

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT OBSERVER

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SDGs AND GENDER EMPOWERMENT



We are not here only to demolish discrimination but to envision the benefits to the human race of integrating this forgotten half of humanity in development

- Mrs Srimavo Bandaranaike, World's First Democratically-elected Prime Minister from Sri Lanka speaking at the First Conference on Women, Mexico City, 1975

Women are unavoidably only the bridge between generations, and what we accomplish for ourselves today are only the foundation upon which future generations of women and men will build - Dr Rafidah Aziz, Minister of Trade from Malaysia speaking at the 2nd Conference on Women in Copenhagen, 1980



IF THERE IS ONE MESSAGE THAT ECHOES FORTH FROM THIS CONFERENCE, LET IT BE THAT HUMAN RIGHTS ARE WOMEN'S RIGHTS AND WOMEN'S RIGHTS ARE HUMAN RIGHTS ONCE AND FOR ALL - HILLARY CLINTON, FIRST LADY OF THE UNITED STATES SPEAKING AT THE 4TH CONFERENCE ON WOMEN IN BEIJING, 1995

FROM THE EDITOR

Welcome to our 16th issue of Sustainable Development Observer focusing on Gender Empowerment and the SDGs.

The latest available Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 5 data shows that the world is not on track to achieve gender equality by 2030. It will take perhaps another 3 centuries to close the global gender gap. Almost 1 in 3 women have experienced physical or sexual violence at least once in their lifetime. While at the higher level of the social and economic ladder 85 % of Fortune 500 CEOs are men.

Shining a spotlight on these issues, UN Women embarked on a campaign aimed at the global corporate and political elite at the annual Davos Economic Forum to engage them on a 'Generation Equality' discussion. Under this umbrella an initiative to accelerate investment and implementation on gender equality is being explored. UN Women is spearheading solutions-focused conversations with leaders from across governments, business and civil society organizations. If discussions that have taken place at the UN conferences on women are any yardstick, the 3-century prediction for gender equality may yet be the reality.

While we have tried to bring you a diversity of viewpoints – mainly from women – on gender empowerment and the SDGs in this issue, the crux of the issues are reflected in the graphics we have presented below courtesy of UN Women. I will leave you to grasp the issues through these.

Dr Kalinga Seneviratne – Editor

Issue 16 – January 2023
 Bringing You Stories and Issues Relevant
 To Achieving The SDGs in The
 Post-COVID Era

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1 NO POVERTY

Globally, over **380 million** WOMEN AND GIRLS are in extreme poverty, living on less than \$1.90 a day. If current trends continue, in sub-Saharan Africa, **more women and girls** will live in extreme poverty by 2030 than today.



2 ZERO HUNGER

Globally, nearly **1 in 3** WOMEN experienced moderate or severe food insecurity in 2021. Rising food prices are likely to exacerbate hunger around the world.



3 GOOD HEALTH AND WELL-BEING

Unsafe abortion is a leading but preventable cause of maternal mortality and morbidity.

Today, over **1.2 billion** WOMEN AND GIRLS of reproductive age live in countries and areas with some restrictions on access to safe abortion.



4 QUALITY EDUCATION


Protracted conflicts, wars and renewed efforts to keep girls out of school perpetuate gender gaps in access to school and learning.

54% of GIRLS who are not in formal education worldwide live in crisis-affected countries.



5 GENDER EQUALITY

At the current rate of progress, it may take another **286 years** to remove discriminatory laws and close prevailing gaps in legal protections for women and girls.



8 DECENT WORK AND ECONOMIC GROWTH

Women's labour force participation in 2022 is projected to remain below pre-pandemic levels in **169 countries**



Digital Finance Can Drive Women's Economic Empowerment in Africa

UNITED NATIONS (IDN) — A new report reveals persistent barriers in the digital finance sector that limit women's economic empowerment in Africa while recommending policy responses to overcome them.

Commissioned by the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (ECA), the latest edition of the biennial African Women's Report was published on October 3. The report analyses the digital finance ecosystem in Africa to examine all its components and how they impact women's economic prospects.

Barriers

The report pinpoints five key issues affecting the use of digital finance as a catalyst for women's economic empowerment in Africa. First, despite having more mobile money services than anywhere else in the world, women's access to digital services, mobile and internet in Africa is limited due to illiteracy, cost, skills gap and social norms.

Second, while impressive gains are made in improving women's digital finance skills, Africa lags behind compared to other regions. For instance, the share of women with digital finance skills in North Africa has doubled from 12.5 per cent in 2014 to 25.7 per cent in 2018—surpassing the global average of about 20 per cent. However, the same figure stands at only 12 per cent for the entire continent.

Third, only 33 per cent of women in Africa have a formal bank account compared to 43 per cent of men. This gap, together with limited access to economic assets, escalates women's vulnerability and exclusion from profitable sectors and formal jobs. Fourth, social norms as well as inherent biases in financial practices, products and services adversely impact women.

Africa is a global leader in several transactional technologies such as mobile money but there remains considerable scope to scale up digital finance and ensure that women can take full advantage of the resulting opportunities. This requires addressing a number of barriers related to connectivity, digital literacy, cost, laws, and culture.

Finally, the lack of women's participation in decision-making processes, as well as in financial and technology fields, means digital finance policies and products are unlikely to include women's perspectives and meet their needs. In addition, in some African countries, women are nine times less likely to have formal identification than men, which impedes their ability to access, own and use digital finance services freely and safely.

