13 March 2025

Original: English

Human Rights Council
Expert Mechanism on the Right to Development
Eleventh Session
2-4 April 2025
Item 4 of the provisional agenda
Implementation of the mandate and programme of work

Women's active, free and meaningful participation in development, with emphasis on decision-making*

Draft Study by the Expert Mechanism on the Right to Development

Executive Summary

This EMRTD thematic study analyzes the active, free and meaningful participation of women in their diversity in development, particularly in decision-making. The assessment includes international standards, policies and practices, taking into account the impact of intersectional discrimination and gender gaps and the multisectoral approach to overcoming challenges. It examines barriers and obstacles, including their interaction with inequalities, poverty and other critical issues.

The study presents a variety of good practices and lessons learned, involving different actors and different strategies and lines of action, and ends with some conclusions and recommendations to ensure transformative change.

* The annexes to the present report are reproduced in the language of submission only.

Please recycle

I. Introduction

1. The United Nations (UN) Declaration on the Right to Development (DRTD)[1] recognizes this right without distinction of any kind, including sex (Article 4), and promotes women's participation. It calls for effective measures to ensure that women play an active role in the development process (Article 8). The right to development (RtD) implies the active, free and meaningful participation of all persons and peoples.

2. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) include gender equality among their priorities in Goal 5, explicitly recognizing the existing inequalities, moreover the challenges to the realization of premises of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW).[2]

3. Equal opportunities for women's active, free and meaningful participation in development, particularly in decision-making, remains a transformation to be achieved worldwide. According to the Agenda 2030, gender equality is not only a fundamental human right, but also a necessary foundation for a peaceful, prosperous and sustainable world.

II. Purpose of the study and basic elements

4. This study aims to analyze the main components of women's participation in development, with a focus on decision-making; the impact of discrimination against women and gender gaps on the realization of the RtD for women and for all; and the link between good practices and relevant changes with the realization of the RtD of women and the country as a whole.

5. It examines how women in their diversity, including young women and girls, have the right to participate in, contribute to and enjoy economic, social, cultural and political development, taking into account the impact of intersectional discrimination. Indicators and data are also essential to assess women’s empowerment and participation in decision-making.

6. This study examines women's right to development by analyzing: gender inequalities, global and national gender gaps, and the Human Development Index to assess contributing factors.[3]

7. It examines international instruments, policies, programs and practices aimed at empowering women in development, focusing on decision-making, including governance, and leadership. It also identifies good practices and lessons learned from relevant experiences, which are integrated in Chapter IX.

8. A number of parameters, such as inclusive and participatory processes, transparency and accountability, and women's leadership and representation, guide the analysis of processes and policies. Particular attention is paid to women's access to education, employment, health and freedom from discrimination and violence, as well as the existence of comprehensive care systems, to ensure adequate conditions for active, free and meaningful participation and, most importantly, real access and opportunities for decision-making.

III. The right to development and women’s participation: International standards I Introduction

9. The right to development is an inalienable human right recognized by international law that entitles all persons and peoples to participate in, contribute to and enjoy the benefits of development (Art. 1 of the DTRD).

10. All international human rights instruments, including those at the regional level, establish the principle of equality and non-discrimination. In addition to the aforementioned

1 A/RES/41/128, December 1986.
2 A/RES/70/1, 25 September 2015; A/RES 34/180, December 1979.
3 UNDP, *Human Development Report 2023-24*. March 2024.

provisions of the DRTD, CEDAW explicitly covers women's right to non-discrimination in the public, social, cultural and political spheres. This includes the right to vote and be elected, to participate in the formulation and implementation of government policies, to hold public office and public functions at all levels of government, to represent their countries at the international level, and to participate in development policies and plans, including for rural women, and in economic, cultural and social life. The Convention emphasizes the importance of women's participation in decision-making, as evidenced by its preamble, which states that "the full and complete development of a country, the welfare of the world and the cause of peace require the fullest participation of women, on an equal footing with men, in all spheres," clearly reinforced by its recently adopted General Recommendation No. 40 (GR40).[4]

IV. Women's rights: principles of equality, diversity and non-discrimination

11. Women's rights are fundamental human rights that guarantee equality and non-discrimination. These rights are enshrined in international law, including the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, both UN International Covenants, on civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights, and CEDAW, as well as other relevant international and regional instruments.[5] The principle of equality demands that all persons, regardless of their conditions including their sex, have the same opportunities and rights to fully participate in society. It rejects any form of gender-based discrimination, among others.

12. Diversity is another crucial aspect of women's rights. Recognizing and valuing the diverse experiences, perspectives, and needs of women from all backgrounds is essential for achieving substantive equality. This includes acknowledging the intersectionality of gender with other factors such as race, ethnicity, age, economic background, disability, and social conditions, which can create unique and compounded forms of discrimination.[6]

13. The principle of non-discrimination against women prohibits "any distinction, exclusion or restriction made on the basis of sex which has the effect or purpose of impairing or nullifying the recognition, enjoyment or exercise by women, irrespective of their marital status, on a basis of equality of men and women, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural, civil or any other field".[7]

14. This principle ensures that all women, regardless of their background or circumstances, have equal access to opportunities, resources and power. Equality and non-discrimination apply to all spheres and at all times. States have a duty to protect women's rights and to prevent and punish violations. This implies taking appropriate and timely measures to ensure an enabling environment for women to exercise their rights, with full access to processes, meaningful participation and enjoyment of related benefits. In addition, a multisectoral approach is essential to involve all relevant sectors of society, beyond Governments, which play a critical role in respecting and promoting gender equality.

15. Empowering women and girls is critical to achieving sustainable development. Societies as a whole benefit from the contributions and perspectives of women and girls when they have equal opportunities for education, employment and economic and political participation.

V. Active, free and meaningful participation:

16. Access to an active, free and meaningful participation in economic, political and social spheres, including equal and inclusive representation and decision-making, depends on:

4 CEDAW/C/GC/40, February 2024.; *See also:* CEDAW, Arts. 3, 7, 8, 13 y 14.
5 *Id.*, para. 22; A-RES- 217 A (III); A-RES-2200A (XXI).
6 *Id.* para. 17.
7 *Ibid. 2,* Article 1.

Capacities: related to issues such as access to education, information, health and a safe environment;

Opportunities: related to real options and mechanisms to remove barriers to access to business, employment, autonomy and leadership positions; and

Freedom: legal and practical access to basic rights, particularly through appropriate legal frameworks and prevention/protection mechanisms against discrimination and violence.

17. The right to participate in public affairs is a fundamental human right embedded in various international and regional human rights instruments that encompasses the ability of individuals to participate meaningfully in decision-making processes that affect their lives.[8]

18. Meaningful participation is a cornerstone of international principles and jurisprudence, implying real opportunities to participate and embodying the core idea that participation should be genuine, accessible and effective, in order to ensure that it is not merely theoretical, but practically accessible to all.[9]

19. International jurisprudence and doctrine have recognized that access to information and the ability to engage in public debate are essential for meaningful participation in public affairs. It has also underscored the importance of substantive equality, beyond formal legal rights. Accessibility, meaningful consultation, empowerment and accountability are key drivers of real and effective participation opportunities.[10]

20. Participation mechanisms must be accessible to all women, regardless of their background, abilities, or social status. This includes ensuring that information about decision-making processes is available in accessible formats, relevant for indigenous peoples and persons with disabilities among others, and that reasonable accommodations are made for women with disabilities.

