

# Women's Major Group

## Women's Major Group 2021 High Level Political Forum Position Paper

**“Sustainable and resilient recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic that promotes the economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development: building an inclusive and effective path for the achievement of the 2030 Agenda in the context of the decade of action and delivery for sustainable development.”**

### Executive Summary

As we gather virtually for the 2021 High Level Political Forum (HLPF), the COVID-19 pandemic continues. We mourn the loss of family, friends, elders, colleagues, and feminist advocates. We mourn those who have lost their lives to COVID-19; to the accidents and health problems that overwhelmed and under-resourced health systems could not respond to; to the violence in our homes; and to the State violence that has occurred during brutal crackdowns. We mourn the loss of life that is to come as Global North countries continue to hoard vaccines and prioritize intellectual property and profits over lives in the Global South.

Over one year from the onset of the pandemic, women and girls in all their diversity and their organizations continue to be at the frontlines of the response. Through our paid and unpaid labor, women and girls keep homes, communities, and economies afloat. And yet national and international funders do not prioritize our organizations for support. Moreover, governments, corporations, and non-State actors continue to undermine our ability to effectively and meaningfully participate in policymaking, including through threats, harassment, and violence against women environmental and human rights defenders.

We are at the frontlines because government systems - care, health, including sexual and reproductive health care services, economic and tax, environmental management, and global governance - have been inadequate in responding to the pandemic, especially since these systems were built on inequality, subjugation, and oppression. Patriarchy, white supremacy, colonialism, militarism, neoliberal capitalism, ethno-nationalism, and authoritarianism built the systems that brought us to this moment of intersecting crises. Austerity and privatization pushed by neoliberal capitalism hollowed our public health systems. Militarism, illicit financial flows, tax abuse, and unsustainable debt burdens, emptied public coffers of valuable resources that could, among other things, fund the public care systems women and girls desperately need. Extractive industries and

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industrial farming driven by colonialism and capitalism have destroyed biodiversity, habitats, territories, and homes.

**Without systemic change**, these structural inequalities will continue to shape our pandemic responses, derailing us further from achieving gender equality and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). States should heed the call of feminist advocates and place economic, racial, climate, and gender justice at the center of pandemic recovery and SDGs implementation.

The Women's Major Group continues to believe in a multilateral system grounded in human rights. Not a multilateralism that races to the lowest common denominator, but one that fosters global solidarity and learning. Multilateralism not as the arena for geopolitical skirmishes, but for cooperation. Multilateralism not as another space for the dominance of multinational corporations, but as a space for the people, especially those most marginalized.

The HLPF could play a key role in ensuring accountability and pushing for transformational implementation of the SDGs by:

1. Focusing on the systemic barriers to achieving the SDGs;
2. Abandoning the siloed approach to SDGs review;
3. Meaningfully engaging civil society;
4. Emphasizing policy coherence, especially with human rights bodies;
5. Becoming a space to review and act; and
6. Improving linkages between the national, regional, and global levels.

### **Cross-Cutting Recommendations**

In order to achieve the SDGs and realize the human rights of women and girls States and other actors must take steps to accelerate action across the full spectrum of SDGs including:

- 1. Take a human rights-based approach to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the response to the COVID-19 pandemic and its related crises.** Respect, protect and fulfill the human rights and fundamental freedoms of all women and girls, including sexual and reproductive rights, and realize gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls;
- 2. Protect and expand the space for feminist and social justice movements to mobilize and demand action.** End the practice of punitive legislation targeting environmental and women human rights defenders, activists, and social leaders, especially Indigenous and Afrodescendant leaders. End impunity for forced disappearances, extrajudicial killings, threats, harassment, intimidation, and violence against environmental and women human rights defenders, activists, and social leaders.

3. **Actively seek out and support the participation of women and girls in all our diversity in the creation, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programs that impact us and our communities.** We are the experts in our own lives and contexts. Policies and programs that do not include our voices will never meet our needs and rights, leaving the most marginalized behind.
4. **Dismantle the unjust economic systems that perpetuate and deepen inequalities between and within countries,** and build peaceful, just and inclusive societies. Challenge and end privatization and commodification of public goods and services; exploitation of biodiversity and natural resources; endless cycles of unsustainable debt; and trade agreements that undermine labor rights, lead to environmental degradation, and perpetuate colonial dynamics. In its place, create a new development paradigm which prioritises the well-being/thriving of humans, animals and nature. In doing so, ending the primacy of economic growth (as measured by GDP) and the poverty and inequality it brings in its wake.
5. **Allocate adequate resources and technology transfer to strengthen data and statistical systems and collect disaggregated data.** Increase the capacity of national statistics offices, as well as data generated by civil society organizations. Value qualitative data in the same way that quantitative data is valued.
6. **Develop and implement system-wide policy coherence and** coordination between the High Level Political Forum with other UN human rights and development systems and processes, including at regional and national levels, to ensure effective implementation, monitoring, learning and accountability of the 2030 Agenda. Ensure the adoption of Major Group and other Stakeholders system at the country and sub-country level to engage all major groups and stakeholders in the implementation and monitoring of SDGs.
7. **Increase funding for feminist, women- and youth-led organizations, Indigenous women's networks, and movements, with priority given to those formed and led by people historically marginalized on the basis of gender identity, class, caste, sexual orientation, indigeneity, race, ethnicity, disability or religion.** Provide multi-year core operating support and adopt funding practices that encourage collaboration rather than competition between organizations and movements.

## **Sustainable Development Goal 1: End poverty in all its forms everywhere**

### ***Key Data***

- As a result of the COVID-19 crises, 88 million to 115 million people were pushed into extreme poverty.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> OHCHR 2021.A/HRC/46/19.

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- UN Women estimates that an additional 47 million women and girls will fall into extreme poverty in 2021.<sup>2</sup>
- As of March 2021, only 11% of social protection and labor market measures responding to COVID-19 addressed unpaid care.<sup>3</sup>
- Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, 105 countries had no social protection programs to protect people who are unemployed. These incomplete social protection systems Social protection systems, where in place, are often inadequate and incomplete because of pressure from international financial institutions (IFIs) that pushed countries to focus on smaller scale programs.<sup>4</sup>

### *Structural Barriers to Progress and Gendered Dimensions of Poverty*

It is not natural or inevitable that more women live in poverty than men. This inequity is the result of policy choices and the structural factors that dictate the terms of our economies and societies, including and especially market-based approaches to poverty alleviation. Since patriarchal societies do not value women equally, they do not value women's work equally, resulting in work that is unpaid -especially in the case of care and domestic work - or underpaid - as is the case in professions that women dominate, such as teaching or nursing. Since patriarchal societies do not value girls as much as they value boys, girls' education is often is more likely to be curtailed and / or limited to "appropriate" areas of study, discouraging girls from careers in higher paying fields. Since patriarchal systems aim to undermine women's autonomy, independence and independent access to resources, formal and customary legal systems often deny women and girls equal access to land, property, or inheritance rights, as well as financial services, further reinforcing structural barriers to progress and equality.

### *Social Protection*

Developing and resourcing gender-responsive social protection systems is central to combating poverty for women and girls in all their diversity across the life course. This increases in importance as countries continue to navigate the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and the health and economic crises exacerbated by the pandemic. Countries have a variety of obligations for creating and resourcing adequate social protection programs, including and beyond the 2030 Agenda. Multiple legally binding human rights treaties, such as the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, require States to take action to progressively realize the right to social protection without discrimination or retrogression.

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<sup>2</sup> UN Women. COVID-19 and Fiscal Policy: Applying Gender-Responsive Budgeting in Support and Recovery Measures. 2021.

<sup>3</sup> UN Women. COVID-19 and Fiscal Policy.

<sup>4</sup> OXFAM and Development Finance International. "Fighting Inequality in the Time of COVID-19: The Commitment to Reducing Inequality Index 2020." October 2020.

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Comprehensive social protection systems also must include those who are in informal sectors of the economy as well as those in unpaid care work, who are disproportionately women. Including informal and migrant workers into national social protection systems has taken on new urgency given the disproportionate impacts that the COVID-19 pandemic is having on workers in the informal economy in terms of their health, safety, and employment. A broadened and formalized recognition of a comprehensive social protection system should include access to food, water, basic energy, health services, child care and education. This type of broad social protection system can help communities adapt to the negative impact of economic crises, humanitarian emergencies, pandemics and other health emergencies, and the climate crisis.

Moreover, it is imperative that health schemes under social protection systems include and cover services specific to the needs of women and girls in all our diversity, including sexual and reproductive health (SRH), maternal and infant health services, sexual and gender-based violence services and safe abortion care. It is also critical to ensure that SRH remains an integral part of essential health services, that opportunities to improve policy frameworks for reduced barriers to sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) are identified, and that governments ensure gender and human rights-based approaches to tackling the pandemic and its consequences.

Worldwide, many women have suffered a lifetime of discrimination, and many remain illiterate with no opportunity to attend school, which limits employment opportunities. Without a job, they are often excluded from social protection systems where they exist, meaning they struggle to accumulate savings, receive a pension, or afford healthcare. A lifetime with no access to economic resources, including credit, work opportunities, land ownership and inheritance. Even when women work, there is a gender pay gap, which when combined with the number of women that never enter the formal workforce, results in a pension gap.<sup>5</sup>

### *Austerity and Financing*

Public financing and resources must be guaranteed and allocated for social protection systems and public social infrastructure, including SRH services and access to safe birthing centers and aftercare. Austerity measures continue to threaten any gains that can be made in reducing poverty among women and girls and present a direct violation of the principle of non-retrogression. Yet, few governments seek to understand the gendered impacts of austerity or reverse such policies. With the economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic slowing economic growth globally, we may be entering another period of increased austerity. This would be catastrophic for women and girls in all their diversity across the world.

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<sup>5</sup> OECD. <https://www.oecd.org/gender/data/wide-gap-in-pension-benefits-between-men-and-women.htm>. Accessed 11 May 2020.

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The Secretary-General's report for the 2020 Commission on the Status of Women asserted: "Fiscal austerity has consistently produced regressive outcomes, especially for low-income women, given their greater reliance on public services and transfers, their role as default care providers when services are eroded, and their strong presence as front-line public sector workers that have been subjected to cuts."<sup>6</sup> This warning has become even more critical in light of the impacts of COVID-19 on women front-line workers and increased rates of poverty for women and girls.

As women make up a large share of workers in the industries hit hardest by the COVID-19 crisis, hold less wealth than men, and often have more difficulty finding re-employment after layoffs, they are particularly vulnerable to austerity measures. Governments and international financial institutions (IFIs), such as the World Bank and International Monetary Fund, should learn the lesson of previous waves of austerity measures and pursue alternative processes that will not place the burden directly on the shoulders of women and girls. Instead, governments and IFIs must develop and resource COVID-19 response and recovery plans that center care and equality and remake our economic systems to facilitate just transitions to sustainable economies with decent work for all.

### ***Illustrative Interlinkages***

Armed conflict and militarized political economies (SDG 16) contribute to poverty by shifting money towards weapons and military expenditure, forcibly displacing communities (SDG 10), creating structural damage to vital infrastructure (SDG 9) and social protection systems, and harming people's health and wellbeing (SDG 3).

Post-conflict economic reconstruction programs often exacerbate these problems<sup>7</sup> by promoting growth-centric economic recovery models (SDG 8), imposing austerity measures, and prioritizing recouping investor confidence over strengthening social safety nets. As a result, these programs widen endemic structural inequalities, including gendered inequalities.

### ***Recommendations***

We recommend that governments at the national and sub-national levels:

#### *Social Protection*

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<sup>6</sup> Secretary-General (2020). Paragraph 18.

<sup>7</sup> Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF), Policy Brief: Action Coalition 2 on Economic Justice and Rights, February 2021.  
<https://www.peacewomen.org/sites/default/files/Action%20Coalitions%20and%20WPS%20Policy%20Brief%202021.pdf>

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- Adequately finance and, where they do not already exist, create gender transformative social protection systems that include protections for those working in the informal sector, migrant workers, off-grid households, and landless farmers, and are targeted to the most vulnerable.
- Avoid reductions in spending on non-contributory social protection mechanisms, such as unconditional cash transfers.
- Remove discrimination against gender non-binary people in accessing social protection programs.

### *Austerity Measures and Debt*

- Do not enact austerity measures, including cuts to social protection programs and public services. Attention should be paid particularly to education, health, and care services, which disproportionately impact women and girls.
- IFIs and donor countries should cancel, restructure, suspend, and lower rates on existing debt, and any new debt issued should not include austerity conditionalities. Otherwise, countries may be required to spend limited financial resources on debt servicing rather than social protection and other programs to achieve the SDGs.

### *Economic Justice*

- Promote women's economic rights, including through removal of laws and policies inhibiting women's land ownership, inheritance, and access to financial services, such as credit. Financial institutions demand collateral which many women do not have because many do not control productive resources, such as land.

## **Sustainable Development Goal 2: End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture**

### ***Key Data***

- Globally, the number of people in acute food insecurity could increase by 121 million people in 2021 - an 82% increase compared to pre-COVID needs.<sup>8</sup>
- In 2019, almost 1 in 10 people globally experienced severe levels of food insecurity.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> World Food Programme. *WFP Global Update on COVID-19: November 2020*.

<sup>9</sup> World Food Programme. *The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World*.

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- COVID-19 may increase the number of undernourished people globally between 83 to 132 million people.<sup>10</sup>
- Globally, more women experience food insecurity than men and the gap increased in 2018-2019.<sup>11</sup>
- According to the UN, approximately 12 million girls aged 15–19 give birth each year in low- and middle-income countries and many marry and become pregnant before they are physically mature. This situation is often associated with inadequate nutrient availability for both mother and fetus, leading to reduced adult stature of young mothers.<sup>12</sup>
- Small food producers generate 80% of the world’s food. However, most of these producers, especially women, Indigenous Peoples, young people, and other historically marginalized groups, do not have secure land rights leaving them vulnerable to large-scale land-based investments or conflicts between families or communities.<sup>13</sup>
- When women have secure land rights, it has been shown that they direct more resources to improved food security and that there are better health and education outcomes for their families. More secure land and water rights often increase household food security, especially for poor female-headed households.<sup>14</sup>
- Women are the backbone of the rural economy, especially in the developing world.<sup>15</sup> Empowering and investing in rural women has shown to significantly increase productivity, reduce hunger and malnutrition, and improve rural livelihoods, for everyone.<sup>16</sup>
- The lack of public investment and inclusive investment schemes dedicated to small-scale agriculture prevents small-scale farmers from transforming to sustainable agriculture.<sup>17</sup>

### ***Structural Barriers to Progress and Gendered Dimensions***

The right to food, food justice, nutrition, and food sovereignty are basic human rights with significant age, gender, race, and class dimensions. Hunger and malnutrition are not natural or inevitable - human action drives them. As a group of humanitarian organizations recently explained:

“These people are not starving, they are being starved. These girls and boys, men and women, are being starved by conflict and violence; by inequality; by the impacts of climate change; by the loss of land, jobs or prospects; by a fight against COVID-19 that

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid. Page 16.

<sup>12</sup> UN. E/CN.9/2021/2. Paragraph 20.

<sup>13</sup> Food and Agriculture Organization. “Protecting land and natural resources tenure rights in the era of COVID-19 by heeding the lessons from the past.” October 2020. Page 1.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid. Page 2.

<sup>15</sup> <http://www.fao.org/gender/resources/infographics/the-female-face-of-farming/en/>.