Speaking about the report, Ms. Edlam Yemeru, acting Director of ECA's Gender, Poverty and Social Policy Division, said: "Africa is a global leader in several transactional technologies such as mobile money but there remains considerable scope to scale up digital finance and ensure that women can take full advantage of the

resulting opportunities. This requires addressing a number of barriers related to connectivity, digital literacy, cost, laws and culture.”

She continued: “Our report takes a holistic approach in looking at the digital finance ecosystem and defines policy options for governments to develop the sector further and accelerate financial inclusion while paving the way for women’s economic empowerment - leaving no one behind.”

Responses

The report outlines 10 policy responses for governments to consider in ensuring their national digital ecosystem supports, not challenges, women’s economic empowerment.

Specific responses include prioritising female representation in the sector, up-skilling people - especially women - in digital finance, reforming laws for greater mobile money uptake and designing gender-sensitive policies that combine technology with social development.

The report proposes that sex-disaggregated data on internet usage, mobile ownership and financial literacy should be part of national household surveys to inform the design of relevant policies.

It further recommends embedding digital finance frameworks in national development plans and working with credit bureaus to address the potential for inherent gender biases within credit reporting systems.

Finally, the report urges African countries to establish regional digital finance regulatory and justice frameworks using the African Continental Free Trade Area as a platform to enable digital identities and improve cross-border cooperation.

The African Women’s Report is a biennial flagship publication of the ECA. The latest edition focuses on ‘Digital Finance Ecosystems - Pathways to Women’s Economic Empowerment in Africa’¹. [Transmitted by IDN-InDepthNews — 14 October 2022]

Source of story: Africa Renewal / Economic Commission for Africa



A glimpse of the Women Leadership Forum. Photo Credit: Katharina Schiffli.

At Current Rate Of Progress Gender Equality Would Take 300 Years To Achieve Says Report

By Aurora Weiss

VIENNA (IDN) — The gender pay gap, inequality in access to education and the labour market: These issues remain

pertinent in the 21st century. Achieving full gender equality, one of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), could take close to 300 years if the current rate of progress continues, noted a report published by UN Women and the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA) in early September.

Against this backdrop, the European Brand Institute, in cooperation with the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO), organized the 10th "Women Leadership Forum" at the Vienna International Centre on September 20.

The Forum was initiated in 2013 with the panel discussion 'Equality Creates Values', said its founder, Ms Renate Altenhofer. "Over the past ten years, the Forum has become a stage to make female leaders visible and raw models for the next generation," she added.

¹ Report could be accessed from <https://repository.uneca.org/handle/10855/48741>

And this, particularly in view of the fact that the COVID-19 pandemic and its aftermath, violent conflict, climate change, and the backlash against women's sexual and reproductive health and rights are further exacerbating gender disparities, avers the report.

The UN expects the pandemic to push an estimated 47 million additional women and girls into extreme poverty and further widen the gender poverty gap. Data from 16 countries show women have done 29 per cent more childcare per week than men during the pandemic. Nearly one in two women reported that they or someone they know have experienced violence since the start of the pandemic, according to survey results from 13 countries.

To change the current situation for the better and achieve progress, equal efforts are needed by both men and women, UNIDO's Director General Gerd Müller said. "We all have a responsibility. We need a fundamental change in politics, economy, and society. It doesn't require only strong women; we also need committed men. For example, in African countries in positions of power, out of 54 states, only two are led by women."

Equality for girls and women has many dimensions: cultural, social, economic, and legal, said Mr Müller. Equally vital is equality in law, political participation, economic life, equal educational opportunities for all girls and women worldwide, and most importantly, promoting financial inclusion, he added. Currently, one billion women have no access to the financial market, though women are crucial for peace and progress and the future of our planet.

The 2030 Agenda embraces three pillars of sustainability: economic, social and environmental. Therefore, it is necessary to put women at the heart of the economy.



Ghada Waly, Executive Director, UN Office on Drugs and Crime, UNODC. Photo Credit: UNIS Vienna /Nikoleta Haffar

As an example, Ghada Waly, executive director of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) and director general of the United Nations Office at Vienna, mentioned her home country of Egypt, where women maintain most households. Unemployment is three times higher among women than men. "It is clear that inclusivity and diversity require effort. It is very difficult to achieve them because they touch the core of our society. That is why it requires the commitment of both women and men in leadership positions," she pointed out.

"At UNODC, we believe that more female police officers, prosecutors, lawyers, and judges will contribute to better protection of women from violence and lead to a more peaceful society. Women are underrepresented in this sector, and they are making 1 of 6 police officers on the global scale. We know that women's representation in law enforcement and law institutions is linked to the core effective victim centre response to crimes. More women in the justice sector are good for justice," Ms Waly stressed.

Gender equality is not only a problem in certain professions but also needs to be addressed geographically. For example, even if women in Kenya are trained to access funding for agriculture, the problem arises that these funds cannot be utilized because women cannot legally own land.

The Arab region has the lowest female labour force participation rate in the world: 26 per cent compared to the global average of 56 per cent. In contrast, the male labour force participation rate is 76 per cent, above the global average of 74 per cent.

Female unemployment in the Arab states is 15.6 per cent, three times higher than the global average. The proportion of women in leadership positions is low in the region, with only 11 per cent of women holding leadership positions, compared to the global average of 27.1 per cent. Jordan has the lowest rate of women's economic participation of any country not at war.

According to an International Labour Organization (ILO) report released this year, the female labour force participation rate is less than 15 per cent, compared to about 60 per cent for men.