21. Consultation processes must be genuine and meaningful, allowing women to express their views and to have those views taken into account in decision-making. This requires more than simply informing individuals about decisions; it involves actively seeking their input and providing feedback on how their input has been considered.

22. Active participation implies direct and autonomous representation at all stages and in all areas. It goes beyond being present or passively receiving information. It implies agency, initiative and a role in decision-making, with direct involvement, without intermediaries or barriers, as part of the individual's right to express an opinion.[11]

23. Free participation is linked to real opportunities to participate in processes without pressure or coercion, with adequate safeguards against violence, and effective spaces to express opinions and make autonomous decisions without undue interference from the state or other actors.

24. Autonomous participation is based on the concept of active participation, free from coercion, self-directed and based on the individual's own choices and values. It implies that women have the power and capacity to participate in ways that are meaningful to them and reflect their own priorities and visions. It emphasizes the notion that women should have the autonomy to participate in political and social life on their own terms, free from external control or patriarchal constraints.

25. Meaningful participation in development ensures that people's voices shape programs and policies, reflect their authority, and allow them to influence how power is used.[12]

---

8 *ICCPR*, Article 25; General Comment No.25 (Article 25), CCPR/C/21/Rev.1/Add.7, July 1996.

9 *Id.*; A/RES/79/1, para. 40, September 2024.; *Ibid.* 4, para. 19.

10 *Id.*

11 *Ibid.* 8, paras. 6, 12 and 25.

12 Flavia Piovesan, "Active, Free and Meaningful Participation in Development," in *Realizing the Right to Development: Essays in Commemoration of 25 Years of the United Nations Declaration on the Right to Development*, page 105, United Nations, 2013.

26. According to the Inter-American Human Rights Court, the right to participate in public affairs implies the meaningful access to information, prior consultation, and the possibility of influencing the decision-making process. It emphasizes that consultation processes must be timely, effective, and carried out in good faith.[13]

27. Likewise, for the European Court of Human Rights, the right to participate in public affairs encompasses more than just the right to vote. It includes the right to access information, to participate in decision-making processes and to influence public policy, essential to a healthy and functioning democracy.[14]

28. For its part, the African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights has recognized the significance of women's meaningful participation in decision-making processes in various contexts, emphasizing the importance of women's representation in political and public life, as well as their right to access information and justice.[15]

29. Similarly, the ASEAN Commission on the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Women and Children (ACWC) has recognized the importance of gender equality and women's rights in several statements. It has stressed the importance of promoting women's rights to education, health, and economic and entrepreneurial empowerment. It has also emphasized the need to address violence and discrimination against women, including through relevant guidelines.[16]

30. This jurisprudence and doctrine underscores the importance of informing people about decision-making processes in a timely and accessible manner; providing them with adequate time and resources to participate; creating safe and inclusive spaces for participation; ensuring that decision-makers are responsive to public input; and monitoring and evaluating participation processes to ensure that they are effective.[17]

A. Key factors to guarantee enabling environments for the active, free and meaningful participation of women in their diversity

31. The lack of effective mechanisms to prevent and protect women against gender based violence (GBV) has a significant impact on women's ability to participate in public life, including their economic and social activities.

32. In this sense, effective prevention and protection mechanisms against all forms of discrimination are essential to ensure the participation of women in their diversity and to avoid the exclusion of sectors affected by intersectional discrimination. The following are some examples of what the effective application of this approach means for indigenous and rural women and women with disabilities.

---

13 *See e.g.*: *Case of the Kichwa Indigenous People of Sarayaku v. Ecuador*, Judgment, June 2012; *Case of Ximenes-Lopes v. Brazil*, Judgment, July 2006; *Advisory Opinion OC-24/17, November 2017: Gender Identity, and Equality and Non-Discrimination of Same-Sex Couples, State Obligations Concerning Change of Name, Gender Identity, and Rights Derived from a Relationship Between Same-Sex Couples*.

14 *See e.g.: McGonnell v. the United Kingdom [GC]*, no. 28488/95, ECHR 2000-I; *Guerra and Others v. Italy [GC]*, no. 14903/89, § 60, ECHR 1998-I; *Tănase v. Moldova [GC]*, no. 7/08, §§ 155-157, ECHR 2010.

15 *See e.g.:* African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights v. Republic of Kenya, Application No. 006/2012 (May 2017); Federation of African Journalists and Others v. The Gambia, Application No. 029/2015 (March 2022).

16 *See e.g.:* ASEAN, *Guidelines for Developing National Standard Operating Procedures for a Coordinated Response to Violence against Women and Girls*, Technical contributions and edited by the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women) Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific, EVAW team, copy-edited by Mary Ann Perkins, design and layout by Yo-E Ryou, 2023; and, ASEAN, *Declarations and Statements on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment, Social Welfare and Development, Women's Rights and Children's Rights, and Rural Development and Poverty Eradication*, Association of Southeast Asian Nations, August 1967.

17 United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, *Guidelines for States on the Effective Implementation of the Right to Participate in Public Affairs*, Palais des Nations.

33. According to the DRTD and other international instruments, such as the International Labor Office (ILO) Convention 169 and the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), individuals and peoples are the holders of the right to development. In this context, the participation of indigenous women in development must integrate their traditional perspectives on collective rights and the specific norms of their communities. They must be involved in decision-making processes related to development initiatives that affect their communities and their lives.[18]

34. These initiatives must be designed and implemented in a culturally appropriate manner that empowers indigenous women and ensures that their unique perspectives and knowledge are valued and respected. The principle of consultation with indigenous peoples, seeking their free, prior and informed consent, also applies to indigenous women, in line with the concept of active, free and meaningful participation in decision-making.[19]

35. Similarly, rural women, who are critical to agriculture and community well-being, face unique challenges and must have a meaningful voice in development initiatives that affect their communities. Consultation processes must be accessible, with due consideration to specific challenges such as rural women's literacy levels and time constraints due to their daily responsibilities, to ensure their active participation in decision-making. Empowering rural women through access to information, resources and decision-making platforms is essential to ensure that development initiatives effectively address their needs and thus contribute to the overall well-being of their communities.

36. Women with disabilities have the right to full and equal participation in development and decision-making, free from all forms of discrimination, which requires accessible programs and processes, including physical, information and communication access. Their active involvement in all stages of development, from design to evaluation, is essential to ensure that their voices and perspectives are valued and integrated. Empowerment through autonomy, independence and self-advocacy must be prioritized and necessary support and resources provided to fully participate in society. Reasonable accommodation may be required to facilitate their meaningful participation.[20]

B. Challenges to guarantee genuine participation: barriers and failed processes

37. It is imperative to underline the importance of genuine inclusive and participatory processes in order to avoid situations of misrepresentation. Long-standing traditional practices rooted in cultural, religious and social beliefs, discrimination and stereotypes, seriously undermine the authenticity of women’s participation and the effectiveness of policies and norms.

38. Despite the implementation of gender quotas, there are significant obstacles to women's substantive participation in elected positions. These challenges include cases of forced resignations, where women are forced to step down for male replacements; symbolic representation, where women hold positions without real power or party support; restricted access and limited diversity, where opportunities favor elite women rather than marginalized groups; exclusionary practices in decision-making, where women's voices are ignored and their expertise questioned; and violence and harassment, which create fear and silence their participation.

39. Beyond formal exclusion, women face subtle economic barriers, including tokenism, where leadership positions confer limited influence; exclusion from informal networks, which hinders access to information and opportunities; stereotypes about entrepreneurship, which make it difficult to secure financing and limit career options; unequal pay and opportunities, which concentrate women in low-paying sectors and hinder advancement; lack of support structures, which burden women with unpaid care work and childcare constraints;

18 *Ibid. 1, Article 1.1;* ILO, *Convention No. 169*, June 1989; A/RES/61/295 (UNDRIP).