<sup>16</sup> 7FAO: STRENGTHENING SECTOR POLICIES FOR BETTER FOOD SECURITY AND NUTRITION RESULTS (2017) <http://www.fao.org/3/a-i7218e.pdf>

<sup>17</sup> [https://ag-transition.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/Investments\\_in\\_agriculture\\_MaB\\_WEB.pdf](https://ag-transition.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/Investments_in_agriculture_MaB_WEB.pdf)



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has left them even further behind. Every day, we see that it is women and girls who suffer the most.”<sup>18</sup>

Corporate capture of the food system and the accompanying global trade agreements interact with and drive the structural factors mentioned above, including climate change, inequality, land degradation and land grabbing, and militarism and conflict, to weaken food sovereignty, land rights, and, ultimately, increase hunger and malnutrition.

Globally, women hold disproportionately fewer land rights than men compared to the amount of land on which they labor because of patriarchal gender norms, laws, and practices. Women's labor is too often invisible in agriculture because their work is considered supplementary to men and considered “natural” given women and girls' caregiving roles.<sup>19</sup> Though some gains have been made to formalize women's land and water rights, enforcement is still lacking. Moreover, women often confront stricter entry barriers into sustainable agriculture, since they are less likely to access advanced farming tools and agriculture technologies due to their limited funds and existing gender digital gap. In addition, trainings are often aimed at men and owners rather than women workers.

Government responses to COVID-19 are threatening women's land rights as restrictions on movements limit small scale food producers from accessing critical resources, such as seeds or water, or their land and markets. Not being able to access and use their lands regularly, increases the vulnerability of their land rights, especially when large-scale land-based activities, such as mining, have been declared “essential” and allowed to continue operating. The Food and Agriculture Organization notes that contested land deals and land rights-related violations have occurred, especially for women who also have decreased access to mediation and judicial systems.<sup>20</sup>

Globally, women and girls make up 60% of the chronically hungry, and it is likely that the proportion is even higher in some regions, such as Asia and the Pacific.<sup>21</sup> In many cases, girls and women living in poverty and food-insecure households eat after male family members do and eat less nutritious food. Women and girls are also facing increased difficulties accessing nutritious, safe food in the wake of COVID-19, due to the closure of food services in schools and

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<sup>18</sup>

<https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2021/apr/20/millions-at-risk-of-famine-without-urgent-help-governments-warned>. Accessed 22 April 2021.

<sup>19</sup>

[http://www.csm4cfs.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/CSM-Agroecology-and-Feminism-September-2019\\_compressed.pdf](http://www.csm4cfs.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/CSM-Agroecology-and-Feminism-September-2019_compressed.pdf). Accessed 12 May 2021.

<sup>20</sup> FAO. Page 3.

<sup>21</sup> Food and Agriculture Organization.

[http://www.fao.org/fileadmin/templates/rap/files/Newsletter/150625\\_gender-fact-sheet.pdf](http://www.fao.org/fileadmin/templates/rap/files/Newsletter/150625_gender-fact-sheet.pdf). Accessed 12 May 2020.

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communities, food shortages, disrupted supply chains, decreased income, and movement and quarantine restrictions. This will likely continue even after restrictions have started to lift given longer term impacts on supply chains. Evidence from previous crises shows that food insecurity can lead to harmful coping mechanisms and situations, such as the changes in diet, decreasing consumption, and sexual exploitation.<sup>22</sup>

The 2030 Agenda specifically highlights adolescent girls, as well as pregnant and lactating women as target groups whose nutritional needs must be addressed. Studies in countries across Asia and Africa have revealed the extent to which many adolescent girls are underweight, and the links between malnutrition and anemia (iron deficiency) once girls have begun menstruating. Anemia increases the risks of maternal mortality and fetal growth restriction.<sup>23</sup>

We need urgent action to address our broken food and agriculture systems, which have been captured and monopolized by big businesses, at the expense of natural resources, biodiversity, livelihoods, health, and local food sovereignty. Policies, incentives, and support should move away from industrial agricultural models, and towards regenerative agriculture, agroecology and food sovereignty, creating food systems that are local, sustainable and culturally appropriate. Export models should be replaced by local production and consumption, including community and school vegetable gardens. In addition, ensuring a living wage and providing protections against fluctuating food prices are critical interventions for reducing hunger.

### ***Illustrative Interlinkages***

Between food security, conflict, and climate change there are mutually reinforcing bonds. Food (SDG 2) and water (SDG 6) insecurity, worsened by the climate crisis (SDG 13) contribute to armed conflict (SDG 16), including by making conflicts more protracted. In turn, armed conflict drives hunger and famine.<sup>24</sup> As the World Food Programme recently declared: “To avert famine, we need an end to conflict.”<sup>25</sup> The COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent crises is exacerbating all of these factors. Moreover, malnutrition has long-term impacts on health, (SDG 3), including cognitive and physical development, sexual and reproductive health, levels of educational attainment (SDG 4), and labor force participation (SDG 8).

### ***Recommendations***

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<sup>22</sup> CARE and UN Women. “Latin America and the Caribbean Rapid Gender Analysis for COVID-19.” <https://www2.unwomen.org/-/media/field%20office%20americas/documentos/publicaciones/2020/05/enlac%20rga%20report%20english%20final%20junio2%201comprimido.pdf?la=en&vs=250>. Accessed 12 May 2021.

<sup>23</sup> UN. E/CN.9/2021/2. Paragraph 21.

<sup>24</sup> World Food Programme. “Three things you may not know about famine and how to prevent it.” <https://www.wfp.org/stories/3-things-you-may-not-know-about-famine-and-how-prevent-it>. Accessed 24 April 2020.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

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We recommend that Governments at the national and subnational levels:

### *Nutrition*

- Respect, protect, and fulfill the human right to adequate, culturally appropriate, and safe food and nutrition for all, including through addressing the specific needs of women, girls, young people, and children.
- Provide nutrition education at all levels, and promote nutritionally balanced and diverse diets, particularly utilizing traditional and local knowledge, practices, and food, along with appropriate supplementation, especially for adolescent girls, pregnant, and breastfeeding people.
- Work with communities to monitor child nutrition and support families in learning how to provide children with a nutritious diet. Work with parents and caregivers, as well as communities and primary healthcare providers, to promote adequate infant and young child feeding at the household level and to reduce son bias in feeding practices.
- Promote good practice in breastfeeding and implement the International Code of Marketing of Breast-milk Substitutes taking into consideration and meeting the need for adequate nutrition of the breastfeeding people.
- Increase national budgets for maternal and newborn health and nutrition.
- Set a minimum service response package in times of crises and emergencies and ensure that it is adequately funded and developed in partnership with local civil society.

### *Agricultural and food systems*

- Adopt a human rights-based approach to the promotion of food sovereignty and agroecology centering the realization of the human rights of women and girls in hunger, food, and nutrition policies.
- Prioritize the transformation of food and agriculture systems towards food sovereignty by moving political support and all subsidies and incentives away from industrial agriculture models and monoculture production, which degrade the environment and destroy local livelihoods and food security, towards regenerative systems of local production and consumption.
- Raise awareness against and regulate genetically modified food, as well as low-quality, ultra-processed, and high-fat / high-sugar food, that perpetuate malnutrition in all its forms.
- Provide secure, safe, regular, and cost-effective transportation for women's agro-businesses and improve urban and rural linkages for farm to market delivery.

### *Land rights*

- Ensure regulation, accountability, and justice in cases of violations of the right to land, including inheritance laws, land and resource grabbing done by State and corporations.

Women must have access to affordable legal services, fair and honest land administration, and gender-neutral enforcement and judicial systems to uphold their land rights.

- Establish and uphold grievance mechanisms for small scale farmers, Indigenous Peoples, and other marginalized groups whose rights to land have been violated.
- Establish and fund gender-, culture-, and age-responsive policies for agroecology, as well as fishery in the coastal regions, including ensuring biodiversity of seeds and plants, and control and ownership of land, water, and other resources.
- Ensure public investment in small-scale sustainable agriculture by providing tailored support for women farmers, promoting their equal access to agriculture technology.
- Uphold Indigenous Peoples' rights to land, territories, and resources, and the right of free, prior and informed consent as critical human rights, as well as a critical strategy in ending the climate crisis and reversing environmental degradation.<sup>26</sup>

### **Sustainable Development Goal 3: Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages**

#### ***Key Data***

- As of April 2021, approximately 1 in 4 people in high-income countries have received a COVID-19 vaccine, while in low-income countries only approximately 1 in 500 people have received a COVID-19 vaccine.<sup>27</sup>
- Since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, maternal deaths, stillbirths, ruptured ectopic pregnancies, and maternal depression have all increased with significant disparities between high-resource and low-resource settings.<sup>28</sup>
- Women make up 70% of the health workforce globally, but are typically in lower-level positions with lower pay and decision-making authority.<sup>29</sup>
- What countries have identified as “essential” medical care or commodities during the COVID-19 pandemic do not match vital services for women, such as abortion, services related to addressing GBV, contraception, condoms, or harm reduction treatment.<sup>30</sup>
- As of April 2021, approximately 90% of countries report some type of disruption to their health services as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Critical health services for

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<sup>26</sup> UN. <https://news.un.org/en/story/2021/03/1087242>. Accessed 15 May 2021.

<sup>27</sup> BBC. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-56698854>. Accessed 24 April 2021.

<sup>28</sup> Chmielewska, Barbara, et al. “Effects of the COVID-19 Pandemic on maternal and perinatal outcomes: a systematic review and meta-analysis.” *Lancet Global Health*. 31 March 2021.

<sup>29</sup> UNAIDS. “Six Concrete Measures to Support Women and Girls in all Their Diversity in the Context of the COVID-19 Pandemic.” 2020. Page 17.

<sup>30</sup> UNAIDS. “Six Concrete Measures to Support Women and Girls in all Their Diversity in the Context of the COVID-19 Pandemic.” 2020.

women, including mental health care, contraceptive care, treatment for malnutrition, and HIV treatment, are among the most heavily impacted.<sup>31</sup>

- Currently, an estimated 60% of preventable maternal deaths, 53% of under five deaths, and 45% of neonatal deaths globally occur in humanitarian crises or fragile contexts.<sup>32</sup>

### ***Structural Barriers to Progress and Gendered Dimensions***

In the face of the current COVID-19 pandemic, the need to safeguard the health of all is especially pressing. The pandemic has made evident the need for greater investment in health system strengthening, including health information systems and data collection, health worker governance, robust primary health care, community health systems and financial protection through universal health coverage (UHC).

Moreover, the underinvestment in and hollowing out of public health systems is a result of financial measures pushed by neoliberal development, public-private-partnerships (PPPs), illicit financial flows (IFFs), and debt policies pushed by IFIs, including in high income countries.<sup>33</sup> A recent study found that a “10% increase in private health expenditure relates to a 4.3% increase in COVID-19 cases and a 4.9% increase in COVID-19 related mortality.”<sup>34</sup> In other words, the more privatized a health system, the worse its response to COVID-19. Weak public health systems disproportionately impact women, especially poor women and women in rural areas, given their socially prescribed roles in providing care and their own sexual and reproductive health needs.

The World Health Organization (WHO) Director General prophetically described the impact of the currently unequal state of COVID-19 vaccine distribution: “the world is on the brink of a catastrophic moral failure – and the price of this failure will be paid with lives and livelihoods in the world’s poorest countries.”<sup>35</sup> It is imperative that countries treat COVID-19 vaccines as global public goods. As the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights recently clarified: “States have therefore a duty of international cooperation and assistance to ensure

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<sup>31</sup> World Health Organization. “Some signs of recovering emerging but major efforts required to restore and strengthen health services.”

“<https://www.who.int/news/item/23-04-2021-covid-19-continues-to-disrupt-essential-health-services-in-90-of-countries>. Accessed 24 April 2021.

<sup>32</sup> (UNFPA 2015. State of World Population 2015. Shelter from the Storm: A Transformative Agenda for Women and Girls in a Crisis-prone World.

[https://www.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/sowp/downloads/State\\_of\\_World\\_Population\\_2015\\_EN.pdf](https://www.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/sowp/downloads/State_of_World_Population_2015_EN.pdf))

<sup>33</sup> Corporate Europe Observatory. “Health care privatisation and austerity left EU-countries ill prepared to deal with pandemic.”

<https://corporateeurope.org/en/2021/01/health-care-privatisation-and-austerity-left-eu-countries-ill-prepared-deal-pandemic>. Accessed 24 April 2021.

<sup>34</sup> Assa, Jacob and Calderon, Maria Cecilia. “Privatization and Pandemic: A Cross-Country Analysis of COVID-19 Rates and Health-Care Financing Structures.”

<sup>35</sup> World Health Organization. “WHO chief warns against ‘catastrophic moral failure’ in COVID-19 vaccine access.” <https://news.un.org/en/story/2021/01/1082362>. Accessed 24 April 2021.

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access to vaccines for COVID-19 wherever needed, including by using their voting rights as members of different international institutions or organizations, including regional integration organizations such as the European Union.”<sup>36</sup>

The pandemic has also brought to light the existing structures of power that reinforce and deepen inequalities, and how they are being used to address a public health crisis, such as the use of existing criminal law related to public health to introduce fines and penalties, and imprisonment. In many countries, police powers have significantly increased in relation to public health, and the police and the military have been put at the forefront of executing or monitoring the implementation of measures adopted for the containment of COVID-19; “implementing fines, court summons, and arresting those who do not comply with them, from mandatory mask wearing to quarantine.”<sup>37</sup>

The COVID-19 pandemic has also shown how human health is interdependent with the well-being and flourishing of the environment and animals. Collaborative, multisectoral, transdisciplinary, and international efforts, as encapsulated by the WHO’s One Health / One Welfare approaches are vital to this effort. This is an approach to designing and implementing programs, policies, legislation, and research in which multiple sectors – including public health, animal health, plant health, and the environment – work together to achieve better public health outcomes.

### *Sexual and Reproductive Health*

Sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights are integral to the realization of the right of everyone to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health and comprehensive sexual and reproductive health-care services must have the interrelated and essential elements of availability, accessibility, acceptability, equity, efficacy, and quality.

Due to supply chain disruptions, resource diversion, lack of political prioritization, and other strains on health systems, the sexual and reproductive health of women, girls, and gender non-conforming people has been particularly impacted during the current COVID-19 pandemic. At the beginning of the global pandemic, UNFPA predicted dire impacts on the SRH of women and girls, including a possible 47 million women in low- and middle-income countries unable to access modern contraceptives and an additional 7 million unintended pregnancies.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. “Statement on universal affordable vaccination for COVID-19, international cooperation and intellectual property.” E/C.12/2021/1.

<sup>37</sup> RESURJ and Vecinas Feministas. “The Criminalization of a Pandemic: A Cross-Regional Feminist Analysis” <https://resurj.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/ENG-The-Criminalization-of-a-Pandemic.pdf> Accessed 4 May 2021

<sup>38</sup> UNFPA. <https://www.unfpa.org/pcm/node/24174>.

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Safe and legal abortion is a necessary element of comprehensive reproductive health services that must be included within all universal health coverage (UHC) packages. However, the exclusion of abortion from UHC packages and lack of safe abortion services, in general; the shortage of trained healthcare providers; the unwillingness or bias of service providers, including the exercise of so-called “conscience clauses”; and abortion stigma prevent women and girls from accessing safe abortion care services. Moreover, sexual and reproductive health services, especially abortion and post-abortion care, are among the most privatized services for women and adolescent girls. Factors such as these force women and adolescent girls to resort to unsafe abortion, further explaining why unsafe abortion is a major contributor to maternal mortality.<sup>39</sup>

According to UNFPA, 20,000 girls under the age of 18 give birth every day in developing countries.<sup>40</sup> It is widely expected that COVID-19 will increase rates of adolescent pregnancies as a result of, among other things, school closures, disruptions in sexual and reproductive health commodities and services, diminished access to comprehensive sexuality education (CSE), and increased rates of unprotected sex.

