



HLPF 2016 Brief Series

ISSUE #3: Civil Society Participation and Accountability

Key messages:

- Accountability for gender equality is essential across all 17 SDGs, and the implementation, follow up and review of the agenda should ensure human rights and gender analysis throughout for gender transformation to occur.
- The active and meaningful participation of civil society, including women's and feminist groups and other relevant rights-holders must be guaranteed at all levels of planning, design, implementation, follow-up and review.
- Creating and ensuring an active, open and inclusive process for engagement with civil society is absolutely critical to ensuring a dynamic HLPF because civil society brings essential knowledge and expertise about the impact of the Agenda on those most affected by it, as well as the hardest to reach.
- The full engagement and participation of constituencies and rights holders, including the most marginalized, can contribute to the development of strong gender-sensitive data collection and analysis of country census, surveys and periodic reviews.
- Scaling up resources for civil society, including women's, feminist, human rights and grassroots organizations, who are key drivers of national and global-level action for achieving gender equality, will be critical to achieving the SDGs.
- Create and ensure a safe and enabling environment for civil society organizations and human rights defenders, especially women human rights defenders, to do their important work free from harassment, intimidation and violence by both state and non-state actors.

Accountability

As rights holders, activists and experts, members of the Women's Major Group know what is needed to transform the systems that hold women and girls back as well as how to include individuals and communities that have historically and systematically been "left behind." Gender equality and human rights cut across all 17 SDGs and must be a central aspect of accountability. The implementation, follow up and review of the agenda should ensure a gender perspective throughout.

Member States should seek the knowledge and skills of women's, feminist, and grassroots organisations. Full engagement and participation of constituencies and rights holders, including the most marginalized, in development of more gender-sensitive data collection through country census, surveys and periodic reviews is needed. Women's groups have expertise in reaching marginalized groups, identifying needs and guiding delivery of services, and have gained legitimacy and trust in collaboration with different stakeholders. In Nigeria, for example, Women's Major group partners have successfully engaged the National Statistics Bureau by inviting them to participate in more gender responsive data collection and reporting. Gender disaggregated data is

required to identify the gender gaps in resourcing and move away from instrumentalization of women and girls and from tokenistic implementation of strategies by member states towards gender inclusion and well-being.

Robust accountability is critical for effectiveness and success of the agenda, providing opportunities for identifying gaps/challenges and what policies are working/not working for whom. Participatory monitoring and accountability also provides ownership over the Agenda and policies for people most affected. Finally, it is important to note the need for accountability at all levels - national, regional, and particularly global. The global level is the space to ensure accountability between states and of states to their national populations.

At the global level, the High Level Political Forum must address the systemic drivers of inequality, including macroeconomic and global governance policies, support collaborations with civil society, share best practices, and hold governments and all other actors accountable for their sustainable development and human rights commitments. This includes the UN itself. In particular, the continued support of all-male panels selected to discuss important issues at the United Nations shows a lack of commitment to the 2030 Agenda and gender equality, ignoring the expertise of women worldwide. The HLPF must create robust and well-resourced links with international, national and regional accountability mechanisms, including human rights bodies, where solid data, regional realities and consultations with CSOs should be central. It must also recognize the particular challenges faced by women and girls in countries in special situations.

On corporate accountability, multistakeholder partnerships, which often give primacy to private sector and international financial institutions will only widen inequality between and within organisations without accountability, oversight and governance. We therefore call for an intergovernmental governance framework for multi-stakeholder partnerships, rooted in the international human rights framework and existing obligations in all three dimensions of sustainable development (economic, social, environment), with a central objective to ensure accountability and ex-ante assessment of partnerships. Ex-ante criteria will assess if a specific private sector actor is fit for a partnership in pursuit of the 2030 Agenda. United Nations member states would be at the helm of formulating the framework, including the criterion, the oversight and monitoring process based on due diligence reporting and independent third-party evaluations.

Civil Society Participation

Civil society organisations working on issues of human rights, justice, democracy, social and environmental rights are currently facing huge challenges regarding participation. HLPF cannot replicate this trend. Groups must be involved at all levels of planning, implementation, follow-up and review, which includes every stage of process, including as representatives on accountability mechanisms, key witnesses at any hearings or evidence-gathering sessions, and have the ability to publicly respond to reports or statements relating to Agenda 2030. At the global level, follow-up and review modalities for Agenda 2030 and the HLPF should ensure the enhanced participation of civil society through Major Groups and other organized civil society constituencies with a clear mechanisms for accountability, transparency and diverse membership.

WMG appreciates the fact that 22 countries volunteered to submit national reports and appreciates the frameworks developed by some countries. However, in most cases civil society organisations were neither consulted nor informed during the review process (see WMG Brief #4 on National Reports). Without the inclusion of women and feminist organisations in national planning and reporting mechanisms, the HLPF national reviews will remain incomplete and notional. As active advocates and experts on justice, human rights

and gender equality, Women's Major Group members are a valuable political actor and resource towards implementation, particularly in relation to budgeting and the gender resource and asset gaps.

Accountability requires disaggregation and validation of verifiable data, both qualitative and quantitative, collected on all indicators. Women's organizations should be partners in contributing, validating and interpreting the data used in reporting, planning and monitoring. Interpretation of data from a gender lens must be a key requirement.

Governments should ensure safety of women in civil society space, including women's human rights defenders. In the last five years more than fifty nations have adopted measures to curtail the activities of NGOs and human rights advocacy groups, which are increasingly perceived as threats by autocratic leaders in the 21st century. "There is a global trend of states fearing civil society," warned Maina Kiai, U.N. Special Rapporteur on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association. "Asia, Africa, Latin America, and post-Soviet states are the main stages where this repression is taking place."

Finally, participation requires resources. Women's organizations globally struggle to raise the resources necessary to do their work. For example, AWID research in 2010 revealed that the median budget for 740 women's organizations all over the globe was US\$20,000, despite evidence that women's movements are the key drivers of national and global action to realize women's and girls' human rights and gender equality. To address these financial shortfalls, governments must: allocate and track specific funding to support women's human rights and feminist groups at all levels, including through national budgets and official development assistance; implement gender-budgeting at all levels to ensure that the differential needs of women, men, girls and boys are adequately addressed; and ensure capacity building for women's groups.