For women in countries such as Yemen, Syria, Afghanistan and Iraq, access to jobs is even more limited, safety issues are greater, support structures are poor, and opportunities are even worse.

The gender imbalance in leadership positions is still significant. Data from the World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Report 2022² show that women still hold less than one-third of leadership positions.

Women and girls around the globe continue to face obstacles that limit their possibilities and challenge their futures, U.S. Ambassador to Austria Victoria R. Kennedy stressed at the Women Leadership Forum in Vienna. The American diplomat, lawyer, activist, widow and second wife of long-time U.S. Senator Ted Kennedy delivered an inspiring speech. She emphasized how important role models are because when women achieve high office or business success, they impact and empower future generations of women and girls to follow in their footsteps.

"Kamala Harris is the first female Vice President of the United States, and she is the first African and Asian American woman to hold such a lofty office. And when women achieve high positions, we help pave the way for future generations of women and girls to follow in our footsteps," said Ambassador Kennedy.



Official Portrait of US Vice President Kamala Harris. Photo Credit: Wikipedia Commons

She also remembered how she chose her career path during the 1970s when the women's liberation movement in the United States was in full swing. Even though her father was a lawyer, she did not see herself in that profession because it was exclusively reserved for men. It took a male professor to open her eyes, recalled Ambassador Kennedy.

The professor told her the story of Carla Hills, a female lawyer. She had just been appointed by the president of the United States to be his Secretary of Housing and Urban Development. At that time, in the mid-1970s, Carla Hills was only the fourth woman to serve as a cabinet secretary in the entire history of the United States. The male professor challenged her with a simple question that changed her life: "If she can do it, then why can't you?" [Transmitted by IDN-InDepthNews – 03 October 2022]



Women salvage usable materials from damaged parts of Al-Hatab Square in the old quarter of Aleppo, northern Syria, February 2017. Photo: EPA/Youssef

How Syrian Women Navigate Security Risks to Mediate Local Conflicts

A UN Women Feature

NEW YORK (IDN) — For over a decade, Syria's protracted conflict has taken countless lives, displaced millions in and outside the country and left much of its infrastructure in tatters. International mediation efforts to end the conflict have largely stalled, in part because the local dynamics that help fuel the crisis are often overlooked by formal mediators. This makes mediation efforts that seek to resolve

inter- and intra-community conflict and address local concerns vital to advance formal peacemaking efforts led by national actors.

Syrian women have been instrumental in mediating various conflicts that have affected their communities. Most Syrian women mediators operate as 'insider mediators', meaning they have some connection to the

² See <https://www.weforum.org/reports/global-gender-gap-report-2022/>

dispute and are perceived as trustworthy and credible by the disputing parties. As insider mediators, women demonstrate two consistent strengths: the ability to build or leverage relationships, and the possession of detailed knowledge on the conflict and its parties.

Research from the region³ shows that conflict often changes socially-ascribed gender roles and enables women to take a more visible role in local mediation. This is particularly the case in Syria, where restrictions on men's movement and the risk of arrest have created opportunities for women to engage in negotiations on critical issues ranging from service provision to ceasefires.

Negotiating ceasefires and brokering detainees' release

Women in Syria have been involved in a number of mediation efforts related to sieges and ceasefires. For example, early in the war, as the Zabadani district - northwest of Damascus - began to fall under the control of opposition forces, it was besieged by the government. The authorities demanded that men hand over weapons and surrender, which meant that only women could move safely across the lines of control. Though in pre-war Zabadani women were usually expected to focus on responsibilities inside the home, the restrictions and risks suddenly faced by men altered these dynamics and made it acceptable - and even necessary - for women to get involved in negotiations with government forces.

Quickly stepping into this newfound role, a group of women in Zabadani gathered and initiated a mediation process with the besieging forces in order to negotiate an end to the siege as well as a potential ceasefire. Prior to the siege, these women were not prominent figures in the community: "Most of these women became involved because their husbands were implicated with the opposition forces and were wanted by the government. The women themselves were mostly housewives and did not have any formal role in the community, but they gained their significance because they wanted to protect their husbands," said Sameh Awad,* a peacebuilding expert familiar with the case.

The women were able to negotiate a ceasefire - successful in its early stages, though later collapsing due to the changing political context. Yet, for a period of time, "women were successful in ensuring civilians were protected and evacuated", explained Awad*.

Women mediators often build informal coalitions with other women as a strategic way of strengthening their voice in negotiations. For example, after hearing a rumour that armed factions were planning to kill a group of detainees in the north-western city of Idlib, a group of female teachers worked to convince a wider group of women, including the detainees' mothers, to approach the headquarters of the battalion leader. The encounter ended with the faction leader agreeing to speak with the military council and a month later, the detainees were released as part of an exchange deal.

Navigating security risks to access property and services

Many military-age Syrian men risk being conscripted upon return to areas under government control. As a result, women are more likely to return than men, and women and children often return first to settle housing, land and property and civil documentation claims, and to assess conditions and available services in the area. Upon return, they often must negotiate complex property claims as well as access to services.

Syrian women have also led mediation efforts with government forces to address security issues and service provision in areas formerly under opposition control. "The government insisted that men needed to complete military service, and this made many young men afraid to emerge in the public sphere," explained Awad. "So, women were involved in going out and exploring to what extent the discussions with the new authorities in the area were possible. During these negotiations, they discussed early recovery in their areas."