Globally, adolescent pregnancy is a significant problem with long-term impacts on girls, their families, and communities. In developing regions, nearly half of pregnancies among adolescent girls and women aged 15-19 are unintended.<sup>41</sup> Adolescent pregnancy poses grave risks including the risk of dying in childbirth, premature labor, complications during delivery, low birthweight, and infant mortality, as well as morbidities, especially vesico-vaginal fistula.

Early childbearing negatively influences the likelihood of a girl continuing her education, further limiting her opportunities for training and employment, and often confining her to the domestic sphere for a number of years.<sup>42</sup> Early motherhood often forces girls and adolescents to leave school early, and if they are able to join the paid labor force, they often do so in precarious and / or low-paid work, contributing to intergenerational poverty. To prevent this, governments must invest both in prevention of adolescent pregnancies, as well as in adequate support for young parents to continue their education.

Adolescent pregnancies and parenthood are a direct result of several factors, including lack of comprehensive sexuality education, the inability to exercise the right to bodily autonomy,

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<sup>39</sup> ARROW. (2019). Access to Safe Abortion in Asia and the Pacific Region. <https://arrow.org.my/publication/access-to-safe-abortion-in-asia-and-the-pacific-region/>. Accessed 18 May 2020.

<sup>40</sup> UNFPA. <https://www.unfpa.org/adolescent-pregnancy>. Accessed 24 April 2021.

<sup>41</sup> Deliver for Good Policy Brief. “Meet the Demand for Modern Contraception and Reproductive Health.” (2019). <https://deliverforgood.org/investment/meet-the-demand-for-modern-contraception-and-reproductive-health/>. Accessed 5 May 2020.

<sup>42</sup> ARROW. (2019). The Status of Adolescents’ SRHR in Asia and the Pacific Region [https://arrow.org.my/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/ARROW\\_5\\_Adolescents-Brief.pdf](https://arrow.org.my/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/ARROW_5_Adolescents-Brief.pdf). Accessed 5 May 2020.

inadequate access to sexual and reproductive health care services, stigma, and discriminatory laws related to adolescent sexuality.

***Illustrative Interlinkages***

The links between health, gender-based violence, and punitive criminal law and human rights violations have always been present and deadly. The COVID-19 pandemic and government responses to it have added new layers to this connection.

Both GBV and SRH services have been under-funded and under-prioritized during the pandemic with many women's organizations, as well as individual women and girls, filling in the gaps. Redistribution of funds, personnel, and equipment from GBV and SRH services to the COVID response have negatively impacted the well-being of women and girls globally.

Moreover, violent responses from governments that have relied on criminal law and policing, especially, in the name of public health<sup>43</sup> are particularly impacting already criminalized and marginalized populations, including lesbians, transgender people, sex workers, and migrants.<sup>44</sup> In the case of women living with HIV, they may discontinue or have interrupted treatment for fear that they will have to reveal their HIV status to police in order to be outside legally during lockdowns.<sup>45</sup>

***Recommendations***

We recommend that governments at the national and sub-national levels:

*COVID-19*

- Treat COVID-19 vaccines as a global public good. Abandon vaccine nationalism, the stockpiling of vaccines, and support the TRIPS COVID-19 waiver.
- Apply an intersectional, gender-responsive and human rights-based approach to address the impacts of COVID-19.
- Provide all frontline health workers, caregivers and essential workers, with quality personal protective equipment including menstrual hygiene products, psycho-social support, child-care, and address immediate needs, to enable them to provide quality care.
- Ensure that people living in communities affected by armed conflict, refugees, internally displaced people, migrants, or stateless people get speedy access to COVID-19 vaccines, testing, and treatment.

<sup>43</sup> RESURJ and Vecinas Feministas. "The Criminalization of a Pandemic: A Cross-Regional Feminist Analysis"

<sup>44</sup> UNAIDS. "Six Concrete Measures to Women and Girls in all their Diversity in the Context of the COVID-19 Pandemic." Page 11.

<sup>45</sup> UNAIDS. Page 5.



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- Recognize the negative impact that the COVID-19 pandemic has had in the educational sector, and more specifically in access to comprehensive sexuality education, and consider this in response and recovery plans by ensuring that girls and adolescent girls have access to CSE to be better equipped to make informed decisions over their bodies, relationships, and life course.

### *Universal Health Coverage (UHC) and Health Systems*

- Deliver UHC through public health systems, ending and reversing the privatization of health systems as well as public-private-partnerships (PPPs) to deliver health services recognizing that privatization and PPPs may exacerbate inequalities in access to health services.
- Provide adequate financial, human, and infrastructure resources towards achieving UHC and integrate sexual and reproductive health care services into the provision of primary healthcare and UHC packages.
- Commit to coordinated, sustainable, long-term funding for health systems strengthening that applies a gender lens to disease detection, prevention, and treatment.
- Address the significant barriers that prevent women, girls, non-binary and gender diverse people from accessing health care, including user fees, out-of-pocket payments, physical distance, stigma, and legal restrictions.
- Guarantee the labor rights of health workers at all levels, including community health workers, and ensure their safety through the provision of personal protective equipment and safe working environments.
- Cease targeting healthcare facilities in the context of armed conflicts, per the obligations of all states under international human rights and humanitarian law. Cease all activities that prevent people in conflict-affected areas from accessing their rights to health.

### *Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights*

- Ensure the availability and provision of sexual and reproductive health-care services, incorporate them as essential services, and prioritize these services for all women and girls within recovery plans as well as contingency planning for future pandemics.
- Safeguard essential sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR), including access to services, supplies, and information. Critical care includes contraceptives, abortion and post-abortion care, antiretroviral therapy, diagnosis and treatment of sexually transmitted infections, pre-and post-exposure prophylaxis, emergency obstetric care, and newborn and maternal care. Do not let emergency responses be used to divert resources or justify targeted restrictions or regulations that limit access to SRHR.

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- Challenge harmful norms and gender inequality that hinder fulfilment of the sexual and reproductive health and rights of adolescents, young people, women, LGBTIQ+ women, non-binary and gender non-conforming people.
- Ensure that all survivors of sexual and gender-based violence have access to a comprehensive package of sexual and reproductive health care services, including post-exposure prophylaxis, emergency contraception, abortion, and mental health services. Ensure that these services are considered essential services in times of crisis.
- Recognize abortion as a human right and remove all punitive laws and measures, including those for healthcare providers. Ensure the accessibility of abortion services, including through the provision of services, facilities and personnel trained on safe abortion and post-abortion care and self-managed medical abortion. In times of crisis, declare abortion as an essential service and implement telemedicine and other online tools to fulfill the human right to abortion.
- Guarantee access to comprehensive sexuality education (CSE) and youth-responsive sexual and reproductive health (SRH) services to ensure that all adolescents and young people can make informed choices free from discrimination, coercion, or violence. Ensure that CSE and youth-responsive SRH services include and address the health, rights, and needs of all young people, including LGBTIQ+ young people and young people with disabilities.
- Recognize and work to eliminate period poverty, through removal of taxes from menstrual products, as well as providing these products free of charge to women and adolescent girls who do not have access, such as those living in poverty or detention.
- Provide emergency obstetric services, especially in rural and peri-urban areas, as a human right and in order to prevent obstetric fistula. Guarantee free healthcare services for all women and girls living with obstetric fistula.
- Conduct outreach campaigns to reach women and girls living with obstetric fistula in order to reduce stigma and connect them with healthcare services.
- Ensure the implementation of the Minimum Initial Service Package (MISP) at the onset of every humanitarian crisis.
- Integrate and train young people in the implementation of MISP in crisis situations.
- End impunity for sexual and gender-based violence as international crimes.

### **Sustainable Development Goal 4: Ensure inclusive and equitable education, quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all**

#### ***Key Data***

- According to UNESCO, in April 2020, over 1.5 billion students were impacted by school closures accounting for more than 90% of students from pre-primary to higher education.

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It is likely that this will lead to increased rates of child labor, sexual exploitation, teenage pregnancy, and child, early, and forced marriage.<sup>46</sup>

- Even though school closures have forced both boys and girls out of school now, girls are less likely than boys to return to school after a prolonged absence.<sup>47</sup>
- 900 million children do not have basic hygiene services at their school, severely impacting girls during menstruation.<sup>48</sup>
- Approximately  $\frac{2}{3}$  of the world's 781 million illiterate adults are women, a proportion that has remained unchanged for twenty years.<sup>49</sup>

### ***Structural Barriers to Progress and Gendered Dimensions***

Public education is part of broader public service systems that have been increasingly under attack as part of a hollowing out of state services. The right to education is vitally linked to SDGs 2, 5, 10, and 16 that refer to gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls in the promotion of peaceful and inclusive societies, including their full and meaningful participation in decision-making, leadership, and peace processes. In addition, parents that make a living wage are better able to ensure that their children, including and especially girls, have access to quality education.

The COVID-19 crisis threatens both to roll back gains made on girls' education and to create new barriers for girls to achieve their human rights to education, health, and protection. It is also increasing women and girls' household work burden. Not all girls will be impacted equally though with those who are already most marginalized, including the poorest, girls with disabilities, and those in conflict-affected, rural, or remote areas.<sup>50</sup>

### ***Infrastructure***

School infrastructure plays an important role in learning and encouraging retention and enrollment. In developing countries, young girls often leave school at the start of menstruation due to poor sanitation facilities, including the unavailability of private bathrooms, compounded with fear and stigma.

The dangers faced by girls and adolescents due to unsafe roads, lack of infrastructure, and inadequate services especially at the secondary school level, often prevent girls and adolescents from attending school. Moreover, even where adequate infrastructure and services exist, harmful

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<sup>46</sup> UNESCO. "Building Back Equal: Girls back to school guide" Page 2.

<sup>47</sup> UNESCO International Institute for Education Planning. "COVID-19 school closures: Why girls are more at risk." 29 April 2020. <http://www.iiep.unesco.org/en/covid-19-school-closures-why-girls-are-more-risk-13406>. Accessed 4 May 2020.

<sup>48</sup> UNESCO. "Building Back Equal." Page 3.

<sup>49</sup> OXFAM. "Gender justice and women's rights."

<https://www.oxfam.org/en/what-we-do/issues/gender-justice-and-womens-rights>. Accessed 24 April 2021.

<sup>50</sup> UNESCO. "Building Back Equal." Page 2.

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gender stereotypes, child, early, and forced marriages, sexual harassment, and the lack of inclusive and quality learning environments, keep girls and young women out of school.

### *Gender-Based violence*

Although evidence is still being gathered and analyzed, it is clear that rates of domestic violence, including violence against children, increased exponentially during lockdowns across all regions. Recent estimates are that up to 80 million children worldwide are likely to have been exposed to physical, sexual and/or emotional violence during lockdowns, in addition to new and increased forms of online violence, including cyberbullying, sexual exploitation and abuse.<sup>51</sup> Lockdown conditions have been aggravated by isolation from safe spaces, services, and peoples that schools often provide, including teachers, social workers, clubs, or friends.<sup>52</sup> Girls also face increased risk of early and unintended pregnancy and entering child labor, each of which lessen the likelihood that they will return once schools reopen.

### *Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM)*

Girls often have less access to STEM training than the boys from an early age through tertiary education. According to the GSDR, women make up only 35% of students in STEM programs in tertiary education, for example, even though women make up a slightly larger percentage of students in tertiary education overall.<sup>53</sup> This impacts women's future earnings and career opportunities as they enter the labor market with fewer skills and abilities than their male counterparts.

Though increasing women and girls' STEM education is important, humanities and liberal arts education must continue to be valued.

### *Marginalized Women and Girls*

Marginalized women and girls face distinct obstacles to exercising their right to education. For example, discrimination based on sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, and sex characteristics (SOGIESC) results in numerous problems, such as bullying, that prevent people from accessing quality education in schools.

Ideological-political approaches that are spreading worldwide limit equitable education through their impact on school curricula. The resulting impediments to comprehensive sexuality education in schools and portrayals of stereotypical roles in curricula and class settings

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<sup>51</sup> <https://www.wvi.org/publications/report/coronavirus-health-crisis/covid-19-aftershocks-perfect-storm>. Accessed 14 May 2021.

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<https://www.end-violence.org/sites/default/files/2020-07/Policy%20brief%20-%20SRGBV%20%20and%20school%20reopening%20Final.pdf>. Accessed 12 May 2021.

<sup>53</sup> GSDR. Page 48.

particularly impact the independent development of women, girls, and LGBTQI+ people. This situation and its challenges also negatively impact minorities, ethnic-cultural population diversity, sexual diversity, vulnerable populations, people with disabilities and LGBTI+ people.

For older women that had not previously accessed literacy education, there are very few opportunities to learn how to read and write, which is necessary for their involvement in daily life and for the enjoyment of their human rights. Women and girls with disabilities face additional barriers to accessing inclusive education, including social isolation, discrimination, and lack of accessible facilities.<sup>54</sup> Women and girls in conflict-affected communities, as well as refugees, internally displaced persons, and migrants, often face challenges in accessing quality education due to gaps in documentation, interruptions in their education, targeting of civilian infrastructure, and lack of economic opportunity.

Ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education requires governments to create and support gender-responsive education systems, through redistributing unpaid and devalued domestic and care work; addressing the feminization of the education workforce, including by protecting the labor rights of teachers; and rethinking how institutions such as school, work, and the environment, support or undermine the lives and rights of women and girls.

### ***Illustrative Interlinkages***

The combined impact of school closures and restrictions on movement as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic have had immediate consequences and possibly long-term consequences for girls across a wide-range of human rights and SDGs, possibly including:

- Increased burdens of unpaid care and domestic work (SDG 5) limiting the amount of time girls have to dedicate to their education.
- Reduced learning opportunities because of the gender digital divide and limited access to information and communication technology (ICT) (SDG 5).
- Increased risks of gender-based violence, including child, early and forced marriage and female genital mutilation/cutting, and new forms of digital violence such as online harassment and bullying (SDG 5).
- Interrupted access to school feeding programs (SDG 2), which reached 388 million children prior to the school closures.<sup>55</sup>
- Reduced labor participation rates for women (SDG 8) who must stop working to attend to the education and care needs of children.

<sup>54</sup> UN Women, Making SDGs Count for Women and Girls with Disabilities, 2017, <https://www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/wp-content/uploads/sites/15/2019/10/Making-SDGs-count-for-women-with-disabilities.pdf>. Accessed 28 April 2021.

<sup>55</sup> World Food Programme. "State of School Feeding Worldwide 2020." 2020.

- Limited access to comprehensive sexuality education leading to decreased levels of knowledge about critical sexual and reproductive health issues (SDG 3).<sup>56</sup>
- Increased risk of HIV (SDG 3).

### ***Recommendations***

#### *COVID-19*

- Prioritize the engagement of women and girls in COVID-19 response and recovery plans, including school reopening plans, as well as continuations of remote learning.
- Develop equitable plans for ensuring girls return to school as schools reopen with targeted actions to reach the poorest and most marginalized girls.

#### *Curriculum*

- Target and sustain efforts to remove gender bias, stereotypes, and discrimination within and across education systems, from teacher recruitment and training to curriculum and materials development, as well as integrate gender equality and human rights explicitly into all areas of curriculum, including comprehensive sexuality education.
- Align comprehensive sexuality education within formal and informal settings with best practices and guidance worldwide, specifically the *International Technical Guidance on Sexuality Education*.
- Combat gendered norms regarding areas of study and vocation, including by encouraging women and girls to undertake “non-traditional” fields of study and vocations in order to combat gender segregation within the workforce and by increasing remuneration and respect for traditionally feminine areas of work.
- Support and invest in girls and young women’s STEM education programs, support women to study STEM at the university level, and later to be incorporated in the labor market.
- Incorporate education and skills-building for climate action into curricula, including technical skills, as well as emotional, cognitive skills, such as disruptive thinking and political agency, that will be critical in the transition to more just and sustainable societies.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> UNAIDS. “Six Concrete Measures to Support Women and Girls in all their Diversity in the Context of the COVID-19 Pandemic.” 2020.

