fewer than in 2019. Most VNR reports also contained a specific section on countries' commitment to leaving no one behind (LNOB), in which women and girls, along with persons with disabilities, children and youth, were specifically mentioned.

Five years into the 2030 Agenda, and on the 25th anniversary of the *Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action,* governments are sharing progress and reporting in some detail on the legal frameworks, action plans and policies currently in place or being introduced to promote gender equality and end all forms of discrimination. Countries also reported on actions being taken to implement, enforce and monitor such plans and policies. For example, Costa Rica launched a new *National Policy for Effective Equality among Women and Men (2018-30),* and Armenia reported on the approval of the *Gender Policy Strategy and the Action Plan for 2019-2023.* In turn, Slovenia reported on the amendment of its *Equal Opportunities for Women and Men Act* to state that all ministries should appoint a coordinator responsible for ensuring that the gender perspective is incorporated in measures and policies. In addition, a small number of countries reported on the implementation of gender-responsive budgeting. This aims for the incorporation of a gender perspective into budgeting frameworks so that a gender-equitable distribution of resources can address gender gaps.

Despite these efforts, major challenges remain. Whilst there have been improvements in producing disaggregated data overall, there are still challenges in producing gender disaggregated data. Reporting for 2020 showed that this is only available in 57% of the cases (27 out of the 47 countries presenting VNR reports), with no improvement from the previous year. Whilst countries report on legal frameworks to promote, enforce and monitor gender equality and non-discrimination, there is still a lack of clear data to show trends in progress in implementation of SDG 5, and few VNRs reported on the full set of targets and indicators within the goal.

Whilst over half of countries reported on policies and programmes in place to tackle violence against women and girls, this is still one of the main challenges mentioned in the achievement of SDG 5. Moreover, participation of women in leadership and decision-making positions is still low in the majority of reporting countries. In addition, the unequal distribution of unpaid work between men and women beyond the labour market sphere was raised as a significant challenge by over half of the reporting countries. This affects advancement towards equal participation of men and women in the labour market, and constrains women's economic empowerment. This is in line with data from the International Labour Organisation (ILO) in 2018, which shows that, globally, women spend an average of four hours and 25 minutes daily doing unpaid care work, in comparison to men's average of one hour and 23 minutes.[2]

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1.   2017 HLPF Thematic Review of SDG 5
2.   International Labour Organisation, 2019. A quantum leap for gender equality: For a Better Future of Work for All. Geneva: ILO.

Crucially, VNR reports show that progress towards SDG 5 has been hampered by the COVID-19 pandemic, which has had a negative and disproportionate effect on women. Armenia's VNR report specifically mentions pregnant women as at risk of being left behind due to COVID-19, whereas Bangladesh highlights widowed women, and both Moldova and Peru note the significant impact on people susceptible to domestic violence. Furthermore, reduced access to healthcare services, including sexual and reproductive health services, is raised as a concern in Nigeria's VNR report. These reports are in line with research conducted on the impact of COVID-19 on women, which shows how lockdown measures have aggravated pre-existing inequalities.[3] These include young women being unable to continue their education, hence affecting their long-term prospects, and job losses for women, who in most low-income countries are more likely than men to work in the informal sector without access to labour protections or social protection through work. Worldwide, over 740 million women work in the informal economy. Their income fell by 60% during the first month of the pandemic.[4]

Furthermore, the significant increase in unpaid care work due to the disruption of childcare and education in many countries has increased the burden on women, since prevailing gender norms expect women to take on these domestic duties.[5] This burden of care is raised in the 2020 VNR reports of many countries, including Austria, Bulgaria, Costa Rica, Kenya, Honduras, North Macedonia and Panama. In addition, violence against women and girls, particularly intimate partner or domestic violence, has been reported to have intensified following stay-at-home measures. This is due to women having to spend more time with their abusers at home, in addition to increased stress in the household, the disruption of social and protective networks, and support services for survivors being shut down or overstretched.[6] **Both this research and the VNR reports emphasise the importance of a gender lens in COVID-19 national recovery plans to ensure that decades of achievement are not reversed.**