One example of this type of mediation occurred in the district of Al-Kiswah, south of Damascus. After Al-Kiswah was returned to the control of the government, women engaged very discreetly in mediation with government authorities. Like in Zabadani, many men could not venture out of their homes without risking arrest, which

³ See UN Women Report - https://arabstates.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2022-07/Local-Mediation-Paper_EN-1.pdf

pushed women into the role of negotiator: "On behalf of their communities, women reached out to political parties to create an entry point to get services, and then they took on the role of negotiating service provision, purchase of harvest, fertilizers to be used during the next harvest, opening the local school, and repairing the local medicine dispensary," said Awad.

These women's efforts were particularly vital since areas such as al-Kiswah initially received very little external support. Humanitarian assistance was extremely limited, and there were no government services available. In this difficult context, "women played an important role in normalizing life in these areas - this was a civil society space that was not 'NGO-ized' or funded by donors, it was driven by survival. These actors emerged out of necessity because they wanted their communities to survive," said Awad.

Repairing social cohesion

Several years after the start of the conflict, Mobaderoon, a women-led civil society organisation in Damascus, noted an increase in localized violence stemming from fractured social relations and resentment towards internally displaced Syrians (IDPs) who had arrived in the capital. To address this violence, the organisation formed local committees made up of community leaders, mukhtars, other influential community members such as teachers and civil society activists, and ordinary residents. They established neutral spaces where people could meet and discuss issues affecting their neighbourhoods, and where they could build their confidence and skills to address these issues.

After some time, the women-led organisation expanded its work to Tartus, a coastal city in western Syria, and partnered with another women-led organisation that enjoys strong community ties and presence in the area. Their approach changed somewhat: "They focused their efforts on some neighbourhoods that had received very high rates of IDPs from other governorates, and where the relationship between the IDP and host populations was tense and fractured," said Farah Hasan*, a member of Mobaderoon. "Because of the war and the influx of IDPs there were no services, or not enough services. Local youth accused the IDPs of being responsible for the war because they originated from areas under opposition control, and they carried out violent attacks against IDPs in nearby camps."



War destruction in Aleppo. Photo Credit: Wikipedia Commons

This violence was creating substantial instability in the area. To address it, the director of the Tartus organisation launched an initiative aimed at improving relations between the host community and IDPs and stopping attacks against the camp residents.

"She met with influential community members and local business actors to convince them that the IDP camp should be integrated as part of the community so that IDPs could participate in the local economy," said Hasan*. "She also initiated regular social meetings between women IDPs and women from

the host community around issues like cooking, in order to build trust between the two sides."

Through ongoing negotiation with community leaders, business actors, women from the IDP and women from the host community, attitudes slowly changed and the targeted neighbourhoods in Tartus witnessed notable differences in the treatment of IDPs. IDPs also reported less harassment and violence from host community members, greater acceptance of their children in schools, and more economic opportunities.

* Names changed to protect the privacy of the persons. [Transmitted by IDN-InDepthNews – 22 October 2022]

Note: These are just some examples of how Syrian women have mediated conflict and helped restore social cohesion in their communities. Countless other mediating efforts go unnoticed. The invisibility and marginalization of Syrian women's efforts means their work is less documented and understood, posing a challenge for those who wish to support them. Crediting Syrian women for their achievements is an important first step towards tapping into their mediation potential to usher in lasting and inclusive peace in Syria.



Tanzanian President Samia Suluhu Hassan. Photo Credit: Global Information Network

Only Three Africans on Forbes List of 100 Most Powerful Women

By Lisa Vives, Global Information Network

NEW YORK (IDN) — Tanzanian President Samia Suluhu Hassan, Nigeria's Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, who is the current Director General of the World Trade Organization, and Nigerian media mogul Mosunmola Abudu are the only African women featured in the list of the World's Most Powerful 100 Women by Forbes.

Director-General of the World Trade Organization since March 2021, she is the first woman and first African to lead the World Trade Organization as Director-General.

Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala is the top-ranked African woman at position 91. The

In 95th place on the list is Samia Suluhu Hassan, President of Tanzania since March 2021. She became president following the death of President John Pombe Magufuli and is the first female president of Tanzania.

Mosunmola Abudu, at age 58, is the youngest of the African women on the Forbes list. A media mogul, philanthropist and a former human resources management consultant, she is highly ranked among the 25 most powerful women in global television.

Despite the minimal representation in platforms such as Forbes, the continent has demonstrated a commitment to promoting gender equality and the empowerment of women. Almost all countries have ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women; more than half have ratified the African Union's Protocol on the Rights of Women in Africa. Other milestones include the African Union's declaration of 2010–2020 as the African Women's Decade.



Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, Director General of World Trade Organisation. Photo Credit: Wikipedia Commons

Although Africa includes both low- and middle-income countries, poverty rates are still high. The majority of women work in insecure, poorly paid jobs with few opportunities for advancement. Democratic elections are increasing, and a record number of women have successfully run for seats. But electoral-related violence is a growing concern.

In contrast, the United States has 50 women on the same Forbes list, including Vice President Kamala Harris, philanthropist Melinda Gates, media star Oprah Winfrey and former House Speaker Nancy Pelosi.

"The list was determined by four main metrics: money, media, impact and spheres of influence. For political leaders," noted Forbes. "We weighed gross domestic products and populations; for corporate leaders, revenues and employee counts; and media mentions and reach of all. The result is a collection of women who are fighting the status quo."

Iranian woman Jina "Mahsa" Amini also made it to the list at position 100, albeit posthumously. Her death in September sparked the unprecedented women-led revolution in Iran.