<sup>57</sup> Brookings Institution. “A new green learning agenda: Approaches to quality education for climate action.” <https://www.brookings.edu/research/a-new-green-learning-agenda-approaches-to-quality-education-for-climate-action/>. Accessed 19 May 2021.

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### *Teachers*

- Improve working conditions and increase pay and benefits for teachers.
- Integrate gender equality training into initial teacher education and professional development programs and integrate gender-responsive, intercultural pedagogy into curricula.
- Ensure that male teachers are sensitive to the specific challenges and barriers that female students and teachers face.
- Provide additional support and incentives to female teachers, especially in rural areas, who can be powerful role models within their schools and communities.

### *Infrastructure*

- Invest in school infrastructures and ensure school environments are safe, secure, and free from violence, including violence that occurs in, on the way to, or around schools.
- Address structural factors that create barriers to education, such as poverty, ethnicity, disability, and armed conflict. This includes the need for adequate and safe water, sanitation, and hygiene facilities in schools.

### *Violence*

- Develop and revitalize school-level/institutional policies on preventing and responding to all forms of violence in light of the new challenges posed by COVID-19, ensuring reporting and accountability mechanisms are in place.
- Ensure that there are adequate school/institutional monitoring mechanisms for girls at risk of not returning to education. Provide the necessary support for their safe return.
- Promote child-focused spaces for children to share experiences, ensuring these are specifically safe for girls. Teachers and education support personnel should receive training to manage confidential discussions with students who have experienced or been affected by violence during lockdown and re-openings. Ensure that students can access child-friendly, gender-responsive reporting mechanisms and services dedicated to providing psychosocial and legal support.

## **Sustainable Development Goal 5: Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls**

### *Key Data*

- In 88 countries there are legal restrictions on the jobs and hours that women can work leading to occupational segregation and the overrepresentation of women in the sectors

most affected by COVID-19: healthcare, education, and essential service delivery. This impacts more than 2.5 billion women globally.<sup>58</sup>

- Globally, nearly 1 in 3 women have experienced violence from a partner within their lifetime. Nearly one in four of ever-partnered adolescent girls aged 15–19 year have been subjected to violence by a partner.<sup>59</sup> All evidence so far indicates that violence, including online and ICT-facilitated violence, has increased during the COVID-19 pandemic, especially during lockdowns.<sup>60</sup>
- Responses to the COVID-19 pandemic - such as school closures, increased poverty and economic stress, increased adolescent pregnancy, disruptions to essential services, or deaths of parents - may expose an additional 10 million girls to child, early, and forced marriage by 2030.<sup>61</sup>
- Globally, women do three times as much unpaid care and domestic work as men while adolescent girls perform significantly more domestic work than boys.<sup>62</sup>
- According to UN Women, opposition to gender equality and to women's rights activism has become "more vocal, global and better organized" in the years following the Beijing Platform for Action.<sup>63</sup>

### ***Structural Barriers to Progress and Gendered Dimensions***

Patriarchy shapes societies in ways that put less value on the lives of women, girls, non-binary, and gender diverse people, place the burden of paid and unpaid care and domestic work on them, and condone violence and other forms of control to maintain their subservient position. Prior to the COVID-19 crisis, women and girls completed between 2 and 14 times as much care work as men and boys - the wide range a reflection of inequalities within and between countries. Closures of childcare and schools, increased care needs of older and ill people, and overwhelmed health systems, have increased the burden even further during the pandemic. Women are also overrepresented among paid care workers, including and especially within health systems. These frontline workers must be recognized as essential after the crisis ends.

### *Gender-based violence*

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<sup>58</sup> Arekapudi, Nisha. "World Bank report: when COVID struck, gender equality came crumbling down." <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/businessreview/2021/03/08/world-bank-report-when-covid-struck-gender-equality-came-crumbling-down/>. Accessed 24 April 2021.

<sup>59</sup> World Health Organization. Committing to implementation of the Global Strategy for Women's, Children's and Adolescents' Health (2016–2030): Report by the Director-General. A74/14. Paragraph 22.

<sup>60</sup> UN Women. "COVID-19 and Violence against Women and Girls: Addressing the Shadow Pandemic."

<sup>61</sup> UNICEF. "10 million additional girls at risk of child marriage due to COVID-19." <https://www.unicef.org/press-releases/10-million-additional-girls-risk-child-marriage-due-covid-19>. Accessed 24 April 2021.

<sup>62</sup> UN Women. "COVID-19 and the Care Economy: Immediate Action and Structural Transformation for a Gender-Responsive Recovery."

<sup>63</sup> UN Women. "Democratic Backsliding and the Backlash Against Women's Rights: Understanding the current challenges for feminist politics." 2020.



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One of the great successes of feminist and women's rights movements is placing gender-based violence (GBV) on the global agenda and demanding that societies no longer treat GBV as a private, normal - even necessary - part of family life. Feminist and women's rights movements continue to challenge the social norms permitting and encouraging gender-based violence, while also adapting to new forms and manifestations of violence, such as online harassment, stalking, intimidation, and violence.

Despite this great achievement, violence against women, girls, non-binary, and gender diverse people is still endemic, affecting all populations. Globally, within their lifetime nearly one third of women will experience physical or sexual violence at the hand of an intimate partner. Every day, 137 women are killed by a family member, 68 of whom are killed by their current or former partner.<sup>64</sup>

As the current COVID-19 pandemic continues to exacerbate existing inequalities women and girls face additional barriers and compounding factors which have worsened during the pandemic, such as increased sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV). Confinement measures as well as the disruption of social and protective measures, as well as decreased access to services have led to an increase in SGBV. In some regions, frequent conflicts and violence in relation to dowry demands, sometimes as a result of loss of income due to COVID-19, have been reported.

Societies, including governments, invoke the specter of violence and harassment to keep women, girls, non-binary and gender diverse people in line, especially those of us that challenge oppressive power systems, such as women human rights defenders, as well as lesbian, bisexual, and transgender women. In addition, the sexual abuse of girls, particularly by fathers or other relatives, constitutes another form of violence endemic the world over.

The current COVID-19 crisis threatens to roll back achievements made in the fight against GBV, both due to reductions in prevention, protection, and social services, and due to increasing rates of violence. Access to sexual and reproductive health-care services as well as hotlines, shelters, and legal aid have been scaled back leaving those experiencing violence with resources to turn to. The heightened risk of GBV is experienced not only by women, girls, non-binary, and gender diverse people, forced to "shelter in place" with abusive intimate partners or family members, but also by frontline health workers and community volunteers who are activating in response to the pandemic. In some countries, there have been increases in purchases of arms and ammunition during the pandemic, further increasing the risks of violence.

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<sup>64</sup> Secretary-General. Paragraph 45.

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GBV occurs in all aspects of the lives of women, girls, non-binary, and gender diverse people, including within the workplace. Following years of advocacy by feminist and labor movements, the International Labor Organization recently adopted Convention 190 concerning violence and harassment in the world of work. When implemented, this will be a powerful tool for movements all over the world to end GBV and harassment in the world of work.

### *Harmful Practices*

Child, early, and forced marriage is a harmful practice, a violation of children's human rights and an extreme form of gender inequality that continues to rob millions of girls around the world of their childhood. While boys are also married as children, child, early, and forced marriage disproportionately affects girls. No region is on track to end child, early, and forced marriage by 2030. According to UNFPA, COVID-19 will disrupt efforts to end child marriage, potentially resulting in an additional 13 million child marriages taking place between 2020 and 2030 that could otherwise have been averted.<sup>65</sup>

Child, early, and forced marriage or unions result from complex social, cultural, political, and economic drivers. Fundamentally, it is a result of patriarchy and social norms that see the proper place of women and girls within the domestic sphere, as well as the desire to control female sexuality.

Factors that increase vulnerability to child, early, and forced marriage or unions include poverty and insecurity stemming from climate change, natural disasters, armed conflict, or forced displacement. For example, families living in poverty may view marriage as the best way to secure their daughters' futures and reduce economic pressures on the family.

Given the complex and interlinked causes and consequences of child, early, and forced marriage, the most effective policy and program interventions take a holistic approach, placing girls and their empowerment and transformational societal change at the center.

Female genital mutilation (FGM) - or the excision or cutting of part or all external female genitalia for nonmedical reasons - is a gross violation of a women and girls' human rights. This harmful practice is often performed without the consent of the girl, violating her right to bodily autonomy and sexual health. UNFPA predicts that due to the disruption of programs to prevent female genital mutilation in response to COVID-19, 2 million additional female genital mutilation cases may occur over the next decade that could have been averted.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> UNFPA. <https://www.unfpa.org/pcm/node/24174>. Accessed 12 May 2021.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

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As the practice has gained more awareness, many countries have opted to medicalize the procedure. This has been thought to address the medical risks associated with FGM, but it does not address the fundamental human rights violation. The process may be “safer” under trained medical care, but it is still a violation of girls’ right to bodily autonomy.

At the heart of FGM are patriarchal social norms and gender stereotypes regarding women and girls' sexuality, including, for example, a demand for girls’ virginity prior to marriage or “protection” of women and girls’ chastity. In order to avoid stigmatization and rejection from their communities, girls may even desire to undergo the procedure.

### *Sexual and Reproductive Rights*

Since the Beijing Platform for Action and the International Conference on Population and Development one year before, the international community has seen significant progress with regards to women and girls’ reproductive rights, such as the groundbreaking referendum on abortion in May 2018 in Ireland and the decriminalization of abortion in Argentina in December 2020.

However, we continue to see new threats, including to the gains once considered solid. For example, mandatory waiting periods or so-called “conscientious objection” laws make access to abortion care a right on paper only and not in reality, especially for the most marginalized women and girls. These laws reveal the patronizing and misogynistic thinking of the state that tells women they cannot be trusted to make their own decisions or that their right to bodily autonomy can only be respected only so long as it does not bother anyone else. Some conservative national and sub-national governments used the cover of the COVID-19 pandemic to attempt to further limit abortion by deeming it non-essential and / or passing legal restriction on abortion care.

Despite the inclusion of reproductive rights in the 2030 Agenda, governments refused to commit to sexual rights. Such an omission not only violates human rights, but also impedes discussions on altering regressive practices and social norms that prevent the full realization of gender equality. There is a need to move beyond the binary understanding of gender and acknowledge the freedom of self-identification of gender for all.

Systems to track and make public allocation for gender equality and women’s empowerment is the indicator for SDG 5c is also an indicator of Global Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation (GPDEC). The monitoring report of 2018 indicates that only 19% of partner countries have a comprehensive tracking system. Monitoring and reporting in this indicator is

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essential for effective, efficient, and equitable financing on gender equality. However, most countries’ voluntary national review reports in HLPF lack reporting progress in it.

### *Access to resources*

Women and girl’s access to financial services, including credit, is limited by a number of factors, including discrimination, lack of formal credit history, inability to offer collateral, high interest rates (including by microcredit organizations), and policies requiring spousal consent.

Girls and women are also less likely to be connected to the internet and own a phone compared to men and boys.<sup>67</sup> With the sudden need to increase the digital aspects of everyday work, due to COVID-19 pandemic, lack of access to new technologies and digital services are affecting women and girls disproportionately with regard to their education, work, and health and safety. When they do have access to these technologies, women and girls are disproportionately affected by technology-related gender-based violence that has adverse consequences both online and on ground. Women in public life, including activists, politicians, and journalists, are frequent targets of this violence which is intended to stifle their free expression.

### ***Illustrative Interlinkages***

Care and domestic work - predominantly provided by women - sustains economies, communities, and families and yet is mostly invisible, unappreciated, and underpaid. Domestic workers, including migrant domestic workers (SDG 10), are critical, essential workers at this time and continue to be on the frontline of the pandemic.

However, labor rights (SDG 8) have been significantly violated during this time with many domestic workers fired without compensation. For migrant domestic workers whose migration status is tied to their employment, unemployment is particularly risky as they may not be able to return home due to travel restrictions and / or lack of funds thus increasing their risk of entering into an irregular status.<sup>68</sup>

For some live-in domestic workers, they have been required to work longer hours, often without additional compensation, and some have had their mobility severely restricted and curtailed by their employers, government-mandated lockdowns, or both.<sup>69</sup> For live-in domestic

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<sup>67</sup> UN Women. Turning promises into action: Gender equality in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. (2018). Page 101.

<sup>68</sup> Caribbean Migration Consultations. “How Does COVID-19 Impact Migrant Domestic Workers?” <https://caribbeanmigration.org/blog/how-does-covid-19-impact-migrant-domestic-workers>. Accessed 24 April 2021.

<sup>69</sup> WIEGO. “Domestic workers are on the frontline of this pandemic, and at risk.” <https://www.wiego.org/blog/domestic-workers-are-frontline-pandemic-and-risk>. Accessed 24 April 2021.

workers that lost their employment, they also lost their homes (SDG 11) exposing them to additional health and safety risks, including exploitation of labor.

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, many domestic workers lacked access to any social protection programs, including unemployment insurance and health care (SDG 1). Moreover, often because of the informal nature of their work, many domestic workers, especially migrant domestic workers, do not have access to health care (SDG 3) and experience situations of violence and harassment, particularly sexual violence (SDG 16).

### ***Recommendations***

We recommend that governments at the national and sub-national level:

#### *Gender-based Violence and Harmful Practices*

- In response to the current COVID-19 crisis, designate GBV prevention and response services as essential and ensure that women's centers, shelters, domestic violence helplines, legal aid, and other critical services, continue to operate and expand where needed. Partner with and provide direct support to feminist, women, and youth-led networks and organizations providing GBV services.
- Ratify and domesticate ILO Convention 190 on violence and harassment in the world of work.
- Implement the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women and its Committee's General Recommendation 35 on gender-based violence against women, as well as regional conventions addressing gender-based violence.
- Enact and / or strengthen national laws and policies that reach beyond criminalization to comprehensively address sexual and gender-based violence, including domestic and intimate partner violence, as well as violence and abuse committed online. Ensure that these processes and facilities are accessible to people with disabilities.
- Train all health providers to address GBV and harmful practices to ensure that needed services are available, accessible, acceptable, and of quality for all without stigma or discrimination.
- Take urgent action to end harmful FGM especially in high-prevalance countries and take a clear and explicit stance against FGM and its medicalization, in line with the UN's "zero tolerance" position.
- Recognize, plan for, and protect against the increased risk of GBV and the breakdown of social and governmental frameworks during humanitarian and other global crises.
- Ensure that women enter marriage with their full and free consent and that they can leave marriages safely and legally with special consideration paid to custody, property, and distribution of financial resources.

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- Train members of the judicial system – including lawyers and judges – in recognizing and responding to gender-based violence. Provide sufficient training to public prosecutors and police on standards of criminal investigations, particularly in relation to working with survivors of gender-based violence.

### *Sexual and Reproductive Rights*

- Adopt a systemic and sustained human rights and justice approach that addresses the root causes of sexual and reproductive right violations and challenges the efficacy of punitive policies that further disenfranchise and criminalize marginalized peoples.
- Provide comprehensive sexuality education within and beyond school as a necessary tool for tackling gender inequality, gender stereotypes, empowering women and girls, ending child, early, and forced marriage and FGM, as well as eradicating all forms of GBV.