19 See: UNDRIP, Art. 19; ILO Convention 169, Art. 6; *Ibid* 1, Art. 32.2; CEDAW/C/GC/39, para. 6.

20 A/RES/61/106, 13 December 2006; CEDAW/C/GC/40 paras. 17, 22 and 27.

underrepresentation in decision-making bodies, which limits policy influence; and the glass ceiling and glass cliff, which hinder leadership and increase the risk of failure.

40. These scenarios illustrate the complexity of ensuring genuine and meaningful participation that leads to real and effective decision-making processes, both political and economic.[21]

41. Consequently with the above considerations, the women's active, free and meaningful participation implies their necessary empowerment and the ability to voice their opinions as well as to ensure that their voices are reflected in decisions.

VI. Gender equality and gender gaps

42. A meaningful democracy requires shared political and economic power between women and men. The continued underrepresentation of women in decision-making and public life limits both the democratic process and the effectiveness of policies.[22]

43. Consequently, and taking into account that women constitute about half of the population, gender equality nowadays has clearly evolved towards the notion of parity. This means that the goal is equal participation and representation of women under the same conditions as men, which implies 50/50 parity.

44. CEDAW GR40 is a forward looking parity compass for achieving equal and inclusive representation of women in decision-making systems across various sectors. It highlights the structural barriers, patriarchal norms and violence, and gender stereotypes that limit women's involvement in these systems, and proposes seven pillars for equal and inclusive representation.[23]

45. The goal of gender parity has also been promoted by civil society in international organizations such as the UN, including in human rights bodies and entities, as well as at the regional level.[24]

46. Despite progress, women's empowerment remains severely limited worldwide, with no nation achieving full gender equality.

A. Gender gaps

47. According to the WEF Global Gender Gap Report 2024, it will take 134 years to achieve full gender parity, exceeding the 2030 SDG target by five generations. Although 97% of the economies assessed have closed more than 60% of their gender gap (up from 85% in 2006), no country has reached full parity. Globally, health and survival are close to parity (96%), followed by educational attainment (94.9%). Economic participation and opportunity is at 60.5% parity, and political empowerment is at only 22.5% parity.[25]

48. Since 2006, political empowerment has improved the most (8.3 percentage points), followed by economic participation and opportunities (4.8) and educational attainment (4.2). Health and survival has declined slightly (-0.2). These changes have altered the time frames for parity: educational attainment now requires 20 years, political empowerment 169 years, while economic participation and opportunity has improved to 152 years. The time frame for health and survival remains undefined.[26]

21 CEDAW/C/GC/23, paras. 9, 27 and 28, 1997.
22 *Id.*
23 Ibid. 4, para. 13.
24 Gqual Campaign.
25 World Economic Forum, *Global Gender Gap Report 2024*, 2024.
26 *Id.* page 5.

49. Women achieve worldwide only 72.1% of what men achieve in key dimensions of human development, leaving an average gender gap of 28%.[27]

50. 91.3% of women and girls live in countries with low or medium levels of women's empowerment. Less than 1% of women live in countries with high levels of women's empowerment and gender parity.[28]

51. The number of women and girls (612 million) living within 50 kilometers of areas of armed conflict is estimated to have increased by 50% over the past decade. Climate change could push 158 million more women and girls into poverty within 25 years.[29]

1. Gender gap in education

52. A global gender gap of 14.5% in education and skills persists, and progress toward parity has slowed from 16 to 20 years. 22.6% of economies have reached full parity, but there are significant disparities across regions. While some countries have reached parity in primary education, the gap widens in secondary education, especially in low-income countries affecting their economic opportunities. Regarding the digital divide, 35.2% of women do not have access to the Internet, limiting their opportunities.[30]

53. Girls have a lower perceived aptitude for hard sciences, leading to underrepresentation in STEM fields, which are highly paid fields. Women represent only 29.2% of STEM workers, and approximately 30% in artificial intelligence.[31] The subsequent transition from uneducated girls to women in the labor market poses a challenge by reducing women's access to decent work and economic resources, thereby limiting women's ability to influence decisions that affect them. This reinforces the persistence of disproportionate care responsibilities and GBV, and contributes to wage gaps that hinder economic growth.

2. Gender gap in work and wages

54. Women's participation in the labor force (61.8%) is significantly lower than men's (over 90%). Women are disproportionately represented in the informal economy (58.2% globally), especially in low-income countries (92.1% of female employment), and earn on average 22% less than men. Women perform 2.3 hours more unpaid domestic work per day than men. These disparities are due to factors such as unequal participation in the labour force, income disparities and under-representation in leadership positions.[32]

3. Gender gap in economic participation

55. Global economic gender parity is improving in 64.4 percent of countries, including 10 of the 15 most populous economies, but significant gaps remain, particularly in economic leadership and decision-making. Women are underrepresented in key economic governance roles, multilateral financial institutions, debt servicing systems, capital markets, industrial infrastructure architecture, trade negotiations and more, hindering growth. While gender equality policies are more common, implementation is inconsistent. There are corporate efforts to recognize the benefits of gender equality, but progress is uneven. Workforce disparities persist, with women holding only 42% of jobs and 31.7% of leadership positions globally, and facing a "fall to the top" with declining recruitment into leadership positions.

---

27 UNDP and UN Women, *The Paths to Equal: Twin Indices on Women's Empowerment and Gender Equality*, 2023, page 13.

28 *Id.*

29 Michelle Nunn, "Why We Must Listen to the Unsung 'Sheroes' of War," June 2024; Women, *Feminist Climate Justice: A Framework for Action*, 2022, page 7.

30 Anna Bonfert and Divyanshi Wadhwa, *Tracing Global Trends in Education: A Tale of Old and New Gender Gaps*, World Bank, 18 April 2024. *Ibid.* 27.

31 *Ibid*. 4, para. 9.

32 Staab, S., L. Williams, C. Tabbush, and L. Turquet, *Harnessing Social Protection for Gender Equality, Resilience and Transformation*, World Survey on the Role of Women in Development, UN-Women, 2024, *The Paths to Equal*,page 3; Gould, Elise, *Gender Wage Gap Persists in 2023*, Economic Policy Institute, March 2024.

Regional disparities in workforce recovery and future unemployment threaten women's economic opportunities.[33]

4. Gender gap in leadership and representation

56. In terms of Political Leadership, women hold only 10% of head of state/government positions globally, a stagnant figure since 1995. Parliamentary representation is improving slowly, but only 26.9% of parliamentary seats are held by women. Minister-level representation is at 21.9% globally.[34]

57. In Business Leadership, women hold only 28.2% of management positions, 5% of CEO positions, and 15.7% of CFO positions are held by women.[35]

58. Significant gender gaps persist in political, economic, and academic leadership. Patriarchal systems and policy decisions are the root causes. Men dominate professional networks. Unequal caregiving burdens hinder women's advancement, and underrepresentation in STEM creates disadvantages in technology transitions. Women also perceive fewer opportunities for advancement. According to the WEF's Future of Work 2023 Survey, more than two-thirds of organizations surveyed have implemented a Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) program. Seventy-nine percent of them have implemented these women-focused programs, which often lack meaningful action to close gender gaps in the industry and economy (41.2%) and focus primarily on training.[36]

59. The success of these programs requires understanding root causes, clear goals, accountable leadership, contextual solutions, and rigorous tracking. Progress is too slow and strong global voices are calling for action, reminding that increased investment and a shift in economic mindset are critical, and that collaboration between government and business is essential for parity and sustainable growth.[37]

B. Data collection and challenges

60. Data is essential for policy planning, monitoring and evaluation, as well as for identifying trends and lessons learned, but there are key challenges that impede accurate gender analysis. Data quality and availability is uneven, reporting is weak, and resources are limited. The lack of gender-sensitive data, such as on unpaid care work, is also an issue, as time-use surveys are scarce and vary widely.