[Transmitted by IDN-InDepthNews — 27 December 2022]



Gina Cortes of the Women & Gender Constituency leads protest on climate justice and human rights. Credit: Gerimara Manuel, APWLD

Women Under Representation at UN Climate Conference

By Lisa Vives, Global Information Network

NEW YORK | SHARAM EL-SHEIKH, Egypt (IDN) — More than 20 years since the first UN climate conference was held, less than five women have been climate conference presidents out of 110 heads of state and government.

Women are now calling for greater representation at the next conference to be held next year in the UAE.

Last year the percentage of women sent from participating countries was around 37 per cent, while over 70 per cent of the total speaking time by delegates was taken up by men, according to the United Nations Foundation.

To highlight their demands, a photo of global leaders attending this year’s conference in Sharm El Shaikh, Egypt, was displayed at the conference hall and captioned: “Notice Anyone Missing?”

While progress seems to have been made by countries sending female representatives as part of the delegation, Elise Buckle, co-founder of *She Changes Climate*, said it is disappointing to have less than 10 of the about 110 heads of state who attended the conference being female.

“When we talk about representation, it is about more than numbers; it is meaningful representation and inclusion,” said Nada Elbohi, an Egyptian feminist and youth advocate, in a press release. “It is bringing the priorities of African women and girls to the table.”

“There is no climate justice without human rights,” said Mara Dolan with the *Women’s Environment and Development Organization (WEDO)*. “It’s a common misconception that women’s groups only care about getting the word ‘women’ on the agenda. ... We come to this conference looking for full recognition and realization of human rights. And gender justice is one piece of that.”

In 2021, over 200 environmental and land defenders were murdered, according to *Global Witness*, a non-profit that exposes the role of industries like mining and logging and how they commit human rights abuses.



WEDO’s Mara Dolan and Alex Gordon march during the Global Day of Action in Glasgow, Scotland. Photo Credit: Annabelle Avril for WECF.

At an event prior to the conference, participating climate activists included Nada Elbohi, Salimata Ba, Sylvia Diamond Dorbor, Zainab Yunusa, Pricilla Achakpa and Gertrude Kenyangi.

Ms Yunusa observed: “80% of climate refugees are women. Displacement affects everyone, but with women and girls in Africa it affects us the most.”

“Let us make sure women, in their diversity, have an equal say in decisions around climate policy,” said *UN Women* Executive Director Sima Bahous. “They must be at the heart of climate action.”

[Transmitted by IDN-InDepthNews — 22 November 2022]

Legal Mechanisms for Gender Equality in Universal Health Coverage Needed

Viewpoints by Roopa Dhatt and Samiratou Ouedraogo*

WASHINGTON DC (IDN) — If there was a Harvey Weinstein in health, we probably wouldn't know about it. Not because sexual harassment in the health workforce isn't widespread—we know that it is and not because women don't want to report their experiences of sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment (SEAH) at work - we know that they do; but because across much of the world's health systems, there are simply no feasible reporting or legal mechanisms in place that women health workers can use with confidence.



Community Health Workers in Kenya. Photo Credit: Brian-Otieno

To this day, there are huge gaps in the data about SEAH of women health workers and cases are largely unrecorded and therefore officially invisible. Where studies do exist, they are generally isolated in specific countries with inconsistent and incomplete data, and in many instances not disaggregated by sex. This absence in the evidence and knowledge base on SEAH means that policy action can't be informed to prevent it.

It is important to ask why data is not collected routinely on an abuse that causes physical and mental harm to health workers delivering essential services?

As a global movement advocating for gender equity in health with women-led chapters in over 45 countries worldwide, we hear directly from women health workers about the lived experience of the daily abuses they face. Our work has shown that SEAH against women is widespread in global health, even in countries with appropriate laws and policies in place.

In response, Women in Global Health⁴ harnessed the power of women's stories as part of a #HealthToo research project and online platform and have used women's testimony as data. Our latest policy report, *Her Story: Ending Sexual Violence and Harassment of Women Health Workers*⁵ analyzed stories submitted by women in 40 countries in 10 languages. The stories are harrowing and the findings are compelling.

Women in all parts of the world in the health sector experience work-related SEAH that includes sexualized verbal abuse, sexual assault and rape. SEAH in the health workforce is first and foremost a human rights violation. It is unwanted and unprovoked by women who are highly trained professionals and just want to be left alone to focus on their work. Women's stories revealed that their responses varied depending on the type of SEAH and their personal circumstances. There is no 'right response,' the report acknowledged, only recognition that the victim is not responsible.

⁴ For more information see - <https://womeningh.org/>

⁵ Download report from - https://womeningh.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/WGH-Report_Policy-Report-4.pdf

Power imbalance

A major driver of the abuse, the report found, is the power imbalance favouring men in the hierarchical health profession. Men currently occupy 75 per cent of all leadership roles in health, with women clustered into roles accorded lower status and lower pay. Women have less power to speak and more to lose, and this power dynamic creates an enabling environment for SEAH.

Many stories in the report describe sexist behaviour that belittles and demeans women. They reveal that this behaviour is motivated by power differentials and stereotypes of women's subordinate position, more than it is by sexual desire. Certain groups of women health workers are at higher risk - trainees, interns, migrant women, women of marginalized races, castes and ethnicities, reinforcing the issue of unequal power dynamics.