CASE STUDIES ON APPROACHES TO ACHIEVING GENDER EQUALITY

Uzbekistan's efforts towards gender equality

Despite the lack of data disaggregated by gender, Uzbekistan's VNR report highlights the country's recent efforts to promote gender equality and considerable shifts in achieving it. In 2019, the Parliament adopted the *Law to Ensure Equal Rights and Opportunities for Men and Women and the Law to Protect Women from Discrimination and Violence.* The proportion of women in leadership positions grew by 5.3 percentage points from 27.7% in 2015 to 33% in 2019. Women's employment is one of the priority areas in Uzbekistan's socioeconomic development, and the VNR report highlights many initiatives to increase it. The proportion of women in the total workforce is currently 45%. The VNR report is also cognizant of areas where further progress in needed.

Linking SDGs implementation and gender equality national policies in Costa Rica

In Costa Rica, under the leadership of the National Institute for Women, established in 2007, and through multi-stakeholder processes involving the Government, United Nations agencies, civil society, and academia, three significant gender policies were adopted: the *National Policy to prevent and address violence against women of all ages 2017-2032*, the *National Policy for Effective Equality between Women and Men 2018-2030*, and the *National Policy for Equality between Women and Men in the training, employment and enjoyment of the products of Science, Technology, Telecommunications and Innovation 2018-2027*. All of these are explicitly aligned with the 2030 Agenda. As part of the country's efforts to implement those policies, a study around gender equality was published in 2020, identifying actual gender gaps, specific measures to close them, and providing public finance recommendations.

3. ActionAid, Impact of COVID-19 on Young Women, November 2020.
4. Ancona, G., and A. Bhatt, 2020. Spotlight on Gender, COVID-19 and the SDGs: Will the pandemic derail hard women progress on gender equality. New York: UN Women.
5. UKAid, Implications of COVID-19 on women informal workers.
6. ActionAid, Impact of COVID-19 on Young Women, November 2020.
7. European Disability Forum; Sightsavers India. Rising voices: Mainstreaming women with disabilities in India-EU international cooperation.

A case study of participation of women with disabilities in SDG implementation in India

Richa, DPO member from Jharkhand state says "I want to be head of the Gender Committee formed under the SDGs and United Nations Convention on Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) framework training in my state. I feel knowledgeable and empowered due to information that has been given to connect from 'local to global' issues of women with disabilities. I learnt during the disability inclusive SDG scorecard process that 'united we stand together' and alone we cannot uphold all our rights!"[7]

Globally, women with disabilities are subject to double discrimination due to their gender and disability, and therefore continue to be disadvantaged. In March 2018, a project supported by the European Union was launched in five Indian states with the aim of supporting people with disabilities to play a vital, proactive part in implementing and monitoring the SDGs at local, state, national, regional and international levels. A qualitative study was conducted to assess the 15 Organisations of Persons with Disabilities (OPDs) for gender inclusion, discriminatory or exclusionary practice and barriers faced by women with disabilities in leadership roles. This helped to identify gender-specific barriers and gaps limiting full and equal participation by all members. Following this, Gender Committees were established. An innovative disability-inclusive scorecard on SDG implementation was developed, with a specific focus on women with disabilities. Women with Disabilities were empowered with training on the use of the SDGs, UNCRPD, and the Indian national laws as advocacy tools. This strengthened the voices of women with disabilities in both local and national advocacy actions. Women OPD leaders participated in the national VNR consultation held in January 2020 and ensured their specific concerns and recommendations were reflected in India's 2020 VNR report.