### *Access to Services and Resources*

- Ensure economic justice for women, including their right to control, own, pass on, and inherit property.
- Uphold women and girls' unrestricted access to information and communications technologies, not only as users of technology but also as creators, which is crucial for access to sexual and reproductive health information and for the sexual expression and pleasure of women, adolescents, girls and trans and non-binary people in all our diversity.

### *Participation and Leadership*

- Promote and ensure representation of people of diverse sexual orientations, gender identities and expressions, as well as of diverse racial, religious, and ethnic groups and people with disabilities in social, political, and economic spheres.

### *Financing for gender equality*

- Ensure allocation and tracking of budget for gender equality in every sector to achieve substantive equality in reality. Mainstream gender-responsive budgeting into national budgeting and audit systems.

## **Sustainable Development Goal 6: Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all**

### *Key Data*

- Fewer than 50 countries have laws or policies that specifically mention women's participation for rural sanitation or water resources management.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> UN Water. Summary Progress update 2021: SDG 6 - water and sanitation for all. March 2021.

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- 70% of schools in least developed countries have challenges in providing basic hygiene facilities for students.<sup>71</sup>
- Women and girls are responsible for water collection in 8 out of 10 households with water off premises, severely limiting their ability to pursue education, employment, or leisure, and exposing them to violence.<sup>72</sup>
- Globally, 3 billion people lack access to basic hand-washing facilities in their homes and 1 billion people have limited access to water due to irregular public water supplies and frequent interruptions of service.<sup>73</sup>

### ***Structural Barriers to Progress and Gendered Dimensions***

With the COVID-19 crisis, the lack of water puts many populations at greater risk for infection. Public health experts across the world advise people to significantly increase the amount of times people wash their hands every day. This disparity is one of the reasons that poor and marginalized communities are at even greater risk from COVID-19.

In addition, some governments are using the economic crisis caused by COVID-19 as an excuse to push through efforts to privatize water services.<sup>74</sup> Moreover, IFIs and even UN agencies are also using the COVID-19 crisis as cover for pushing private sector financing or public-private-partnerships.<sup>75</sup> If implemented, these privatization efforts, at the hand of multinational corporations, will have disastrous impacts on women and people in remote, marginalized, or poor communities whose access to water will reduce while their costs will rise.

### *Gender and Water and Sanitation*

Inadequate access to safe, reliable water and improved sanitation, including for menstrual hygiene management, disproportionately impacts women and girls. According to UN Women, 785 million people did not have access to basic drinking water services in 2017.<sup>76</sup> In 80% of households that did not have a source of safe drinking water on site, women and girls bore sole responsibility for water collection.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> UN Women.

<https://www.unwomen.org/-/media/headquarters/attachments/sections/library/publications/2020/progress-on-the-sustainable-development-goals-the-gender-snapshot-2020-en.pdf?la=en&vs=127>. Accessed 15 May 2021.

<sup>72</sup> UN Water. <https://www.unwater.org/water-facts/gender/>. Accessed 15 May 2021.

<sup>73</sup> World Resources Institute. "Combating the Coronavirus Without Clean Water."

<https://www.wri.org/blog/2020/04/coronavirus-water-scarcity-hand-washing>. Accessed 10 May 2020.

<sup>74</sup> McDonald, David, and Susan Spronk. "COVID-19 has decimated water systems globally, but privatization is not the answer."

<https://theconversation.com/covid-19-has-decimated-water-systems-globally-but-privatization-is-not-the-answer-155689>. Accessed 24 April 2021.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

<sup>76</sup> UN Women. Progress on the Sustainable Goals: The Gender Snapshot. (2019). Page 12.

<sup>77</sup> UN Women, Turning Promises into Action, p. 104.

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In addition to burdens on women and girls' time and labor, the gendered impacts of inadequate access to water and sanitation include decreased school attendance, productivity, earnings, employment opportunities, violations of the privacy of women and girls, diminished safety and health, and heightened risk of violence, including for women with disabilities.

### *Participation and Leadership*

Water management decisions are not gender neutral. Differences and inequalities between women and men influence how individuals and communities use and make decisions about water use and access and respond to changes in regulation of water use and access.

Empowering women and adolescent girls, including from leadership positions to access, protect, and prescribe sustainable consumptive uses for clean and safe water and effective recycling of wastewater, can enable women and adolescent girls to claim their power while also improving community health.

### ***Illustrative Interlinkages***

Conflict (SDG 16) impedes the ability of women and girls who live in conflict areas to exercise their human rights to water and sanitation.<sup>78</sup> Warring parties in some countries have targeted water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) systems, impacting millions of people. Water and sanitation infrastructure is frequently left unmaintained during conflicts, particularly in areas with high levels of violence.

This lack of access to WASH further exposes conflict-affected communities, particularly women and girls, to preventable diseases, including cholera and diarrheal disease (SDG 3). Since women and girls carry primary responsibility for water collection, this further exposes them to increased risk of violence (SDG 5).

### ***Recommendations***

We recommend that governments at the national and sub-national levels:

#### *Human Rights*

- Recognize access to water as a human right and ratify, domesticate and implement international human rights instruments related to water and sanitation.

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<sup>78</sup> Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF), Policy Brief 3: Action Coalition on Bodily Autonomy and Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights, February 2021. <https://www.peacewomen.org/sites/default/files/Action%20Coalitions%20and%20WPS%20Policy%20Brief%203.pdf>



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- Ensure access to water and sanitation through public, adequate and community-owned services and reject pressure to privatize water services, recognizing water and sanitation as human rights rather than commodities.
- Protect the human rights of land, environmental, water, and women human rights defenders, including the right to information, freedom of assembly and speech, as well as protection from harassment, intimidation, and violence.

### *Public Spaces*

- Ensure safe, reliable, accessible sanitation facilities at school, workplaces, public spaces and other institutions taking into account the specific needs of women and girls.
- Increase safe sanitation services in rural areas as a priority, bearing in mind that access to safe sanitation services is much lower in rural areas than in urban areas.

### *Policy Coherence*

- Incorporate a WASH, gender, and age-dimension into cross-cutting sector policies and strategies, including for food security, nutrition and health, as well as during emergencies and armed conflicts.

### *Menstrual Hygiene Management*

- Incorporate menstrual health education into school curricula and ensure the availability of infrastructure and gender-responsive facilities, such as private washrooms. Sensitize and increase knowledge about menstruation as a healthy, natural, and normal part of development and address the stigma surrounding menstruation and menstrual hygiene.
- Take into account the specific needs of women and girls regarding sanitation services, in particular for menstrual hygiene, along the decision chain and in the design of facilities.

### *Participation and Leadership*

- Encourage the leadership of girls and women and gender mainstreaming in collaboration and coordination between national level agencies involved with the integrated water resources mechanism, with particular focus on transboundary water resources.
- Raise the participation of girls and young women in all aspects of decision-making concerning planning and installations of water and sanitation projects, including strengthening local decision-making participation of women in WASH committees. It is important to foster institutional changes that will decentralize regulation of water use and access and enhance the role of women in community management, building on their expertise.
- Ensure that community-owned water services are adequately resourced, that the people who run them are trained and supported, and that gender equality is promoted throughout.

## **Sustainable Development Goal 7: Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all**

### ***Key Data***

- Close to 4 million people die prematurely each year from illnesses attributable to household air pollution from incomplete combustion of firewood and kerosene, mostly women and children.<sup>79</sup>
- Almost 1 billion people do not have access to electricity.<sup>80</sup> 3 billion people do not have access to clean cooking, relying on solid biomass, coal, or kerosene.<sup>81</sup>

### ***Structural Barriers to Progress and Gendered Dimensions***

With the widespread implementation of shelter in place orders, access to reliable and affordable electricity and appliances has never been more important. And yet nearly 1 billion people do not have access to electricity, while 3 billion people do not have access to clean cooking, relying on solid biomass, coal, or kerosene instead.

This is especially devastating for women and girls since patriarchal gender norms put the onus of domestic and care work on them, including cooking, heating, and gathering fuel. In the context of the pandemic, unpaid care work is increasing. For people living in energy poverty this includes added difficulties and stress surrounding food and fuel procurement, storage, and preparation, and the increased demands around cleanliness and hygiene.

Lack of access to electricity, heating, and clean cooking fuel does not just increase unpaid care work, it is also deadly because it increases exposure to indoor air pollution (IAP), which disproportionately impacts women and girls. As the COVID-19 pandemic spreads in areas with high rates of IAP, and with the added effect of shelter in place orders, we may see mortality rates climb for women and girls.

Also, inadequate and unreliable access to affordable, efficient, and sustainable energy services hinders the social and economic resilience of women. For example, women forced to procure energy individually because they cannot access the national grid often incur high costs of running small-scale businesses, which points to a role for small-scale, locally controlled renewable energy systems. The lack of electricity may also be deadly in areas where hospitals and health clinics do not have reliable energy access. For example, in some parts of sub-Saharan Africa, only 28% of health facilities have access to reliable electricity.

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<sup>79</sup> World Health Organization (2018)

<https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/household-air-pollution-and-health>.

<sup>80</sup> Global Sustainable Development Report. 2019.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

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While women and girls labor to meet these demands and women energy entrepreneurs - an important link to decentralized cleaner, more accessible energy - struggle to survive, fossil fuel companies are using this opportunity to consolidate their power and carve out special protections and benefits for themselves. In the US, for example, the fossil fuel industry received USD 10.4 billion - 15.2 billion in financial relief, which was then supplemented by indirect support, such as the purchasing of oil and gas bonds by the US Federal Reserve.<sup>82</sup> The industry has lobbied for direct financial support, deregulation, and even criminalization of protests.<sup>83</sup> Many of the interventions these companies seek directly contradict the science-based recommendations of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change and would violate the human rights of workers and land, environmental, and human rights defenders.<sup>84</sup>

### ***Illustrative Interlinkages***

When families and homes lack access to reliable energy, women and girls fill in the gaps with their time and labor. As a result, women and girls have less time to dedicate to their education (SDG 4), rest, or income generating activities (SDGs 1 and 8). They may also experience increased safety risks associated when they have to gather fuel (SDG 5). Moreover, women and girls’ health is at risk from some energy sources (SDG 3). Health risks include burns, injuries, or chronic headaches, as well as other illnesses associated with household air pollution, such as heart disease, stroke, or pneumonia.<sup>85</sup>

In addition, as Energia highlights: “The pandemic is moving beyond a global health crisis and morphing into a labor market, social and economic crisis, posing a serious threat to women’s employment and livelihoods, especially in the small business and informal sectors that already face energy access challenges.”<sup>86</sup>

### ***Recommendations***

We recommend that governments at the national and sub-national levels:

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<sup>82</sup> Public Citizen.

<https://www.citizen.org/article/bailed-out-and-propped-up/?eType=EmailBlastContent&eId=94926f68-3c0f-462d-87c9-ae6d05950810>. Accessed 19 May 2021.

<sup>83</sup> Influence Map.

<https://influencemap.org/report/The-Coronavirus-Crisis-and-Climate-Lobbying-23249d39450ff19b441090a6a50174eb>. Accessed 19 May 2021.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid.

<sup>85</sup> World Health Organization. “Burning Opportunity: Clean Household Energy for Health, Sustainable Development, and Wellbeing of Women and Children.” 2016.

<sup>86</sup> Energia. “Gender and energy at center stage in COVID-19 battle: Powering a more gender equal recovery.” <https://www.energia.org/document/gender-and-energy-at-center-stage-in-covid-19-battle-powering-a-more-gender-equal-recovery/>. Accessed 24 April 2021.

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- Prioritize investment in a just transition towards low-carbon, renewable energy infrastructure and technology that is community-owned and democratically controlled, over fossil fuels, while ensuring compliance with ethical and human rights standards and sourcing.
- Increase access to accessible, affordable, reliable, safe, and modern energy services in rural areas and increase access to electricity, using renewable energy sources.
- Uphold energy democracy and energy justice, where energy is owned and governed by communities, not corporations. Reverse top-down, market-based approaches for energy production, distribution, and control so that women, households, and communities can drive energy interventions and make decisions that work for them.
- Take a gender-responsive, human rights-based approach to all aspects of energy planning and policymaking to actively support and advance the human rights of women and girls in all their diversity.
- Invest in research and program evaluations to better understand the links between clean energy interventions and gender-based violence prevention, particularly in humanitarian settings.
- Eliminate all subsidies for the fossil-fuel industry and biomass energy. Redirect these funds to essential public services and social protection programs.
- Make sustainable energy access and clean cooking solutions part of COVID-19 recovery plans in recognition of the connections between gender equality, energy justice, climate change, and the exploitation of natural resources. Design these plans with women and girls directly to ensure their suitability and sustainability.
- Ensure that actors at all levels, local, regional and national, are accountable through developing and implementing their energy and climate plans
- Provide financial, political, and legal support to women's energy enterprises and entrepreneurs to guarantee they survive the COVID-19 crisis.
- Guarantee access to electricity during the pandemic through flexible payment plans, fee waivers, or cash transfers targeted at the poorest and most marginalized communities and women.
- Quickly ensure access to electricity for all healthcare facilities through sustainable sources, such as mini-grids and off-grid systems.
- Protect the human rights of land, environmental and women human rights defenders, including the right to information, freedom of assembly and speech, as well as protection from harassment, intimidation, violence.

## **Sustainable Development Goal 8: Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all**

### ***Key Data***

- Employment losses in 2020 were higher for women than for men.<sup>87</sup>
- Young women were more than twice as likely as young men to be jobless and not in education or training globally in 2019. Nearly 1/3 of young women in 2019 were not in education, employment, or training.<sup>88</sup>
- Prior to the pandemic, globally, 61% of people working were doing so informally, while in low-income countries, 92% of women workers were employed in the informal sector.

### ***Structural Barriers to Progress and Gendered Dimensions***

The COVID-19 pandemic has reinforced that we need a systemic shift to a more sustainable economy that works for both people and the planet. It has become increasingly clear that endless economic growth is neither feasible nor desirable in a world with limited resources, and a severely degraded environment. In practice, when left to a free market economy, economic growth will never be sustainable, inclusive, or provide work and livelihoods for all. Instead, big business will become increasingly wealthy and local livelihoods and jobs lost as they fail to compete.

Neoliberal capitalist economic systems exploit and devalue women's work as a source of competitive advantage, including lower pay, casualization and informalization of women workers. Trade policies, such as investor-state dispute settlement provisions, inhibit governments from creating pro-poor policies that could benefit women and girls in all their diversity. Moreover, after the 2008 economic crash, governments failed to take action to reform the systems that failed in the first place. As PSI describes "Instead of expansionary fiscal policies to create more *and decent* jobs, including in the health sector, and universal social protection, governments embarked on a spree of austerity measures."<sup>89</sup>

Debt repayment strategies and conditionalities, in line with the neoliberal economic model, include practices that exacerbate inequalities. In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic these strategies, including reduction in social protection coverage, privatization of public services, and

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<sup>87</sup> International Labor Organization. "How women are being left behind in the quest for decent work for all." <https://ilostat.ilo.org/how-women-are-being-left-behind-in-the-quest-for-decent-work-for-all/>. Accessed 24 April 2021.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid.

<sup>89</sup> PSI. "Public health, once and for all!"

<https://publicservices.international/resources/news/public-health-br-once-and-for-all-?id=10648&lang=en>. Accessed 24 April 2021.

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labor flexibilization reforms, force women and girls to fill in the gaps in services and decrease their access to decent work.

Public health containment measures force informal workers to stop working or adapt their working methods in ways that lower their incomes or put them at risk of COVID-19 transmission or violence, harassment, or arrest by state authorities. Domestic workers - many of whom are also migrants - are often unprotected by basic labor rights, such as paid sick leave. Some have been required to work more and without proper protection, while others have been told not to work and have not received compensation.