61. Although intersectionality is important, gender data is often not disaggregated by race, ethnicity, disability or socio-economic status, which masks different realities and hinders analysis of intersectional discrimination. The lack of detailed profiles of women in leadership and representation statistics prevents a nuanced understanding of progress and challenges, thus limiting the effectiveness of gender equality interventions.

62. These challenges complicate the analysis of women's participation in development and decision-making.

63. Despite these obstacles, civil society and some governments are making progress in monitoring women's participation and the inclusion of marginalized groups. Some of these are described in chapter IX, including a section on good practices.

64. However, data limitations persist. Data on the quality of education is lacking, and it often fails to reveal the systemic exclusion of women belonging to different groups in decision-making. Although efforts are being made to improve data, quality remains a major challenge.

---

33 *Ibid.* 25, pages 7 and 39.

34 *Id*; *Ibid*. 12, para. 22; *Ibid. 4.*

35 *Id*; UN Women, *Key Messages on Women's Rights, Empowerment, and Equality: Electoral and Political Participation 2024*, UN Women, New York.

36 World Economic Forum, *Global Gender Gap Report 2023*, page 56.

37 *Id.*

C. Gender and Poverty: A Complex Intertwining

65. Women experience disproportionately poverty due to unequal access to education, healthcare, economic opportunities, and decision-making, worsened by unpaid care work. This hinders development.

66. Global poverty reduction has stalled; 8.5% of the population live on less than $2.15 US dollars daily (the extreme poverty line for low-income countries), and 44% on less than $6.85 US dollars (the poverty line for upper-middle-income countries). Sub-Saharan Africa and conflict-affected countries hold three-quarters of those in extreme poverty.[38]

67. The pandemic pushed millions into extreme poverty, disproportionately affecting women and girls through loss of employment and increased care burdens.[39] Over 10% of women are in extreme poverty. Women aged 25-34 are 25% more likely to live in extremely poor households than men. Women in fragile contexts are 7.7 times more likely to live in extreme poverty. Conflict-affected women and girls have doubled since 2017. Climate change may cause 236 million more women to go hungry by 2030, twice as many as men.[40]

68. Intergenerational poverty is a major concern. Older women and female-headed households are especially affected, perpetuating poverty. The economic hardships of older women, combined with their family roles, perpetuate poverty, especially for girls, and can be passed on from generation to generation. Supporting women throughout their lives is critical to breaking this cycle.

69. Women's poverty is worsened by factors like race, ethnicity, class, disability, and gender identity. Data, especially disaggregated, is often lacking.

70. Recognizing this concern, the Pact for the Future aims to address the "feminization of poverty" for global resilience and prosperity.[41]

D. Women's Intersectionality and Multisectoral Approach

71. Intersectionality recognizes that overlapping social and political identities (gender, race, ethnicity, economic status, nationality, disability, etc.) create unique experiences of discrimination and privilege.

72. The multisectoral approach involves collaboration between different actors, such as government, civil society, business and academia, which is essential to addressing complex issues of gender inequality.

73. Its application highlights the multiple experiences of women, such as a black woman facing both racism and sexism. This requires recognizing diverse experiences, focusing on marginalized voices, building inclusive partnerships, using evidence-based approaches, and promoting gender transformative change.

74. Gender equality indicators often oversimplify and fail to capture the nuanced and intersectional experiences of women from diverse backgrounds and ignore intersectional disparities.[42]

75. There are also conceptual and methodological problems arising from different definitions and a tendency to focus on outcomes rather than power structures. In turn, political resistance and lack of will hamper data collection and action.

38 World Bank.

39 Carolina Sánchez-Páramo, Ruth Hill, Daniel Gerszon Mahler, Ambar Narayan, and Nishant Yonzan, *COVID-19 Leaves a Legacy of Rising Poverty and Widening Inequality*, World Bank, 7 October 2021.

40 UN Women

41 *Ibid. 9, para. 17.*

42 *Ibid.* 4, para. 28.

76. As noted above, to adequately address these challenges, it is important to develop more nuanced and inclusive indicators, adopt intersectional frameworks, and generate political will through multisectoral engagement.

VII. Challenges for the gender equality and women's equal and inclusive participation in development

77. Despite the remarkable progress made in recent decades, women continue to face a number of obstacles to their full and effective participation in many sectors and at various levels of governance. In addition, the pandemic and major global contemporary crises, including climate change, conflicts and displacement, and food insecurity, have created additional constraints and setbacks, leading to new challenges.

A. Main obstacles and barriers

78. Despite diminishing legal obstacles, significant formal and practical barriers to human rights of women in their diversity persist, hindering gender equality. These include economic and social barriers like limited access to education, healthcare, and employment, compounded by unequal pay and career advancement, restricting women's effective participation.[43]

79. Cultural barriers, such as gender stereotypes and societal expectations, limit women's opportunities. Violence and safety issues, including online and offline harassment, severely restrict women's freedom and wellbeing. Gender-based violence, a global problem affecting hundreds of millions, impedes women's full participation. Although 165 countries have laws against domestic violence, only 104 have comprehensive legislation. One in three women experiences violence, a problem that affects all income levels, social classes and regions, requiring urgent action.[44]

80. Women's domestic burdens and limited reproductive health control has a significant impact on women's lives and choices. Political underrepresentation and their absence in decision making result in policies that neglect women's needs.

81. These interconnected barriers necessitate comprehensive policy interventions and societal shifts. States have the responsibility to adopt policies to remove these barriers and overcome attitudes that perpetuate inequalities.[45]

B. State's obligations and principles: Temporary special measures

82. States must actively pursue substantive gender equality, not just formal equality, by incorporating gender equality into laws, institutions and policies, and by using temporary special measures to accelerate progress and close gender gaps.

83. Recognizing both biological and socially constructed differences between men and women, differential treatment may be necessary in certain circumstances to address disparities and special needs. Achieving substantive equality also requires an effective strategy to overcome women's under-representation and to redistribute resources and power between men and women.[46]

84. The temporary special measures provided for in CEDAW should be understood in the context of achieving equality, which is enshrined in most national constitutions. Arguments based on the alleged violation of the principle of equality underestimate the real and practical situations that prevent the substantive application of this constitutional and international principle and ignore the steps necessary to ensure effective compliance. Temporary special

43 *Ibid. 21,* para. 14.
44 UN Women
45 CEDAW/C/GC/25, para. 11, 2004.
46 *Id.* para. 8.

measures are also part of the steps taken to remove obstacles to the effective implementation of the principle of non-discrimination.[47]

85. These temporary special measures are essential to the achievement of genuine equality and are consistent with human rights standards. They are not a departure from equality, but a necessary step to overcome historical and systemic discrimination. They are also used to protect other groups that have been historically discriminated against and disadvantaged groups. In addition, States must address intersectionality and may also need to take temporary special measures to eliminate multiple forms of discrimination against women and their compounded negative effects on women.[48]

C. Opportunities and commitments: International cooperation for a women's active, free and meaningful participation in development and decision-making

86. Though not the study's focus, international cooperation remains vital for gender equality, the SDGs, and women's right to development, and cannot be ignored. In line with the UN Charter and the DRTD, States have an obligation to cooperate to contribute to global efforts and create enabling national and international environments for the right to development for all.