Another related theme of the report findings is the problem of unsanctioned serial abusers. A pattern emerged from the stories of men in higher status positions abusing power to coerce and force female employees into unwanted sexual contact in a cycle of 'grooming', threats and retaliation. This behaviour, states the report, is effectively enabled by 'silent bystanders' supporting a patriarchal culture that legitimizes, downplays and perpetuates SEAH against women health workers.

Lack of reporting mechanisms

Most women reporting to #HealthToo did not make an official complaint or report. Without survivor-centered reporting mechanisms, SEAH is unrecorded and has a cost primarily for the victim, while the perpetrator is enabled to continue the pattern of behaviour. In some places, reporting mechanisms exist but on paper only. Women do not use them for fear of retaliation, stigma and not being believed. In many countries, particularly those in the global south, there is no effective employment law and policy to protect women from SEAH.

In a significant number of countries, sexual harassment at work is still not a legal offence. In practice, women don't have the protection of law and have no form of redress. From global, to institutional to personal level, the report calls for establishing the legal foundations for gender equality in the workforce and for a culture change so that perpetrators of abuse are reported and sanctioned.

Mental health

The associated trauma and mental health fallout as a result of the SEAH experienced by women health workers was a key aspect of the report findings. Despite the severity of the problem, trauma was found to be downplayed in the health sector and even 'normalized'.

The stories collected record the very serious trauma of women victims, including post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and suicidal thoughts. Not only does this affect women's ability to carry out their work, with wider consequences for the provision of quality care, it is also an issue of accountability and responsibility by employers who are failing in their most basic duty of care.

Employers are failing to calculate the costs, human and economic, of protecting a minority who choose to abuse, over protection of the majority of health workers who simply want to exercise their professional duties. The report's recommendations include instituting a survivor-centered approach to ensure the rights of women health workers are clear; that they are protected from retaliation and have access to mental and legal support.

Women's underrepresentation in leadership

The default male bias in health leadership means that women have been locked out of decision-making in helping to address SEAH in the health workforce. #HealthToo received just one report of a woman employee sexually harassed by a senior woman. Put simply, women don't rape and they rarely sexually abuse and harass other women.

Increasing women's representation in leadership would allow them to bring their lived experience as women and also their experience working in health systems to the table. Their inclusion would also serve to change the health agenda and reduce cases of SEAH.

Internationally, many countries still lack laws to prohibit work-related sexual harassment. ILO Convention No. 190 (C190)⁶ is the first international treaty to recognize the right of everyone to a world of work free from violence and harassment, including gender-based violence and harassment. It was drawn up by the International Labour Organization (ILO) in wide consultation with workers, employers and women's organizations, and came into force on June 25, 2021. Countries now have a real opportunity to end SEAH in the health sector and beyond by addressing weaknesses in legal and policy frameworks and definitions. To date only 23 countries have ratified C190. Prioritizing its ratification would enable all countries to bring their domestic law into line with the convention.

Committing SEAH in the health sector is a choice made by some employees, patients and community members—almost exclusively men. It is a choice they make because they calculate they have impunity, they will get away with it and the costs will fall on their victims. Decisive action by leaders to end SEAH in health will send a clear signal to these men that the odds have changed. They will be caught and they will be sanctioned. And it will send a clear signal to women, the majority of health workers, that their work is valued and that they will be protected.

** Roopa Dhatt is Executive Director and Co-Founder of Women in Global Health. Samiratou Ouedraogo is the Coordinator and Co-Founder of Women in Global Health, Francophone West Africa, Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso.*

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Women hold up half the sky, but men rule the party. Photo Credit: Xinhua News Agency | Hu Peng

A Surplus of Men Leads to a Deficit of Peace

Viewpoint by Jonathan Power*

LUND, Sweden (IDN) — Many of us who watched the parade of new politburo members walking onto the stage at the recent meeting of the Chinese Communist Party's 20th Congress were struck by the total absence of women. Unlike the previous 25 years, not even one.

Women can be found at the top of the arts, sports and in some parts of academia and the professions and occasionally in business but hardly at all in politics. It's a man's world.

Yet none other than the founder of Communist China, Mao Zedong, said that "Women hold up half the sky". China is the world's most notable laggard when it comes to supporting the advancement of women. Five years ago, there was a sharp rise in feminist activity, especially concerning men abusing their positions of authority to gain sexual favours. But the Party clamped down on it.

We should return to the Chinese census of 2000, which reported that there was an extraordinary imbalance in the birth rate - 117 boys were being born for every 100 girls. In the southern Hainan province, the gap widened to an astonishing 135/100 ratio. About 97% of all unmarried persons aged between 28 and 49 were male.

⁶ See - https://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=NORMLEXPUB:12100:0::NO::P12100_ILO_CODE:C190

China has probably been the world leader in using cheap scans to enable parents to know the sex of their child in the womb and, despite breaking the law, to find a doctor who will abort a foetus for no more reason than it happens to be female. However, this practice is also widely practised in many other Asian countries. India is not far behind.

Adding the two countries together, according to Valerie Hudson and Andrea Den Boer, writing in Harvard University's quarterly, *International Security*, there are now "between 62 and 68 million missing females in Asia". The historical record suggests that societies that breed surplus males end up with more crime and with a higher propensity for nationalist movements, and the urge to go to war.

China and India have ended up with around 30 million young surplus males. They have no brides and no families and thus will tend to be roamers, migrants and putative warriors. Those who think that by a quick fix, they can boost the family fortunes by getting rid of apparently useless girls will find all too quickly that having sons grow up that lose out in the highly competitive stakes for gaining a wife quickly trade away their society's natural charm and stability. The equilibrium of everyday life will be gradually but surely undermined by the horrors of surplus testosterone.