Women subsidize economies and bear the brunt of austerity through their unpaid care and domestic work, which limits their time to pursue education, economic, or leisure opportunities, and may be physically arduous. The neoliberal capitalist system treats women and girls in all their diversity as an endless and free resource.

Feminist critiques of current economic models have highlighted the accepted, invisible spheres that capitalism depends upon for its continuation, namely the unpaid care and domestic work performed by women and girls. For example, feminists have criticized the inadequacy of GDP because it ignores unpaid care and domestic work and measures only the value of goods and services produced in a country in a single year.

In addition, feminists have shown that the current macroeconomic situation undermines women and girls' rights due to: narrow, profit-driven, macroeconomic goals that fail to take human rights into account; gender biases in macroeconomic data collection, analysis, and policy making; insufficient focus on decent work; failure to maximize fiscal space for women's rights and gender equality; and absence of women's voices in political and economic decision making, such as the right to unionize and undertake collective bargaining.

Economic systems require radical structural changes that rethink goals of growth and stability and assumptions of gender and political neutrality to support, rather than undermine, a world of equality and justice. This requires systematic changes, including in fiscal policy, expenditure policy, and labor market policies, and addressing informal economies and care work.

Even before the COVID-19 crisis, feminists knew that care and domestic workers were essential. From caring for children and the elderly to cooking and cleaning, domestic workers provide the reproductive care that enables economies to function. However, they frequently work without benefits or access to social protection programs. ILO Convention 189 guarantees domestic workers' rights to minimum wage, rest, and to choose their own residence. However, the

Convention is insufficiently ratified and incorporated into domestic law to protect domestic workers.

### ***Illustrative Interlinkages***

Too often in the COVID-19 pandemic, essential workers have been lauded in public while made to work in unsafe conditions, essentially being forced to choose between their health or their and their family's livelihoods. For example, health workers - 70% of whom are women - have often had to work without sufficient personal protective equipment, supplies, or resources resulting in large numbers of COVID-19 related deaths.<sup>90</sup>

Essential workers are not confined to health workers, however. In many places, essential workers, such as farm workers, grocery workers, or people who work in food processing, are often from racial or ethnic minorities because of pre-existing inequalities that have now been exacerbated by the pandemic (SDGs 2 and 10).

### ***Recommendations***

We recommend that governments at the national and sub-national levels:

#### *Legal and Policy Frameworks*

- Ratify and domesticate all ILO Conventions, including ILO Convention 189 on domestic workers and ILO Convention 190 on violence and harassment in the world of work.
- Respect and enhance the rights to collective bargaining and freedom of association.
- Strengthen national implementation and enforcement of legal policy frameworks on child labor covering rescue / withdrawal, rehabilitation, monitoring and prevention via increased resource and budgetary allocation, and capacity building.
- Empower workers with protected whistleblowing mechanisms to raise issues, including minimum wage standards.
- Promote supportive environments for all parents and caregivers through remote working possibilities, flexible hours, provision of day care, as well increased flexibility in leave and efforts to ensure supportive transition to the workplace.
- Incorporate care work as formal work, including by expanding social protection coverage to care workers.
- In the face of harms caused by mining and extractivism, protect and defend the human rights of women and girls in all their diversity.

#### *Participation and Leadership*

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<sup>90</sup> The Lancet. "The plight of essential workers during the COVID-19 pandemic."  
[https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736\(20\)31200-9](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(20)31200-9).

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- Address decent work in a holistic way that includes transforming socio-economic constraints, as well as challenging existing gender roles, including by ensuring the participation of women and girls in all their diversity in decision-making at all levels.
- Address the multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination that prevent women from participating in leadership positions and decision-making spaces, including by enabling and developing measures to address women's disproportionate burden of care and domestic work.

### *Children and Young People*

- Create decent jobs for young people and livelihood opportunities in rural areas, including by enhancing skills / vocational training programs and connecting young people to employment upon completing the program.
- Remove barriers to transition from school and training into decent work and increase access to financial services, as well as financial literacy training for youth, particularly adolescent girls and young women.
- Adopt gender-sensitive measures to address specific forms of child labor, including developing a gender sensitive list of hazardous work, that includes not only the work of boys, but the work of girls as well.

### *COVID-19 Pandemic*

- Create feminist COVID-19 recovery policies and packages, including financial support for all workers in the formal and informal economy; moratoriums on rent, utilities, mortgage, and loan payments; access to paid sick leave, paid child and family care, and parental leave; unemployment payments; and food vouchers and distribution programs.

## **Sustainable Development Goal 9: Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization and foster innovation**

### ***Key Data***

- Though 93% of the global population live within reach of a mobile-broadband signal, only 54% of people in the world use the internet. Costs and lack of necessary skills are two of the biggest factors explaining why people do not use the internet.<sup>91</sup>
- While only 58 percent of men use the internet, the percentage falls to 48% among women.<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>91</sup> UN Statistics. <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/report/2020/goal-09/>. Accessed 24 April 2021.

<sup>92</sup> International Telecommunication Union. <https://www.itu.int/myitu/-/media/Publications/2020-Publications/Measuring-digital-development-2019.pdf>. Accessed 20 May 2021.



***Structural Barriers to Progress and Gendered Dimensions***

Infrastructure reflects patriarchal norms. Governments and societies have designed spaces and infrastructure to meet the needs of men's lives while ignoring the realities of the lives of women and girls in all their diversity. The design of cities is determined by and reproduces the hierarchical relationships found in patriarchal societies where some activities are given greater value than others.

For example, in many cities, the movement of private vehicles has been prioritized over public transport, and roadways are designed to give priority to routes dominated by men who tend to have a linear commute during traditional work "rush hours." Conversely, women incorporate more care work in their journeys, which are shorter, more frequent and diverse, and often made on public transport outside of commuting hours, making travel more costly and time consuming.<sup>93</sup> In addition, specific attention must be given to the design of housing schemes that respond to various living arrangements and needs such as those of single mothers, survivors of violence and abuse, and the elderly.

Small scale farmers, most of whom are women in rural areas, are not able to access markets due to poor roads and limited access to technology as basic as weather forecasts. As a result, their produce often goes bad and they are unable to sell it. Improved roads connecting rural areas to market centers would increase their income and productivity.

***Illustrative Interlinkages***

Even prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, the gender digital divide was a pressing issue, but it has taken on life-saving urgency as services, information, education and employment opportunities move online (SDGs 3, 4, and 8).

Nothing in our world is gender neutral, including ICTs. Patriarchal norms continue to limit women and girls' access to and use of technology. This impact may be outright - preventing women and girls from owning mobile phones, for example - as well as more indirect. For example, for people with limited access to electricity (SDG 7), they may need the time, resources, and societal permission to go to another location to charge their phones. These are all things women have in shorter supply than men.

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<sup>93</sup> Criado Perez, Caroline. "Invisible Women: Data Bias in a World Designed for Men." New York: Abrams Press. 2019.

Women and girls themselves will be critical in ending the gender digital divide and creating an internet that works for women rather than reproducing social inequalities (SDG 10). In order to do that, women and girls need to have access to and encouragement to pursue education and career opportunities in STEM.

### ***Recommendations***

We recommend that governments at the national and sub-national levels:

- Actively involve feminist, women's, and girl-led organizations in the design, planning and implementation of all infrastructure projects in order to guarantee that their needs and rights guide the projects and to generate a model of sustainable and life-oriented infrastructures.
- Ensure that COVID-19 recovery plans and all new infrastructure projects take an ecosystem-based approach as defined by the Convention on Biological Diversity and are gender-responsive.
- Use COVID-19 recovery funds to support women-owned small-scale enterprises.
- Treat the internet as a public good and expand access through programs specifically targeted to reduce inequalities.
- Reduce the digital gap in rural, isolated areas by using information and communication technologies (ICT) powered by solar energy systems.

## **Sustainable Development Goal 10: Reduce inequality within and among countries**

### ***Key Data***

- According to OXFAM: “The world’s ten richest men have seen their combined wealth increase by half a trillion dollars since the pandemic began —more than enough to pay for a COVID-19 vaccine for everyone and to ensure no one is pushed into poverty by the pandemic.”<sup>94</sup>
- According to UNDP, for countries in the Global North there are 55 hospital beds, more than 30 doctors and 81 nurses for every 10,000 people. For countries in the Global South for the same number of people there are 7 beds, 2.5 doctors and 6 nurses.<sup>95</sup>

<sup>94</sup> OXFAM. “Mega-rich recoup COVID-losses in record-time yet billions will live in poverty for at least a decade.” <https://www.oxfam.org/en/press-releases/mega-rich-recoup-covid-losses-record-time-yet-billions-will-live-poverty-east>. Accessed 24 April 2021.

<sup>95</sup> UNDP. <https://feature.undp.org/coronavirus-vs-inequality/>. Accessed 24 April 2021.

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- Some estimates indicate that potentially up to USD 36 trillion is currently stashed in tax havens.<sup>96</sup> In contrast, recent studies have estimated that completely ending world hunger by 2030 would cost USD 330 billion in total – USD 33 billion per year.<sup>97</sup>
- The Inter-agency Task Force on Financing for Development's (IATF) 2021 Financing for Development report finds that official development assistance (ODA) accounted for only USD 155 billion or 0.3% of donor countries' gross national income in 2019, less than half of the committed 0.7%.<sup>98</sup>
- The funding gap of the ACT-Accelerator, to which COVAX (COVID-19 Vaccines Global Access) belongs, in February 2021 was still USD 22.9 billion of 33.2 billion, or more than two thirds.<sup>99</sup>
- Debt service costs in developing countries have risen steadily over the past decade. They now absorb 25% of tax revenue in developing countries overall, and even close to 30% in Small Island Developing States.<sup>100</sup>

### ***Structural Barriers to Progress***

SDG 10 gets to the heart of the systemic barriers preventing us from achieving the 2030 Agenda since the multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination they perpetuate create inequalities between and within countries down to the household level. The COVID-19 pandemic and its related crises has made this viscerally clear. As OXFAM explains: “While anyone can catch the virus, the equality ends there.”

In order to realize sustainable and inclusive growth and reduce inequalities of outcomes, it is necessary to ensure equal opportunities of education, healthcare, and employment, and to revise discriminatory laws, policies, and practices. And this begins with universal access to a COVID-19 vaccine that is treated as a global public good.

If we want to reduce poverty in an inclusive way, it is essential to create a different kind of economic system that rectifies economic inequality. This involves improving the regulation and monitoring of financial markets and institutions and encouraging development assistance and foreign direct investment to regions where the need is urgent.

Regarding inequalities between countries, it is necessary to guarantee equal economic opportunities through migration and mobility of people, and adjustment of international financial

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<sup>96</sup> Nicholas Shaxson. 2019. “Tackling Tax Havens.” <https://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/fandd/2019/09/tackling-global-tax-havens-shaxon.htm>. Accessed 24 April 2021.

<sup>97</sup> [https://ceres2030.org/shorthand\\_story/donors-must-double-aid-to-end-hunger-and-spend-it-wisely/](https://ceres2030.org/shorthand_story/donors-must-double-aid-to-end-hunger-and-spend-it-wisely/). Accessed 14 May 2021.

<sup>98</sup> <https://developmentfinance.un.org/2021-financing-sustainable-development-report-preparatory-materials>.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid.

services, and to redistribute financial resources through official development assistance and foreign direct investment. As for inequalities within a country, progressive taxation and transparent fiscal expenditure can help redistribute income.

***Illustrative Interlinkages***

Pre-existing inequalities - such as marginalization, inadequate access to healthcare and potable water, limited information available in Indigenous languages, underrepresentation in decision-making bodies, and inattention to Indigenous Peoples in urban areas - exacerbated the effects of COVID-19 on Indigenous Peoples.<sup>101</sup>

Since the onset of the pandemic, these inequalities have only grown. The Special Rapporteur on the rights of Indigenous Peoples clearly described the intersecting structural barriers and inequalities Indigenous Peoples are experiencing:

“States of emergency are exacerbating the marginalisation of indigenous communities, and in the most extreme situations, militarisation of their territories is taking place.

Indigenous [P]eoples are being denied their freedom of expression and association, while business interests are invading and destroying their lands, territories and resources.

In some countries, consultations with [I]ndigenous [P]eoples and also environmental impact assessments are being abruptly suspended in order to force through megaprojects relating to agribusiness, mining, dams and infrastructure.

Indigenous [P]eoples who lose their lands and livelihoods are pushed further into poverty, higher rates of malnutrition, lack of access to clean water and sanitation, as well as exclusion from medical services, which in turn renders them particularly vulnerable to the disease.

But in the face and in the midst of such threats, the indigenous communities that have managed to best resist the COVID-19 pandemic are those that have achieved autonomy and self-government, which allows them to manage their lands, territories and resources, ensure food security through their traditional crops and traditional medicine.”<sup>102</sup> (SDGs 1, 2, 3, 6, 9, and 16)

<sup>101</sup> Annual report of the Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. A/HRC/46/72. January 2021.

<sup>102</sup> OHCHR. <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=25893&LangID=E>. Accessed 24 April 2021.

### ***Recommendations***

#### *Inequalities within countries*

- Guarantee and allocate public financing and resources for social protection systems and public social infrastructure aimed at eliminating inequalities of outcomes, such as through gender responsive and progressive budgets for gender equality, health, and education programs.
- Regulate and / or reverse privatization of public services and social protection systems to guarantee they remain a public good.
- Refuse trade and investment agreements that restrict countries from delivering social protection for all.
- Take action against inequalities of opportunities caused by income disparity and structural discrimination based on age, sexual orientation, gender identity, disability, race, ethnicity, religion, or region, by raising the income of the poor, especially women from marginalized social groups, including: young girls and older women, single mothers, women with disabilities, LGBTI+ communities, Indigenous Peoples, Afrodescendants, refugees, and others.
- Overturn discriminatory laws and policies to ensure substantive equality.
- Ensure equitable and just redistribution of resources through taxation, wage, and social protection policies.

#### *Inequalities between countries*

- Strengthen regulations and monitoring of global financial markets and institutions, ensure effective financing mechanisms to develop strategies, and accelerate implementation of poverty reduction policies.
- Enhance the representation of and give domestic policy space for developing countries in decision-making processes in international economic and financial institutions.
- Implement preferential treatment for developing countries in trade and economic prosperity policies to ensure the development of their employment frameworks and reducing poverty levels.
- Abolish the Investor-State Dispute Settlement (ISDS) which compromises states' regulatory capacities and ability to mobilize domestic resources.

#### *Data*

- Provide disaggregated, timely data at the national, regional, and global levels, to identify gaps and set plans to narrow inequalities.
- Invest in strengthening a pluralistic ecosystem of data, which collects, systematizes, analyzes, and disseminates quantitative and qualitative data in order to effectively monitor and evaluate potential disparities in access to social services, with full respect for confidentiality and privacy.

## **Sustainable Development Goal 11: Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable**

### ***Key Data***

- Over 90% of COVID-19 cases are occurring within urban areas.<sup>103</sup>
- According to the UN, the direct and indirect impacts of COVID-19 are increasing the number of people living in slums and worsening the quality of life and vulnerabilities for those already living in slums.<sup>104</sup>
- Women are overrepresented in slums in 80% of 59 countries in the Global South in which data are available though women and men are broadly equally likely to live in urban areas in general.<sup>105</sup>

### ***Structural Barriers to Progress and Gendered Dimensions***

While cities offer opportunities to women and girls, in terms of education and employment opportunities, often their urban experience is also one of insecurity, sexual harassment, and exclusion. Women in many cities face challenges accessing safe and secure housing, land rights, and land tenure, as well as services to meet their basic needs, including water, sanitation, and health care.