87. International cooperation, in all forms, is crucial for enhancing women's participation in development and decision-making. While not solely about resources, economic assets are fundamental for states and communities to address challenges.

88. International and regional cooperation can also foster transformative change through the exchange of experiences, especially with the leadership of women's organizations and communities in their diversity, including intergenerational dialogue and grassroots communities.

89. Women in their diversity must be active participants in development, seen as agents of change and decision makers, rather than as passive beneficiaries. Likewise, governments, institutions and agencies involved in development cooperation must follow the same path to uphold human rights standards and achieve effective results. Partnering with civil society and communities, including young women, promotes inclusiveness and sustainability, by taking into account the interests of youth and future generations.

90. Transparency, accountability, and participatory processes with women and girls as protagonists, based on self-identified priorities, are essential in development projects. Monitoring and evaluation mechanisms with stakeholder participation and oversight are also critical.

VIII. Towards the right to development for all: Gender diversity and women's empowerment as drivers of business and socioeconomic progress

91. Achieving the right to development for all requires a focus on gender diversity and women's empowerment, not only as an ethical imperative, but also as a critical driver of business success and broader social and macroeconomic progress. Ignoring the potential of women is a significant impediment to realizing the full potential of societies and economies. Gender equality and women's empowerment are a game changer and a critical component of economic growth. This becomes even more relevant in the current context of major resource challenges.

47 *Id.* para.14.
48 *Id.* para.12.

A. Gender Diversity and Business Performance:

92. The business case for gender diversity is increasingly compelling. Numerous studies show a positive correlation between gender-diverse leadership and improved financial performance. A 2018 McKinsey & Company report, "Delivering Through Diversity," found that companies in the top quartile of gender diversity on executive teams were 21% more likely to experience above-average profitability than peers in the fourth quartile. This advantage extends beyond profitability to other metrics as well. It also found that companies with greater gender diversity on executive teams and boards were more likely to achieve greater value creation.[49]

93. Gender diversity also fosters innovation and better decision-making. Diverse teams bring a wider range of perspectives and experiences, leading to more creative solutions and a better understanding of different markets. A study by the Center for Talent Innovation found that teams with diverse members were 45% more likely to experience year-over-year market share growth. This is because diverse teams are better equipped to understand and respond to the needs of a diverse customer base.[50]

B. Women's Empowerment and Socioeconomic Development:

94. Empowering women is a critical component of sustainable development. A UN Women report highlights the strong link between women's empowerment and economic growth, poverty reduction, and improved health and education outcomes. Companies greatly benefit from increasing employment and leadership opportunities for women, which is shown to increase organizational effectiveness and growth. It is estimated that companies with three or more women in senior management functions score higher in all dimensions of organizational performance.[51]

95. The World Bank also underscores the importance of gender equality for development, demonstrating that gender gaps in education, health, and employment cost countries significant economic losses. Closing these gaps can unlock significant economic potential and lead to more inclusive and sustainable development. It is estimated, for example, that closing the gender income gap could increase global GDP by 26%.[52]

C. Opportunities and action guidelines:

96. International institutions have a key role to play in achieving gender equality. The SDGs, particularly Goal 5 on gender equality, provide a framework for global action. UN Women's Empowerment Principles offer guidance to businesses on how to promote gender equality in the workplace, marketplace and community. The gender dimensions of the Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights complement this approach. Similarly, other regional action plans, guidelines and commitments provide a valuable basis for action and contribute to change.[53]

---

49 Dame Vivian Hunt, Lareina Yee, Sara Prince, and Sundiatu Dixon-Fyle, *Delivering Through Diversity*, McKinsey & Company, January 2018.

50 COQUAL.

51 UN Women, *Progress of the World's Women 2015-2016*, Chapter 2, 69, UN Women, 2015.

52 Council on Foreign Relations, *Growing Economies Through Gender Parity: Closing the Gender Gap in the Workforce Could Add a Staggering $28 Trillion to the Global GDP*.

53 OECD, *Toolkit for Mainstreaming and Implementing Gender Equality*, July 2023; Knowledge Transfer Network of the Statistical Conference of the Americas, *Guidelines for Mainstreaming the Gender Perspective in Statistical Production*, February 2024; African Union, *AU Strategy for Gender Equality & Women's Empowerment 2018-2028*, African Union.

IX. Overcoming challenges to women's participation through the engagement of a diversity of actors and actions: good practices and lessons learned

97. The EMRTD acknowledges contributions from Member States, civil society, academia, and UN bodies and procedures, emphasizing efforts to advance women's right to development, including temporary special measures. Challenges remain in ensuring women's effective decision-making, particularly for disadvantaged groups facing intersectional discrimination, and in measuring results with disaggregated and updated data.

98. Based on inputs and expert research, EMRTD has identified good practices and lessons learned to improve gender equality and women's decision-making in development. These experiences involve diverse actors and perspectives, utilizing various tools and mechanisms across numerous areas.

A. Legislative and Policy Frameworks for Gender Equality:

99. Most national constitutions incorporate the principle of equality, and some of them explicitly include gender equality. Several countries have made significant progress in women's political representation, using a variety of strategies.

100. **Rwanda** (HDI 0.548, ranking 161st) achieved 61.3% female parliamentary representation, largely due to its 30% constitutional quota and grassroots mobilization, which reached 64% in 2013, making it the first country in the world with a female majority in parliament.[54] **Cuba** (HDI 0.764, rank 85) has 55.7% women in its lower house, achieving parity without quotas through policies that address key areas of gender equality.[55] **Nicaragua** (HDI 0.669, rank 130) achieved 53.9% in its lower house. **Mexico** (HDI 0.781, rank 77) achieved parity with 50.4% in the lower house and 50.8% in the upper house, driven by constitutional amendments and monitoring mechanisms.[56]

101. **Andorra** (HDI 0.884, rank 35), **Namibia** (HDI 0.610, rank 142), and the **United Arab Emirates (UAE)** (HDI 0.937, rank 17) have all achieved 50% representation through the use of balanced candidacy laws, "zebra-style" quotas, and sectoral measures, respectively.[57] **Iceland** stands out for its comprehensive approach, including its 2020 Equal Status and Rights Regardless of Sex Act and gender-responsive budgeting, which contribute to its consistent top ranking in gender parity.[58]

102. While some countries may have achieved parity in parliaments, this does not necessarily mean that they have achieved full gender equality in all sectors and forms, and the inclusion of disadvantaged women or minority groups. Effective quotas increase political representation, but monitoring the intersectional impact is crucial. It is worth recognizing that high gender parity in government and parliament can be achieved by different ways, including through quota systems or other strategies, but political commitment is essential to guide efforts towards concrete and sustainable results.

---

54 *Constitution of the Republic of Rwanda*, art. 10(4), December 2015; UN Women, *Rwanda: Women in Parliament*, August 2018; SDG16+, *Rwanda's 30 Percent Gender Quota Led to the World's Largest Share of Women in Government*, January 2025.

55 SDG16+, *Cuba's Family Code Recognizes Diversity in Families, Expanding Rights for Children, Women, and LGBTQI+ People*, 2022.

56 *Constitución Política de los Estados Unidos Mexicanos*, art. 41(I), 2015; John Hassett, *Implementing Political Gender Quotas: Lessons from Mexico*, October 2024.