Mozambique's efforts to advance towards gender equality through legal and policy frameworks

Mozambique's 2020 VNR report emphasises the efforts made to achieve gender equality since 2015 through the approval and implementation of the *National Action Plan for Advancement of Women 2018-2024*, the *National Plan for Prevention and Fight against Gender-based Violence 2018-2021*, and the *National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security 2018-2022*. The *Health Sector Gender Inclusion Strategy 2018-2023* and the *Education Sector Gender Strategy 2018-2022* were also approved. In addition, the *Law for Preventing and Ending Child Marriages* was passed in 2019, prohibiting marriage of children younger than 18 years old and recognising Mozambique's international obligation to uphold the rights of girls. Furthermore, in 2019, the *Law of Succession* was revised to ensure that the surviving woman be the main beneficiary in the event of the death of their spouse. In 2018, the discriminatory Ministerial Order of the Ministry of Education and Human Development, which prohibited pregnant students from attending school during daytime, was revoked. Moreover, steps have been taken to strengthen participation of women in decision-making bodies, and it was reported that 47.6% of Cabinet members and 37.6% of Mozambican parliamentarians are women, in addition to the Speaker of the Assembly being a woman. Despite this progress, Mozambique's VNR report recognises the challenges that still remain in terms of women and girls' education, income, high maternal mortality, adolescent pregnancy, informal employment and control over resources, and highlights the importance of ensuring that laws and sectoral strategies are adequately implemented.

Tackling gender stereotypes around Information and Communications Technology (ICT) in Estonia and Bangladesh

With the objective of tackling gender stereotypes in the digital field, the information campaign 'ICT is everywhere' was organised in Estonia in 2018 with a particular focus on girls and young women. The aim of the programme was to encourage young women to consider studying and working in higher education in digital specialities. Within the framework of the campaign, 50 information events took place in schools all over Estonia over the course of two years, and ten separate workshops in technology companies were held.

In Bangladesh, the 'She Power' project focused on creating awareness and opportunities for women's employment in the ICT sector. Ten thousand five hundred (10,500) women from 21 districts took part in a funded training programme with the support of existing professionals. This led to internships with local entrepreneurs and support to participants to start their own businesses, resulting in over 50% of participants becoming self-employed in the ICT sector following the training programme.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Five years into the establishment of the 2030 Agenda, despite progresses, the world is not on track to achieve gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls.

Member States should ensure that they apply an intergenerational and intersectional gender lens in their implementation, review and reporting on progress of the SDGs to tackle the multiple, intersecting inequalities that women and girls face. This is important to achieve not only SDG 5 but to contribute to progress on all 17 Goals.

To build back better from the COVID-19 pandemic, it is crucial that Member States, civil society and other stakeholders also ensure women's full, equal and meaningful participation in the recovery. This includes women having key roles in developing and directing policy responses to the pandemic at the national and local levels.[8]

The following recommendations set out how national governments can ensure progress towards gender equality and women and girls' empowerment within the SDGs:

- Ensure women and girls' meaningful participation in the implementation, review and follow up of the SDGs, working with them to make sure that policies, decisions and reporting are focused on equity and are gender responsive.

- Provide information on the collection, analysis and dissemination of gender disaggregated data by national and subnational institutions, with a centralised system where this is stored and made accessible.

- Develop gender-responsive budgeting systems to integrate the SDGs into national budgets and ensure gender-equitable distribution of resources.

- Protect and enhance civil society space and support women- and girls-led movements.

- Step up efforts to increase participation of women in politics and decision-making roles, including by removing structural and legal obstacles that hinder them, as this is essential to the achievement of equality and sustainable development.

- Promote gender equality through international good practice, such as gender-based analysis, and by mainstreaming gender into policies and plans, and into appropriate legal, policy and institutional frameworks.

- Eliminate discriminatory laws, policies and practices, and promote appropriate employment policies that improve labour market conditions and advance decent work for women, which is particularly important for an inclusive COVID-19 recovery.

- Ensure policy decisions are informed by a rigorous gender analysis with the aim of ensuring that any threats to or impacts on the rights of women and girls are identified and addressed.

- Scale up investments in public services, including public care services, in order to reduce and redistribute women's unpaid care and domestic work; ensure women public sector workers and women workers in the informal economy have decent work guarantees; and scale up comprehensive responses to gender-based violence.