Whatever else the female does for the male, she calms him down and gives him a centre of gravity, opens doors to other interests outside the boy's own world, smothers him with family life and family responsibilities, and perhaps (as in my case) gives him both a reason to be and the chance of daily success that endures, although the world outside may be undermining him, thwarting him, and perhaps on occasion besting him. Even in the most male-orientated or most female-liberated of cultures, these essential truths seem to hold.

Of course, sex-imbalance theorists cannot explain everything. Violence and war come about for a vast number of reasons, from environmental stress in the case of Rwanda to the vanity of politicians in the case of the First World War. Yet this theorizing perhaps explains why, when Britain lost so many of its young men in the trenches of World War 1, a female-dominated post-war society helped propel Britain for a while into serious disarmament and a near pacifist foreign policy.

In an important article in *Foreign Affairs*, Francis Fukuyama has wondered whether a democratic country's propensity towards a peaceful foreign policy is better explained by the status of women in democracies than by the simple existence of democratic institutions themselves. It could explain, in part, why the U.S. and Britain are more warlike than the Scandinavian countries.

And Asian leaders should start to ask themselves if the war between India and China or India and Pakistan (another sex-imbalanced country) are rather more likely in the coming years because what is still (albeit less so than before) going on today in village hospitals and doctors' surgeries all over Asia. A surplus of men, a deficit of peace, perhaps?

In recent years China has started to grapple with its sex imbalance. Parents are now allowed a second child, which removes a lot of the social pressure to make sure the one and only is male. There is stricter control of private scanning. There are increased penalties for infanticide. Generally, Chinese society is evolving in the direction of young couples not caring about the sex of their child. But, inevitably, it will take decades to restore equilibrium. Until then, we should probably expect a more nationalistic and warlike China, Pakistan and India.

** The writer was for 17 years a foreign affairs columnist and commentator for the International Herald Tribune, now the New York Times. He has also written dozens of columns for the New York Times, the Washington Post, the Boston Globe and the Los Angeles Times. He is the European who has appeared most on the opinion pages of these papers.*

This is an edited version of the original viewpoint article published by IDN-In Depth News.

[Transmitted by IDN-InDepthNews — 20 December 2022]



Davos 2023: What You Need To Know About Society And Equity

The cost-of-living crisis has been identified as the biggest risk facing the world over the next two years, in the World Economic Forum's latest *Global Risks Report*. But the effects are uneven, with people of colour, people with disabilities and women often bearing the brunt of stalled growth. It's also slowing progress on gender equality. Link to article: <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2023/01/social-equity-davos-2023/>



Taking aim at violent, sex offenders

A new law set to take effect today aims to prevent people convicted of sexual and violent crimes from reoffending. It should help reduce those crimes, as long as there are enough officials to enforce... Source: Bangkok Post - <https://www.bangkokpost.com/thailand/special-reports/2488852/taking-aim-at-violent-sex-offenders>

Worker empowerment is necessary to fix a fractured world

UNI Global Union General Secretary Christy Hoffman carried an urgent message to the World Economic Forum meeting in Davos this year: Unions are vital to fixing a fragmented world. "Unions are an essential solution to rising inequality—the underlying cause of fragmentation—and the business elite cannot fix a fractured world while suppressing workers' voices and denying them a seat at the table," Hoffman said.

Source: UNI Global - <https://uniglobalunion.org/news/uni-wef/>



Why China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) Is Back with a Bang

As Beijing's Belt and Road Initiative enters its 10th year, a strong Sino-Russian geostrategic partnership has revitalized the BRI across the Global South.

Source: Global Research - <https://www.globalresearch.ca/why-china-belt-road-initiative-bri-back-bang/5803964>



India: Civic Body in Bengaluru to help women street vendors get e-carts

A civic body in India's silicon valley is planning to help women street vendors to improve their trade by giving them access to three-wheeler electric food carts.

Link to article:

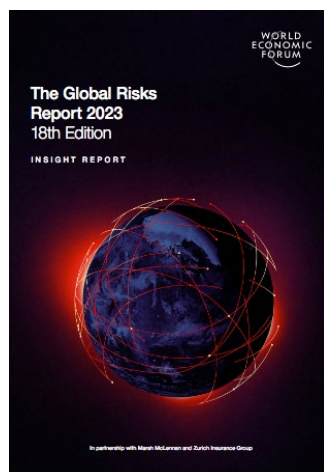
http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/articleshow/95672949.cms?utm_source=contentofinterest&utm_medium=text&utm_campaign=cppst

India: Govt to focus on micro credit facility for street vendors in 2023

The Indian government is enhancing its assistance to the 'informal sector' by providing micro-credit facilities to street vendors, many of whom are women. It will be done with the use of digital technology according to the Union IT and Telecom Minister Ashwini Vaishnow.