57 *Law 44/2022*, 12 December 2022, establishing gender parity in parliamentary representation; CEDAW/C/AND/CO/4;nter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), *Monthly Ranking of Women in National Parliaments; Gender Links Namibia, 50/50 Policy Brief* Namibia, May 2020; Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), *Gender Equality: Increasing Women's Representation in Parliament and Empowering Women MPs;UAE Gender Balance Council, About the UAE Gender Balance Program.*

58 Act No. 95/2000, May 2000.

B. Data, Monitoring, and Accountability

103. Disaggregated data is crucial for tracking progress and identifying disparities, especially for marginalized groups.

104. The Atenea Index, a United Nations Development Program (UNDP), UN Women, and International IDEA collaboration, measures political parity in **Latin America**, providing data to advance gender equality in political decisions. **Argentina** shared its experience with the Women's Political Participation Index (IPPM) and the Municipal Parity Index (IPM), regional tools developed with the UN, to track local women's representation. [59]

105. The Asia-Pacific Gender Equality Scorecard (UN Women), the African Gender Equality Index (African Development Bank), the Maputo Protocol Scorecard and the Gender Equality Index (European Institute for Gender Equality - EIGE) are among other regional tools that guide national efforts. The Inter-Parliamentary Union's (IPU) Women in Parliaments Global Database provides a global picture.

106. Sustainability and accurately measuring legal framework impacts and intersectionality remain challenges requiring assessment to ensure policy effectiveness and inclusiveness.

C. Economic Empowerment and Gender-Responsive Budgeting (GRB)

107. Integrating gender into public budgets at all levels is essential. There are countries with interesting strategies for GRB, including **Mexico**, which is recognized as having one of the most developed GRB systems globally, integrating gender considerations into public budgets at all levels.[60]

108. While the effectiveness and extent of implementation needs to be assessed, the fact that GRB has been prioritized and integrated into development strategies is worthy of recognition and encouragement.

109. In the case of **New Zealand**, a GRB Pilot Program was adopted for 2022 and 2023, which underpinned the country's gender-responsiveness.[61]

110. **Nicaragua**'s Law 717 aims to provide financial assistance to women for land acquisition, a crucial aspect of economic empowerment, especially in rural areas. It is worth noting the challenges of this type of policy in terms of sustainability, economic resources and financing, especially in developing countries.[62]

111. Legal and constitutional provisions in many countries prohibit gender discrimination and establish the principle of equal pay. It is worth mentioning the need for complementary strategies to address the root causes of this gender gap. Some policies include strategies with an intersectional approach, such as the Kia Toipoto (Public Service Action Plan 2022-2024) adopted in **New Zealand** to reduce the gender, Maori, Pasifika and ethnic pay gaps.[63]

D. Addressing Structural Barriers:

112. Initiatives address root causes of gender gaps through multiple strategies. Latin American countries face challenges in translating women's educational gains into political and economic leadership. African countries, particularly the Sub-Saharan region, focuses on educational opportunities to face literacy challenges for women and girls, particularly in rural

59 Argentina 's submission; Atenea Esparidad, Índice de Paridad Política.

60 Teresa Curristine, Nino Tchelishvili, and Sureni Weerathunga, *Gender Budgeting Is More Widespread But Implementation Remains a Challenge*, IMF Blog, March, 2022.

61 Manatū Wāhine Ministry for Women, *Gender Budgeting: Effective Gender Budgeting Can Bring Transformational Change with Social, Economic and Wellbeing Benefits for All,* 2023.

62 Christine J. Wade, *Nicaragua's Gender Gap: Rankings and Reality*, *Agenda Pública*, February 18, 2020; World Economics, *Nicaragua GDP*.

63 Ministry of Education Te Tāhuhu o Te Mātauranga, *Kia Toipoto Pay Gap Action Plan 2024-2025: Closing Our Gender, Māori, Pacific and Ethnic Pay Gap*, 2024.

areas. In Africa, Asia, and Latin America, economic empowerment of rural women is targeted through entrepreneurship and microfinance.[64]

113. Iceland addresses the burden of care with parental leave and subsidized childcare. Resource-limited low- and middle-income countries need innovative care solutions, with communities and the private sector complementing government efforts.

114. Uruguay 's Ley de Cuidados, Colombia' s Manzanas del Cuidado and Barcelona 's Cuida are examples of valuable practices of care policies. International networks such as the Global Alliance for Care and CHANGE promote caregiving public policies. The UN International Day of Care and Support gives visibility to this issue.[65]

115. Flexible work and digital inclusion are being promoted, with China sharing its experience.[66] India's PMGDISHA and Rwanda's Smart Villages, along with GSMA Connected Women, SheCodes and Technovation Girls, aim to bridge the digital divide. Ecuador's Sello Empresas Seguras and Centros Violeta address GBV, while the Net-works Project supports survivors of sex trafficking.[67]

116. Regional justice efforts against GBV include the Latin American Model Protocol on Femicide and the Council of Europe's Istanbul Convention. The EU and UN Spotlight Initiative addresses GBV globally.[68]

E. Capacity Building and Empowerment:

117. Relevant experiences include **New Zealand**'s Women's Employment Action Plan (Te Mahere Whai Mahi Wahine) which targets marginalized women. The **UAE** is investing in women's economic empowerment through education and entrepreneurship.[69] The business sector promotes women's empowerment and inclusive leadership through UN Women's Women's Empowerment Principles, with the engagement of over 9,000 global business leaders. In addition, there are national initiatives such as Champions for Change, with more than 80 leading CEOs and Chairs in **New Zealand** who have made a personal commitment to accelerate inclusive and diverse leadership in their workplaces.[70] International networks such as Fundación Mujeres in **Spain**, Vital Voices, SheTrades and FIWE represent other experiences in supporting women entrepreneurs.[71]

118. Nosotras: Women Connecting, a platform in Costa Rica, with a partnership in Kenya, **Costa Rica** and **Kenya** brings marginalized women together with leaders for mentorship.[72] Community-based initiatives include savings and loan associations in rural India, digital literacy networks in **Nigeria**, and legal awareness programs by Namati in **Sierra Leone** and the Global Empowerment Network, in regions with high rates of domestic violence. African women's traditional groups are also being trained in modern business practices based on their

64 International Fund for Agricultural Development, *Advancing Rural Women's Empowerment: Leveraging Opportunities to Achieve Zero Hunger*, 2017; UNDP, *Women's Economic Empowerment: Lessons Learned on Women's Entrepreneurship and Micro and Small Enterprises (MSE's) from Select Arab Countries: Synthesis Report*, 2023**;** UN Women Office for India, *Review and Analysis of Women's Economic Empowerment Policies and Programmes in India*, 2020.

65 UN Women, *Global Alliance for Care Leads Changes in the Care Economy*, September 2023; Change Network; *Creación del Sistema Nacional Integrado de Cuidados (SNIC)*, November 2015; *Manzanas del Cuidado*; *Barcelona Cuida: Information and Guidance Space*, Barcelona City Council.

66 Lockton Global Compliance, *New Remote Working Legislation Around the World [Updated]*, September 2024; China's submission.

67 Ecuador's submission; Clara Piloto, *The Gender Gap in STEM: Still Gaping in 2023*, Professional Education.

68 UN Women, *Latin American Model Protocol for the Investigation of Gender-Related Killings of Women (Femicide/Feminicide)*, 2014; The Spotlight Initiative: Ending violence against women and girls.

69 Manatū Wāhine Ministry for Women, *Women's Employment Action Plan*; UAE Permanent Committee for Human Rights, *Women's Rights and Empowerment*.