Women and girls in all their diversity have a right to access public spaces safely and without fear, but the barriers to exercising this right are myriad. For example, fear of violence and sexual assault or harassment, including femicide, limits the mobility of women and girls in all their diversity, which is not just physical, but also symbolic. When added to other factors of oppression such as an irregular administrative status, age, gender identity, sexual orientation, ethnicity, or disability status, exercising this right to full urban citizenship becomes even more restricted.

Ensuring women and girls' participation and safety in cities requires a gender transformative approach. This includes providing women and girls in all their diversity with the information, resources, and space to claim their rights and, together with the relevant stakeholders, actively transform their communities into safer, more inclusive places. A gender transformative approach includes designing future cities that are well-lit, well-planned, well-maintained, using universal design principles where women can claim space to participate as active citizens. It requires the active participation of women and girls in the governance of cities and in the design of urban policies and legislation.

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<sup>103</sup> UN Statistics. <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/report/2020/goal-11/>. Accessed 24 April 2021.

<sup>104</sup> UN. "Progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals. Advanced unedited copy." 2021. Paragraph 126.

<sup>105</sup> UN Women.

<https://www.unwomen.org/-/media/headquarters/attachments/sections/library/publications/2020/harsh-realities-marginalized-women-in-cities-of-the-developing-world-en.pdf?la=en&vs=747>. Accessed 15 May 2021.

It is necessary to address explicitly the underlying structural and political issues that jeopardize the safety of women and girls within cities and other settlements, as well as to aim to transform the pervasive social and cultural norms that allow for unequal power dynamics and gender-based violence.

Feminist development of space demands that persons must be at the center of the design and planning of human settlements giving greater prominence to and revaluing care and reproductive work, acknowledging that we are all interdependent: we are persons who are cared for and the persons who care.

### ***Illustrative Interlinkages***

The pre-existing inequalities slum dwellers lived in exacerbated the impact of COVID-19. As the UN explained: “Many of these urban residents already suffer from inadequate housing with limited or no access to basic infrastructure and services, including water, sanitation and waste management. Overcrowding of public transportation and limited health-care facilities have had a catastrophic effect on these communities, turning them into epicentres within epicentres. Many urban dwellers in the developing world work in the informal sector and are at high risk of losing their livelihoods as cities lock down.”<sup>106</sup> (SDGs 3, 6, 8, and 9)

### ***Recommendations***

#### *Public Spaces and Urban Planning*

- Make women and girls safe, including by recovering public spaces, ensuring better inter-connection between productive and reproductive activities, and fighting all types of gender-based violence in public spaces, including sexual assault and harassment.
- Rethink and redevelop human settlements, including cities, from a feminist perspective. Stop producing spaces from a productivist and mercantilist logic and start thinking about environments that prioritize the persons that use them in all their diversity.
- Integrate obligatory sustainable energy and energy efficiency into public, new and renovated buildings and streamline requirements for community power projects, ensuring transparency, participatory approaches, and gender parity in decision-making.

#### *Transportation*

- Incorporate human rights, and gender considerations into the planning processes and policy frameworks. Reflect the diversity of users and their contributions, rights, and needs in all programs and policies and ensure the meaningful participation of affected

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<sup>106</sup> UN Statistics. <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/report/2020/goal-11/>. Accessed 24 April 2021.

communities in the design, implementation, and monitoring and evaluation of transportation policies and programs.

- Provide services that recognize different mobility patterns, reduce overcrowded and unsafe routes, accommodate the movement of everyone, including women and girls with disabilities, provide service outside of peak hours, and use fare policies that allow for trip-chaining and multi-stop journeys.
- Acknowledge the key role of safe, accessible, and affordable transportation in women's access to increased opportunities in education, economic development, and participation in political and governance policy-setting and decision-making, and resource such transportation.

### *Participation and Leadership*

- Commit to forms of governance where cities and their citizens, including youth- and girl-led organizations and feminist and women's organizations, participate in decision-making on the planning of spaces and their management.

## **Sustainable Development Goal 12: Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns**

### *Key Data*

- Since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, G20 countries have committed nearly USD 278 billion to supporting fossil fuel energy as of April 2021.<sup>107</sup>
- According to the UN, annually an estimated 1/3 of all food produced – equivalent to 1.3 billion tons worth around USD1 trillion – goes to waste in the bins of consumers and retailers, or spoiling due to poor transportation and harvesting practices.<sup>108</sup>
- Over 2 billion people live in countries experiencing high water stress with particularly devastating impacts on women, girls, and marginalized communities who disproportionately bear the responsibility for gathering and managing water.<sup>109</sup>
- In 2020, the mass of all human-made things on Earth eclipsed the mass of all living organisms on Earth.<sup>110</sup>

### *Structural Barriers to Progress and Gendered Dimensions*

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<sup>107</sup> Energy Policy Tracker. <https://www.energypolicytracker.org/region/g20>. Accessed 24 April 2021.

<sup>108</sup> UN. <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/sustainable-consumption-production/>. Accessed 15 May 2021.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid.

<sup>110</sup> Elhacham et al., 2020. <https://www.nature.com/articles/s41586-020-3010-5>



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Current patterns and levels of consumption and production are clearly unsustainable, even without the projected growth in the world's human population to 9.7 billion in 2050. Four out of nine of our planetary limits were known to have been crossed four years ago.<sup>111</sup> Yet international organizations and governments have still not shown the political will and leadership to tackle this issue. Whilst lip service is paid to the problem, there is a decided lack of appetite for positive change - even for the removal of the perverse subsidies supporting unsustainable patterns of consumption and production.

The current dominant framework used to understand sustainable consumption and production gives primacy to efficiency and technological innovations, while the social aspects of development such as promoting people's rights and leaving no one behind have fallen off the table. Moreover, the prevailing bias towards the market under globalization and the even greater power being accumulated by corporations pose formidable challenges to sustainable consumption and production and sustainable development, in general.

While practicing sustainable consumption at the individual level is being promoted, corporations are not held accountable for their unsustainable consumption of resources or the violation of human rights in their production processes. The corporate capture of this agenda has resulted in policies that push the onus of sustainability on individuals while transferring the control of wealth, power and resources into the hands of corporations and absolving them of responsibility for their actions.

The use of economic growth, as measured by GDP, and neoliberal policies have fueled unsustainable production and trade, with corporations plundering the planet and using valuable natural resources, including water, free of charge and with impunity. To change this unsustainable production, we must replace this paradigm with new economies grounded in care, justice, human rights, sustainability, and ecological health.

Scientists are increasingly expressing concern about the way in which our planet is being decimated due to the existential threat of runaway consumption of limited resources. This is a man-made disaster, and a consequence of the current materialistic, consumerist lifestyle. We need action to move us from a throwaway society to one that systematically rethinks, reuses, recycles, recovers, and remakes products, materials, and services, returning to products that are made and bought to last, and replacing or banning polluting and non-biodegradable products, including plastics. We need to develop a culture of sufficiency, ensuring that we consume no more than is sustainable and equitable.

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<sup>111</sup> Scripps Institution of Oceanography. Jan 15, 2015. <https://scripps.ucsd.edu/news/earth-has-crossed-several-planetary-boundaries-thresholds-human-induced-environmental-changes>. Accessed 5 May 2020.

Our broken food systems are a prime example of unsustainable consumption and production, with monocultures destroying biodiversity and causing deforestation and industrial agriculture acting as a major source of climate change, pollution, and environmental degradation. The industrial food model needs to be replaced by local production, using regenerative methods, such as small-scale vegetable gardens for local communities and schools.

The shift towards “green” economies is an important part of increasing the sustainability of production. Evidence suggests that women and girls are being excluded from this shift though due to gender-segregated education, training, and employment patterns and discrimination.

In some countries, “sustainable” initiatives such as smart cities and “green” energy projects are being led jointly by governments and corporations through public-private partnerships ostensibly to promote sustainable consumption and production. In reality, however, these initiatives are grabbing lands and other resources from women farmers and Indigenous Peoples, further worsening their poverty, displacing them, and exposing them to other vulnerabilities.

Globally, women drive 70-80% of all consumer purchases through a combination of buying power and influence.<sup>112</sup> Studies have found that women are generally ‘greener’ and more sustainable than men in their buying patterns.<sup>113</sup> As we push for progress on sustainable consumption at the household level, women and girls will be key actors and their needs and preferences must be respected.

### ***Illustrative Interlinkages***

Girls and women, particularly in the Global South, are often the most affected by land degradation, declining soil fertility, unsustainable water use and overfishing, which result from unsustainable production and consumption (SDGs 13 and 14). They also are an important part of efforts to improve the sustainability of production and consumption in the Global North and South. Rural girls and women across the Global South play important roles in the agricultural sector and have critical knowledge of natural resource management, though their roles, rights, and knowledge differ to those of men (SDG 2).

Despite being excluded from many “green” initiatives, women are at the forefront of community-based, people-powered initiatives on sustainable consumption and production. In

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<sup>112</sup> Bloomberg. (2018). "Top 10 things everyone should know about women consumers." <https://www.bloomberg.com/diversity-inclusion/blog/top-10-things-everyone-know-women-consumers/>. Accessed 5 May 2020.

<sup>113</sup> Brough, Aaron R., et al. “Is Eco-Friendly Unmanly? Green-Feminine Stereotype and its Effect on Sustainable Consumption.” *Journal of Consumer Research* 43.4 (2016): 567-582.

some countries, rural women have led campaigns to assert their land rights against landlords and land grabbers and started organic farming to feed their families and their communities. They are leading examples of how people's rights should be at the center of sustainable consumption and production policies and initiatives.

### ***Recommendations***

We recommend that governments at the national and sub-national levels:

#### *Financing*

- Enact progressive taxes, fees, fines, penalties, incentives, tariffs, and other regulation to promote sustainable consumption and production and emissions reductions.
- Take active steps towards new economies grounded in care, justice, human rights, sustainability, and ecological health.

#### *Human Rights*

- Ensure a human rights-based approach to sustainable consumption and production paying particular attention to the human rights of women and girls in all their diversity. This includes conducting gender and human rights assessments of trade and investment agreements.
- Enforce measures at every segment of production, distribution, and consumption chains, to eliminate exploitation of labor and forced labor.
- Hold to account corporations with unsustainable consumption and production practices and who violate human rights. Promote binding treaties on corporate accountability.
- Ensure the right to a healthy workplace and environment free of hazardous chemicals and waste.

#### *Participation and Leadership*

- Promote and protect people-led solutions, especially those led by women and marginalized communities, such as agroecology, indigenous knowledge on resource management, community supported agriculture, farmers' markets, and farmers' / workers' cooperatives.
- Ensure mechanisms that support meaningful public participation, especially from women, farmers, and Indigenous Peoples in the creation and implementation of sustainable consumption and production policies and initiatives.
- Stop the attacks against communities and their leaders who promote people-led sustainable consumption and production initiatives.

#### *Education*

- Improve access to transformative green skills for young people, with education on consumption and production patterns in schools.

## **Sustainable Development Goal 13: Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts**

### ***Key Data***

- According to the UN, 2019 was the second warmest on record and the end of the warmest decade (2010–2019).<sup>114</sup>
- While climate related financing increased to USD 681 billion in 2016, this is dwarfed by the USD 742 billion investment related to fossil fuels in the energy sector in 2016. Subsidies provided by governments to the fossil fuel sector totaled 373 billion in 2015.<sup>115</sup>
- Of total public climate finance, only 20% is provided as grants, and only 25% is allocated toward adaptation.<sup>116</sup>
- In 2014, the latest year for which data is available, 28% of overseas development assistance for climate finance included gender equality as a secondary objective, while only 3% marked it as a primary objective.<sup>117</sup>
- 80% of people displaced by climate change are women.<sup>118</sup>

### ***Structural Barriers to Progress and Gendered Dimensions***

Though climate change and disasters disproportionately impact women this is not inevitable. Patriarchy governs the distribution of power, knowledge, and resources, which societies and legal systems codify and enforce. For example, women have fewer assets than men and rely more heavily on natural resources for their livelihoods.<sup>119</sup> And even though they are more reliant on land and natural resources than men, they have fewer land rights.

Countries and institutions continue to treat gender considerations as a programmatic “add-on” rather than fundamental to the achievement of SDG 13. Without embedding an intersectional understanding of gender into a human rights framework, climate action will be less effective and less sustainable and may exacerbate gender inequality.

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<sup>114</sup> UN Statistics. <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/report/2020/Goal-13/>. Accessed 24 April 2021.

<sup>115</sup> UNFCCC Standing Committee on Finance. 2018 Biennial Assessment and Overview of Climate Finance Flows Technical Report. 2018. Page 13.

<sup>116</sup> Oxfam. Climate Finance Shadow Report 2020: Assessing Progress Toward the \$100 Billion Commitment. Page 4.

<sup>117</sup> GenderNet. “Making climate finance work for women: overview of bilateral ODA to gender and climate change.” 2016. Page 1.

<sup>118</sup> United Nations Development Programme. “Gender and Climate Change: Overview of linkages between gender and climate change.” 2016. Page 5.

<sup>119</sup> UNDP. Page 4.

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Women's work, leadership, and contributions are integral to achieving SDG 13, from creating resilient agricultural systems to supporting sustainable production and consumption to rethinking the ways in which our cities and world are connected via transportation. Yet women-led initiatives and climate solutions that center gender equality are consistently and drastically underfunded across funding sources, from philanthropic actors that prioritize women's environmental activism for only 3% of environmentally-directed funding<sup>120</sup> to public climate finance where only 10% flows to the local level,<sup>121</sup> where women's grassroots approaches are situated.

Not only are women and girls critical, equal actors in achieving SDG 13, but the design and implementation of gender-responsive policies and programs that support gender equality is essential for enacting and sustaining effective climate action. Solutions that do not consider human rights, responsibilities, resources, and opportunities with a comprehensive gender-lens, informed by disaggregated data and gender analyses, are destined to replicate and even exacerbate existing inequalities and perpetuate the unjust social and environmental regimes that have catalyzed climate change.

Research has highlighted that greater equality contributes to effective environmental policymaking: countries with higher proportions of women in their legislative bodies are more likely to approve environmental agreements while countries with greater women's participation have lower carbon emissions, and women's participation is associated with stronger climate policies and environmental outcomes.<sup>122 123 124 125 126</sup> At the most recent climate change conference in December 2019, though, only 37% of Party delegates were women, and about one of every five (21%) of Heads of Delegation was a woman.<sup>127</sup>

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<sup>120</sup> Dobson, Christen, and Lawrence, Steven. *Our Voices, Our Environment: The State of Funding for Women's Environmental Action*. Global Greengrants and Prospera International Network of Women's Funds. 2018.

<sup>121</sup> Soanes, Marek, Neha Rai, Paul Steele, Clare Shakya, and James MacGregor. *Delivering real change: getting international climate finance to the local level*. International Institute for Environment and Development, 2017.

<sup>122</sup> Norgaard, Kari, and Richard York. "Gender equality and state environmentalism." *Gender & Society* 19.4 (2005): 506-522.

<sup>123</sup> Ergas, Christina, and Richard York. "Women's status and carbon dioxide emissions: A quantitative cross-national analysis." *Social Science Research* 41.4 (2012): 965-976.

<sup>124</sup> McKinney, Laura A., and Gregory M. Fulkerson. "Gender equality and climate justice: a cross-national analysis." *Social Justice Research* 28.3 (2015): 293-317.

<sup>125</sup> Mavisakalyan, Astghik, and Yashar Tarverdi. "Gender and climate change: Do female parliamentarians make a difference?." *European Journal of Political Economy* 56 (2019): 151-164.

<sup>126</sup> Cook, Nathan J., Tara Grillos, and Krister P. Andersson. "Gender quotas increase the equality and effectiveness of climate policy interventions." *Nature Climate Change* 9.4 (2019): 330-334.