Source: Times of India -

http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/articleshow/96811140.cms?utm_source=contentofinterest&utm_medium=text&utm_campaign=cppst



Global Risk Report 2023

Last year's *Global Risks Report* warned that a divergent economic recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic risked deepening divisions at a time when collaboration was urgently required to address looming global challenges. Yet despite hard-learned lessons around the interdependence of global risks, few would have anticipated the extent of instability that would soon unfold, this time driven by a new war in Europe. The health and economic aftereffects of the pandemic have quickly spiraled into compounding crises. Carbon emissions have climbed, as the post-pandemic global economy fired back up. Food and energy have become weaponized by the war in Ukraine, sending inflation soaring to levels not seen in decades, globalizing a cost-of-living crisis and fueling social unrest. The resulting shift in monetary policy marks the end of an economic era defined by easy access to cheap debt and will have vast ramifications for governments, companies and individuals, widening inequality within and between countries. As the conflict between Russia and

Ukraine approaches one year, economies and societies will not easily rebound from continued shocks. In this year's Global Risks Perception Survey, more than four in five respondents anticipated consistent volatility over the next two years. Download from: <https://www.weforum.org/reports/global-risks-report-2023/in-full>

Global Gender Gap Report 2022

Gender parity is not recovering, according to the *Global Gender Gap Report 2022*. It will take another 132 years to close the global gender gap. As crises are compounding, women's workforce outcomes are suffering and the risk of global gender parity backsliding further intensifies. Download Report from: <https://www.weforum.org/reports/global-gender-gap-report-2022/>

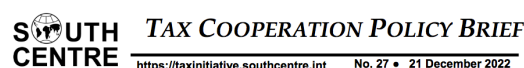


Women Building Peace in the Arab States: Regional Synergies and Cross-Learning

In May 2022, the UN Women Regional Office for Arab States and the Government of Finland organized a two-day workshop titled "Women Building Peace in the Arab States: Regional Synergies and Cross-Learning" to highlight women's mediation efforts in their communities and the lessons learned from interventions under the regional WPS programme and the Syria WPS programme. The workshop's objectives were to explore lessons learned from women's peacebuilding work in their communities across Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Palestine, Syria, Tunisia and Yemen, as well as good practices and strategies to strengthen women's participation in local mediation. This report summarizes discussions about the local contexts of each country as well as the challenges and lessons learned from these contexts. Download report from: <https://arabstates.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2022/11/women-building-peace-in-the-arab-states-regional-synergies-and-cross-learning>

Taxing Big Tech: Policy Options for Developing Countries

Even as the COVID-19 crisis wreaked havoc on the global economy, it gave rise to a small set of winners, namely Big Tech. The increasing prevalence of remote work and an acceleration of the digitalization of the economy allowed Big Tech companies to raise enormous revenues during the pandemic, which in some cases dwarfed the gross domestic product (GDP) of several countries. This policy brief explores the rising untaxed profits of Big Tech in particular, and the digitalized economy in general, and explains why the existing rules are insufficient. It also critically examines the solution that has been devised by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), an intergovernmental organization of developed countries. Finally, it outlines alternative policy options that are more suitable for developing countries to tax the profits of Big Tech. Download report from: <https://www.southcentre.int/tax-cooperation-policy-brief-27-21-december-2022/>



Taxing Big Tech:

Policy Options for Developing Countries *

By Abdul Muheet Chowdhary and Sébastien Babou Diasso **



Frene Noshir Ginwala, a South African of Indian descent. Photo Credit: Global Information Network.

Early Anti-Apartheid Activist Passes At 90 Years of Age

By Lisa Vives, Global Information Network

NEW YORK (IDN) — “Too often, democracy is seen as an event which happens once in five years.”

Thus spoke Frene Noshir Ginwala, a South African of Indian descent who was the first speaker of the country’s democratic parliament. While she was modest about her achievements, she left an indelible mark on South Africa’s constitution and democratic institutions.

Described as a feisty feminist, astute political tactician and committed cadre of South Africa’s governing party, she joined the African National Congress around the time of the “Sharpeville Massacre” of 1960 when police fired on a group of unarmed Blacks in the town of Sharpeville who were protesting discriminatory “pass laws”.

Some 67 Africans were killed and 186 wounded after the police opened fire on the crowd.

The incident forced many ANC leaders into exile. Ginwala facilitated the exit of ANC president Oliver Tambo into Mozambique, crossing the border into Rhodesia (Zimbabwe) and into a safe house. It was the beginning of a long and important comradeship.

She became assistant to Tambo and was instrumental in setting up the ANC office in Tanzania after the leaders were banned.

In the early 1960s, she created a newspaper, *Spearhead*, wrote articles for a variety of international media outlets, wrote speeches for Tambo and gave speeches herself. Her time in Tanzania was interrupted when she was suddenly banned herself by the government of Tanzania for her critical commentary, and she left for the UK.

President Julius Nyerere lifted her ban in 1967 and asked her to return to Dar es Salaam to establish a new national newspaper, *The Standard*. In the 1970s, she became a prominent figure in international

media, travelling around the world to muster support for the anti-apartheid movement and draw attention to abuses against the Black majority population.

Ms Ginwala passed away on January 12 at her home, shortly after suffering a stroke. She was 90 years old.

“Today we mourn the passing of a formidable patriot,” President Cyril Ramaphosa announced on January 13. “We have lost another giant among a special generation of leaders to whom we owe our freedom and to whom we owe our commitment to keep building the South Africa to which they devoted their all,” he observed.

“Ginwala exposed to the international community the crimes of the discredited, oppressive regime in South Africa through her sharp journalistic pen,” said parliament spokesperson Moloto Mothapo, calling her a “torchbearer” of the post-apartheid parliament, instrumental in the formation of South Africa’s democracy.

“In a country blessed with exceptional leaders,” added Shireen Hassam of The Conversation, “Ginwala must surely count among the best.”

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Edited by Dr Kalinga Seneviratne Email: kalingasen@gmail.com