70 *Women's Empowerment Principles*; *Champions for Change*.

71 *Fundación Mujeres*; *Vital Voices*; *SheTrades*; *Federation of Indian Women Entrepreneurs (FIWE)*.

72 *Nosotras: Women Connecting*.

traditional platforms. NGOs and civil society are crucial for advocacy, policy influence, and knowledge-sharing.[73]

F. International Cooperation and Regional Approaches:

119. Many countries are prioritizing gender equality in their foreign policy and development cooperation, using a diverse range of strategies. However, challenges remain, including gaps between policy and implementation, funding fluctuations, insufficient attention to intersectionality, and limited data on impact and women's participation, which hinder effective evaluation. Nevertheless, these cooperation efforts need to be encouraged, while at the same time raising awareness of the need for practices that are compatible with these approaches.

120. The **UK**'s International Development (Gender Equality) Act 2014 exemplifies a legislative approach, mandating the consideration of gender equality in all official development assistance. Targeted programs, such as the **UK**'s Girls' Education Skills Partnership, which focuses on skills training in **Nigeria** and **Bangladesh**.[74] Moreover, **Finland**'s goal to ensure that 85 percent of new development projects promote gender equality by 2025, illustrate focused interventions.[75] Several countries have adopted feminist foreign policies, including **Canada**, which has set ambitious funding targets through its Feminist International Assistance Policy. [76] The **Netherlands** leads Development Assistance Committee (DAC) donors in gender equality spending. [77]

121. **Norway**'s Action Plan commits a significant portion of bilateral development funds to gender equality, while **Sweden**, a pioneer in feminist foreign policy, prioritized funding for women's rights organizations.[78] **Spain** has also adopted a feminist foreign policy and has agreed to cooperate with the **Netherlands** on this issue.[79] Strategic frameworks, such as **Australia**'s Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment Strategy, provide guiding principles for aid programs.[80] Multilateral initiatives, such as the Global Gender and Trade Agreement launched by **Canada**, **Chile** and **New Zealand**, (later joined by **Mexico, Peru, Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador** and more recently **Brazil**), promote international cooperation on women's economic empowerment in trade. **Switzerland** reinforces this trend through its Federal Department of Foreign Affairs (FDFA) strategy, which emphasizes women's empowerment and the fight against violence, while at the same time being a major donor to UN Women and integrating gender equality in all its development activities.[81]

122. Some regional approaches and strategies have focused on providing guidance and promoting gender equality.

---

73 UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, *Building a Movement for Legal Empowerment* (Non-governmental Organization), #SDGAction43420.

74 International Development (Gender Equality) Act 2014, c. 9 (UK); *Research and Innovation ODA Gender Equality*; National Audit Office, *Improving the Lives of Women and Girls Overseas, HC 316, Session 2019–2021, 2020; Girls' Education Challenge, Results 2022, December 2022. UK Announces N10bn to Fund Girls Education in Nigeria, Bangladesh, Others, This Day, March 2022.*

75 OECD, *Advancing Gender Equality as a Foreign Policy Priority Through Finnish Development Co-operation*, September 2024; also see: *Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland, Finland's International Human Rights Policy; Ministry of Social Affairs and Health of Finland, Making Finland a Global Leader in Gender Equality – Government Action Plan for Gender Equality, 2020-2023; Government of Finland, Strong Support from Finland for UN Population Fund and UN Women,* April 2020.

76 D'Erman, Valerie, and Laura Macdonald. "Canada's Feminist Foreign Policy." *The Canadian Encyclopedia*, February 2024.

77 Netherlands. "Feminist Foreign Policy Explained." November 2022.

78 Norway's National Action Plan: Women, Peace and Security (2023-2030).

79 Albares Bueno, José Manuel, and Hanke G.J. Bruins Slot. "Political Declaration on Sustaining a Feminist Approach to Foreign Policy." April 2024; Global Partnership for Education. "Spain Increases Its Contribution to GPE." September 2024.

80 Australian Government. "Working for Women – A Strategy for Gender Equality." March 2024.

81 *Global Trade & Gender Arrangement, as amended."* February 2024; *Carolyn Deere Birkbeck, "GTAGA: The Global Trade and Gender Arrangement, decoded," IISD,* June 2024.

123. The **African Union** (AU) has three key documents worth mentioning: The Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa (Maputo Protocol) (2003); the AU Gender Policy 2009; and the AU Strategy on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment (GEWE) 2018-2028. The Maputo Protocol also includes a specific provision on women's right to equality in political participation and decision-making.[82]

124. The **Americas** have a strong framework with the Inter-American Commission of Women (CIM) and the Inter-American Convention on the Prevention, Punishment, and Eradication of Violence against Women (Convention of Belém do Pará) as fundamental pillars of the Organization of American States (OAS). The Montevideo Strategy for the Implementation of the Regional Gender Agenda within the 2030 Sustainable Development Framework, adopted by members States of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) at the Regional Conference on Women in Latin America and the Caribbean, establishes specific goals and actions to address gender inequalities in various areas, including education, health, economic empowerment, and political participation.[83]

125. The **Association of Southeast Asian Nations** (ASEAN) adopted the ASEAN Gender Mainstreaming Strategic Framework (2021-2025) and the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women for the region. In the work plan, states consensually enumerate priorities for action needed to increase women's participation in development, namely women's leadership, gender mainstreaming, and economic empowerment. In 2019, ASEAN adopted a gender-sensitive guideline on handling women victims/survivors of human trafficking.[84]

126. The **European Union** (EU), adopted the Istanbul Convention and the Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025, which could be strengthened with specific targets and clear monitoring tools. It also adopted the Directive 2024/1385 on violence against women and domestic violence, in line with the strategy.[85]

127. Therefore, it is worth mentioning that despite the huge gap towards parity, the existing universal and regional instruments and strategies, both binding and non-binding, light the way and can be taken as positive practices.

G. Media and Awareness Raising:

128. The media's pivotal role in shaping public opinion requires a commitment to gender equality. In Spain, organizations such as the Asociación Española de Mujeres Profesionales de los Medios de Comunicación (AMECO) and the Escuela de Periodismo promote gender-sensitive media practices, as does Comunicaciones y Masculinidades A.C. (CIMAC) in Mexico.[86]

129. At the global level, the Global Media Monitoring Project (GMMP) provides critical data on women's representation in the news and drives global advocacy. UNESCO's

82 African Union, "The Protocol on the Rights of Women in Africa: Strengthening the Promotion and Protection of Women's Human Rights in Africa," 2004; "African Union Gender Policy," 2009; "AU Strategy for Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment (2018-2028)", February 2019.

83 Organization of American States (OAS), "Inter-American Convention on the Prevention, Punishment, and Eradication of Violence against Women (Convention of Belém do Pará)," 1994; OAS, "Inter-American Commission of Women (CIM),"; Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), *Montevideo Strategy for Implementation of the Regional Gender Agenda within the Sustainable Development Framework by 2030*, March 2017.

84 ASEAN, ASEAN Gender Mainstreaming Strategic Framework 2021–2025, September 2021; ASEAN, Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women in the ASEAN Region, October 2012; Philippine Commission on Women, ASEAN Ministerial Meeting on Women (AMMW) and ASEAN Committee on Women (ACW).

85 European Commission, A Union of Equality: Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025, COM (2020) 152 final, 2020; Council Directive 2024/1385, on Combating Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence, 2024.

86 AMECO (Asociación de Mujeres Periodistas de Cataluña); CIMAC (Communication and Information on Women, A.C.).

Framework for Gender Equality in the Media (GEMI) provides practical guidance to media organizations.[87]

130. At the national level, Women in Media (Australia) provides a support network for women media professionals. Network of Women in Media, India (NWMI) advocates for gender equality and supports its members. Gender Links, Southern Africa, provides training, research and advocacy to promote regional progress.[88]

131. In Latin America, the Network of Journalists with a Gender Perspective facilitates collaboration among journalists committed to gender-sensitive reporting.[89]

X. Conclusions and recommendations

132. Significant efforts to address gender equality and promote women's participation in development and decision-making have been made around the world. This shows that this is a common goal and a shared concern given the persistence of gender gaps.

133. While it is often assumed that greater human development benefits everyone, it does not automatically guarantee gender equality, highlighting the need for targeted policies that actively promote women's empowerment rather than relying solely on general development.

134. It is clear that results and change can be achieved through different pathways involving a variety of actors. Some successes point the way to inspire others and can be reinforced by other examples and collaborative support, including a more consistent and effective international cooperation.

135. However, it is imperative to recognize that commitment and political will are critical to advancing gender equality and women's participation in decision-making, and indeed the most important determinant of results. The importance of sustainability of public policies across administrations and governments in all state levels and sectors is another critical aspect to ensure coherence and continuity of progress.

136. Efforts are being made by different stakeholders and in different countries and regions, but processes need to be more accountable in terms of participation of women in decision-making in their diversity and systematic impact assessment with relevant indicators and data, including in international cooperation.

137. Despite this progress, there is still too much to be done to bring about change. Actions need to ensure greater coherence, effectiveness, commitment and cooperation, and a gender transformative approach to change cultural constraints and stereotypes that lead to multiple forms of discrimination.

138. Innovation and creativity in goals, practices and processes, adapted to ever-changing environments and scarce resources, are also essential to address root causes. This implies a broader understanding of the notion of policy makers, focused on the active participation of the diversity of actors targeted by those public policies. Engaging young people, particularly encouraging men, and redefining priorities is essential to ensure greater sustainability and the involvement of future generations.

139. The full empowerment of girls, adolescents and young women in their diversity is fundamental to achieving inclusive and stable societies and overcoming serious threats and challenges, such as those related to climate change, unemployment, poverty, gender inequality, conflict and migration.

140. Women's active, free and meaningful participation in development, with an emphasis on decision-making, is not only a matter of justice, but also good business, with social and macroeconomic benefits. The World Bank estimates that closing the

[87] WACC Global, *Global Media Monitoring Project (GMMP)*; UNESCO, *Gender Equality in Media*.
[88] Women in Media; Gender Links; The Network of Women in Media, India (NWM).
[89] Red Internacional de Periodistas con Visión de Género (RIPVG).

gender gap in employment and entrepreneurship could increase global GDP by more than 20,5%.[90]

141. Gender equality is a critical component of economic growth. Making better use of available human resources and reducing the misallocation of talent and skills can help achieve stronger and more inclusive growth that benefits women and societies.

142. Data on diversity in decision-making shows that a diverse group of leaders makes more fact-based decisions, leading to higher quality outcomes. And, at the economy-wide level, gender parity is increasingly recognized as critical to financial stability and economic performance.[91]

143. This approach is also the best way to overcome the obstacles of limited and diminishing national and global resources by focusing on harnessing the capabilities and potential of women and other marginalized groups for greater economic growth within the framework of sustainable development.

144. Key Cross-Cutting Issues:

145. The EMRTD underscores the importance of the following core principles in guiding any intervention aimed at the meaningful participation of women in development.

146. Intersectionality and Equality: Addressing interconnected inequalities to ensure equality for all women.

147. Inclusive and Participatory processes: Empowering women and girls, especially marginalized groups, as active decision-makers in all processes.

148. Transparency and Accountability: Providing access to disaggregated, comprehensive and public data and monitoring mechanisms for accountability.

149. Accessibility and Leadership: Guaranteeing women's self-representation and autonomy as well as accessible environments, information and processes.

150. Sustainable Commitment: Engaging women and men, particularly youth, and ensuring strong political and social engagement for ensuring long term state policies and lasting gender equality.

151. Multilateral Engagement: Commitment to international standards and collective action on women's rights and ensuring effective compliance and collaborative implementation.

152. Ten Key Points for a Roadmap of Change:

153. In order to achieve the active, free and meaningful participation of women in their diversity in development, especially in decision-making, the EMRTD makes the following recommendations.

154. Shifting Mindsets: Promote gender equality awareness campaigns and education programmes to challenge discriminatory social norms and unconscious biases, especially among young people. Ensure that strategies are developed with each target population and tailored to their specific priorities and needs.

155. Empowering Education: Increase access to quality education for girls and women, in their diversity, including rural and other marginalized communities, with youth participation, including in STEM and leadership, closing the gender digital divide.

156. Economic Opportunities and Empowerment: Support women's entrepreneurship, financial inclusion, decent work opportunities and access to resources such as land and credit, including gender-responsive budgeting, with a focus

90 World Bank Group, *Women, Business and the Law: A Decade for Reform*, 2019; Strategy, Policy, and Review Department, IMF, September 2023.

91 *Ibid.* 36, page 57.

on women's empowerment and leadership, including in rural areas, while fostering an enabling and safe environment for young women's economic empowerment.

157. Political Leadership and Representation: Implement policies, including temporary special measures such as parity quotas, with accompanying measures to increase the genuine representation of women in government (at all levels and in all its state branches) and in decision-making bodies in the public, private and civil society sectors. Actively involve young people in political processes.

158. Combating Gender-based Violence: Develop and implement comprehensive strategies, including appropriate legal frameworks and comprehensive support services, to prevent and address GBV, including sexual harassment and domestic violence, with a focus on prevention programs for youth.

159. Shared Caregiving and Social Protection Systems: Promote innovative policies that support the reconciliation of work and family life, including affordable and accessible childcare, equitable parental leave for both parents, professionalization of comprehensive care systems, ensuring fair and quality labour standards and flexible work arrangements, recognizing the evolving role of young people in care work. In parallel, address the specific challenges faced by women heads of households and ensure the full inclusion of women in social protection throughout their lives.

160. Strengthening Networks: Facilitate the creation of local and global women's networks and mentoring programs, including among women from diverse backgrounds, to share knowledge and foster solidarity, and encourage intergenerational learning and mentoring among women and youth.

161. Data-Driven Strategies and Accountability: Establish robust, gender-responsive accountability mechanisms based on comprehensive and gender-disaggregated data that captures intersectionality, to inform policy, track progress and conduct systematic impact assessments, with a focus on the experiences of young women and girls, particularly those from disadvantaged groups. It must include independent monitoring, regular audits and transparent public reporting, and ensure oversight by civil society, communities and international organizations. Empower women and youth as key decision-makers in these processes and hold institutions and stakeholders accountable for achieving gender equality.

162. Inclusive and Transformative Development: Integrate gender equality and address the intersecting vulnerabilities of poverty and climate change impacts in all development sectors, from infrastructure to agriculture. Uphold the active, free and meaningful participation of women and youth, especially those facing socio-economic and environmental challenges, in decision-making at all stages of development projects, policies and practices, ensuring that solutions address their specific needs and priorities.

163. Gender Equality and leadership through International Collaboration and Representation: Ensure strong international engagement and cooperation to implement gender equality commitments, exploring innovative avenues to face resource challenges in order to tackle the reforms needed to transformative change. Prioritize measures to achieve equal representation and leadership of women in their diversity in international organizations and bodies and decision-making processes, ensuring their meaningful participation in global policy formulation.