<sup>127</sup> Gender Climate Tracker. <https://www.genderclimatetracker.org/womens-participation-party-delegations>. Accessed 25 May 2021.

The transition to a low-carbon economy must ensure its process and outcomes are just and promote gender equality. We need to support and equip girls with the technical, emotional, cognitive, and life skills needed to ensure they are not left behind during the transition. This training must include and move beyond a focus on STEM skills to encompass socioemotional skills that challenge exploitation be that of the environment or individuals.<sup>128</sup> A gender just transition must take into account the role of girls and women’s unpaid care work and realize that this unpaid work currently supports our exploitative economic systems.

Without the comprehensive inclusion, participation, and leadership of women and girls and gender-responsive policy frameworks, climate change will continue to be inadequately and inefficiently addressed, with disjointed and under-committed efforts that fail to recognize the interconnectedness of gender, racial, environmental, and climate justice.

### ***Illustrative Interlinkages***

In recent years, researchers and activists have expanded the evidence base on the connections between climate change and women’s health, especially sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR). For example, climate change exacerbates the prevalence of vector-borne diseases, such as Zika virus or malaria, which has negative impacts on maternal health by increasing the risk of premature delivery, stillbirths, low-weight births, miscarriage, eclampsia, or cesarean deliveries (SDG 3).<sup>129,130</sup>

In the case of malaria, climate change interacts with maternal health, as well as nutrition (SDG 2). Globally, approximately 40% of pregnant women have anemia, which malaria can exacerbate, leading to increased risks of postpartum hemorrhage and other complications during delivery.<sup>131</sup>

Apart from the physical health consequences of climate change, recent research has also shown that the stressors associated with climate change and climate change related have increased rates of gender-based violence (GBV) and child, early, and forced marriages (CEFM).<sup>132</sup> Both GBV and CEFM are associated with longer-term risks to the health of

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<sup>128</sup> Brookings Institution.

<https://www.brookings.edu/research/a-new-green-learning-agenda-approaches-to-quality-education-for-climate-action/>. Accessed 25 May 2021.

<sup>129</sup> Wu, Y., Ye, H., Liu, J. *et al.* Prevalence of anemia and sociodemographic characteristics among pregnant and non-pregnant women in southwest China: a longitudinal observational study. *BMC Pregnancy Childbirth* 20, 535 (2020). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12884-020-03222-1>.

<sup>130</sup> Women Deliver. “The Link Between Climate Change and Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights: An Evidence Review.” January 2021. Page 7.

<sup>131</sup> Women Deliver. Page 7.

<sup>132</sup> Women Deliver. Page 7-8.

women and girls, including higher risks of sexually transmitted infections, unintended pregnancies, maternal mortality and morbidity, and mental health.

### ***Recommendations***

#### *Financing*

- Demilitarize and end fossil fuel subsidies. Divestment from these exploitative and extractive industries must be accompanied by investment in climate solutions that center gender justice and economies of care.
- Increase gender-responsive climate finance by building and ensuring channels of finance for gender-just climate solutions, resourcing the transformative solutions led and driven by women and girls at the grassroots level globally.

#### *Policy Coherence*

- Embed gender into national policies, strategies, and planning for climate change and disaster risk reduction.
- Strengthen disaster risk reduction systems and adopt rights-based approaches to disaster risk reduction, especially for women and girls displaced or impacted by disasters.
- Strengthen climate change adaptation and mitigation measures to prepare communities, especially women and girls, for enhanced and efficient natural resources management, particularly contributing to food security and sovereignty, access to safe and clean water, and access to health care services, including sexual and reproductive health.
- Integrate all climate change and health policies, strategies, and plans with, but not limited to, the SDGs. These must include responses to safeguard and provide for the health of women and girls, including their sexual and reproductive health, as well as strategies to end child, early, and forced marriage and gender-based violence.

#### *Education*

- Include climate change education in all aspects of formal and non-formal curricula and extracurricular activities and promote school safety to climate-related hazards. Use terms that can be understood by grassroots women when implementing climate change programs.
- Organize and equip women and girls with knowledge, skills, and technologies for addressing the impact of climate change on women's health during disasters and diversifying options for better adaptation to prevent women's and girls' morbidity and mortality.

#### *Indigenous Peoples*

- Protect Indigenous Peoples' and community land rights. Maintaining and restoring Indigenous and community land rights is the first step in supporting rights-based land

management that promotes biodiversity, including through forest ecosystem restoration, and safeguards food security and livelihoods all while sequestering carbon, resulting in up to 14.77 gigatons of carbon sequestered or avoided by 2050.<sup>133</sup>

### *Participation and Leadership*

- Recognize climate change as the most significant intergenerational injustice issue of our time. Listen to and elevate youth and children's concerns around climate change and recognize that unless urgent action is taken, their future rights, which previous generations have enjoyed, are jeopardized.
- Prioritize the voices of women and girls and ensure that community stakeholders and environmental defenders have the ability to both speak and vote/input in all aspects of decision-making and policy processes around climate change.

## **Sustainable Development Goal 14: Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development**

### *Key Data*

- Many people working in fisheries and aquaculture work informally and do not have access to social protection programs. This is especially true for women who work in the sector.<sup>134</sup>
- The UN projects a 100–150% rise in acidity by the end of this century affecting half of all marine life.<sup>135</sup>

### *Structural Barriers to Progress and Gendered Dimensions*

Our feminist allies in the Women and Gender Constituency summarize the current ocean crisis and its causes perfectly:

“The ocean crisis demonstrates a deeper crisis of the human-nature relationship which is the result of societal divisions of labour and relationships of power and domination in the private and public sphere. The dominant economic system and its paradigm of economic growth are based on inequality, injustice, violence, monetization, commodification and privatization of common goods and a rampant extraction of resources. It encourages overexploitation, destruction and pollution of the ocean, as on land.”<sup>136</sup>

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<sup>133</sup> Dooley, K et al. (2018) Missing Pathways to 1.5°C: The role of the land sector in ambitious climate action. Climate Land Ambition and Rights Alliance. Available from: [climatelandambitionrightsalliance.org/report](https://climatelandambitionrightsalliance.org/report)

<sup>134</sup> Food and Agriculture Organization. “The role of social protection in the recovery from COVID-19 impacts in fisheries and aquaculture.” February 2021. Page 1.

<sup>135</sup> UN Statistics. <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/report/2020/Goal-14/>. Accessed 24 April 2021.

<sup>136</sup> Women and Gender Constituency. “A Call to Action for Health and Equity of the Ocean.” <https://womensgenderclimate.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/PAPER-SERIES-The-Ocean.pdf> Accessed 24 April 2021.



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In addition, structural conditions shaping the lives of people engaged in fishing and aquaculture at all levels of the pre- and post-harvest fish chain enhanced their vulnerability to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and its resulting crises, including: high degrees of informal work, high dependence on natural resources and, therefore, highly impacted by climate crises, and isolation.<sup>137</sup> Travel restrictions and other types of lockdowns have also severely impacted migrant workers, many of whom are unable to return home and are at risk of falling into debt.<sup>138</sup>

The predominant industrial agricultural and fisheries models are not sustainable and favor large agribusinesses and distant water fisheries, while pushing out small farmers and artisanal fisherpeople, a majority of whom are women who typically employ more sustainable practices.

Women in fisheries organizing in the Pacific seek recognition for the paid and unpaid labor of women that goes towards sustaining the fisheries and fishing communities, as well as highlighting the right of women to participate in decision making. They call for increased access to financing, capacity building, and technical assistance for women in small-scale fishing communities to participate in, and take responsibility for, integrated management of small-scale and artisanal fisheries based on recognition and protection of access rights to marine resources. This includes increased access to sustainable and fair-trade markets to improve the socio-economic situation of fishers and fish workers within the context of sustainable fisheries management.

In addition, women are specifically affected by waterway and marine litter due to nanoparticles in water and seafood, affecting their overall health and reproductive systems.

### ***Illustrative Interlinkages***

The high degree of informal work (SDG 8) among people working in fisheries and aquaculture, especially of women and migrant workers, usually leaves them without access to social protection schemes (SDG 1). In an industry so highly impacted by climate crises (SDG 13), access to social protection could be life-saving even before the COVID-19 pandemic hit.

Climate change affects small fishing communities which impact directly on women who lose their livelihoods and who are often forced to migrate (SDG 1 and 10) and suffer sexual violence that goes unpunished (SDG 5 and 16).

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<sup>137</sup> Food and Agriculture Organization. “The role of social protection in the recovery from COVID-19 impacts in fisheries and aquaculture.” February 2021.

<sup>138</sup> Food and Agriculture Organization. “The effect of COVID-19 on fisheries and aquaculture in Asia.” May 2020. Page 1.

The Food and Agriculture Organization encourages States to take an expansive view of workers in the fisheries and aquaculture industry and to create gender-sensitive social protection programs that includes people at all stages of the production process. They note that access to social protection can minimize coping strategies, such as child labor (SDG 8) or increased pressure on natural resources (SDG 13) while improving and protecting nutrition and food security (SDG 2).<sup>139</sup>

### ***Recommendations***

We recommend that governments at the national and sub-national levels:

#### *Climate Change*

- Address and reduce all maritime sources of GHG, end fossil fuel subsidies in maritime transport and fisheries that contribute to overfishing, destructive fishing and IUU fishing, end bottom trawling and other activities disturbing carbon and methane stored in the seafloor, no energy and traffic turn in the north at the expense of marine biodiversity and food security in the south: Stop seabed mining!<sup>140</sup>
- Exhaust all means available to help fragile marine systems and vulnerable coastal communities to adapt to irreversible climate change.<sup>141</sup>
- Recognize and compensate for loss of coral reefs and marine biodiversity and the foregone goods and services to associated coastal communities.<sup>142</sup>
- Raise ambition to keep the global temperature rise this century well below 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels, slow down the rate of change, and become carbon negative well before 2050 in order to save coral reefs, promote biodiversity integrity and protect and enhance marine sinks and reservoirs.<sup>143</sup>
- Urgently develop and support actions oriented toward adaptation actions and strategies specifically directed to fisher women and the girls and women whose livelihoods are impacted by climate change and the health of the oceans.
- Highlight the importance of ecosystem adaptation especially focusing on marine and coastal ecosystems and their importance for livelihoods.

#### *Participation and Leadership*

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<sup>139</sup> FAO. Page 1.

<sup>140</sup> Women and Gender Constituency.

<https://womensgenderclimate.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/PAPER-SERIES-The-Ocean.pdf>. Accessed 24 April 2021.

<sup>141</sup> Ibid.

<sup>142</sup> Ibid.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid.

- Promote sustainable management of coastal and marine resources and women and girls' participation in the blue economy, climate adaptation, and mitigation strategies.
- Promote the recognition of local community inputs in all ocean conservation actions and ensure the full and meaningful participation of women and girls in all their diversity.
- Recognize the specific risks, knowledge, commitment and rights of women, Indigenous Peoples, small-scale fishers and associated poor communities from coastal areas, especially in tropical and Arctic regions at the frontline of the ocean- climate-biodiversity emergency.<sup>144</sup>

#### *Data*

- Disaggregate data by gender, age, and other critical demographic factors in the fishing and marine conservation sectors and incorporate fisher women, indigenous Peoples, and young people, in particular, young women, in discussions around conservation.

### **Sustainable Development Goal 15: Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss**

#### *Key Data*

- According to the Global Forest Coalition, “Work burdens related to producing and collecting food for household consumption, non-timber forest products, water, health care and wellbeing are intensified when local, biodiverse forests are privatised and replaced with monoculture tree plantations.”<sup>145</sup>
- According to the UN,  $\frac{1}{5}$  of the Earth's land area is degraded, which undermines the wellbeing of some 3.2 billion people, driving species to extinction and intensifying climate change.<sup>146</sup>

#### ***Structural Barriers to Progress and Gendered Dimensions***

Johanna Molina and Jeanette Sequeira of the Global Forest Coalition succinctly explain that the “anthropocentric, patriarchal and colonialist worldview leads us to view the planet as if it had no limits, to put nature and common goods exclusively at our service, and to assign some people

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<sup>144</sup> Ibid.

<sup>145</sup> Global Forest Coalition. *The impacts of tree plantations on women and women-led resistance to monocultures*. September 2020. Page 24.

<sup>146</sup> UN Statistics. <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/report/2020/Goal-15/>. Accessed 24 April 2021.

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more value than others, justifying policies of natural resource extraction and dispossession that have various impacts on territories, peoples and communities, and particularly on women.”<sup>147</sup>

Women and girls are also disproportionately affected by deforestation and degradation of ecosystems. Gender roles in many contexts dictate that women interact with and depend on these ecosystems on a daily basis, thus ecological degradation poses significant challenges for them to fulfil their differentiated role in agricultural and food production, land use, conservation, land rehabilitation and restoration, water and energy access, household and care responsibilities, and livestock-based livelihoods.

The Food and Agriculture Organization expects that COVID-19 will exacerbate these conditions leading to greater exploitation of natural resources and increased food insecurity and poverty for forest-dependent communities.<sup>148</sup> Moreover, they highlight that the reduced government monitoring and attention resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic will increase illegal mining, timber extraction, and poaching all of which will derail achievement of SDG 15.<sup>149</sup>

Despite playing a major role in biodiversity conservation and forest management and restoration - such as through intergenerational transmission of traditional knowledge, keeping seeds, energy generation, collection of traditional food and medicine, and sustainable livelihoods - women and Indigenous Peoples are often excluded from participation in local, national, and global natural resources governance, especially managerial positions and decision making bodies, as well as from accessing, owning, and controlling land and resources.

### ***Illustrative Interlinkages***

Depleted ecosystems also increase women and girls’ workload and burden and exacerbate existing inequalities: walking longer distances to collect food and water restrains opportunities to take up education (SDG 4) and makes them more susceptible to sexual violence (SDG 5); taking care of sick family members due to lack of access to food and medicine reduces time and energy for other activities. This results in harmful consequences for women and girls’ health, income (SDG 8), subsistence needs, and time.

### ***Recommendations***

We recommend that Governments at the national and sub-national levels:

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<sup>147</sup> Global Forest Coalition. *The impacts of tree plantations on women and women-led resistance to monocultures*. September 2020. Page 4.

<sup>148</sup> FAO. “Land rights.” Page 4.

<sup>149</sup> *Ibid.* Page 4.

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### *Leadership*

- Implement gender-responsive resource management and governance processes with the leadership of women and girls.
- Enact programs and policies that promote women's equal rights and access to land, water, and natural resources, and that ensure engagement and leadership of women and women's organizations in related decision making and governance processes. Invest in dialogues around concepts of gender and how inequalities are created within communities and institutions to enhance and support women's leadership.
- "The strengthening of autonomy of community groups and women's rights groups to organise, strategise, gather evidence, resist and advocate for their own demands and forest conservation policies is central."<sup>150</sup>

### *Human Rights, including Free, Prior, and Informed Consent*

- Respect the human rights, including free, prior, and informed consent, of Indigenous Peoples.
- Promote women and girls' leadership in negotiations, policies, and programs, including the land tenure, territorial, and governance rights of Indigenous Peoples.
- Respect Indigenous women's rights to their community forests, as well as their rights to lead in protecting their people's traditional knowledge and livelihoods.
- Update and harmonize land and natural resources law in line with international human rights obligations.

### *Policy Coherence*

- Implement existing international environmental agreements and ensure policy coherence between the three Rio Conventions (Convention to Combat Desertification, Convention on Biodiversity, and UN Framework Convention on Climate Change).
- Eliminate or redirect perverse incentives for unsustainable agriculture, livestock production, and monoculture tree plantations, and revise trade policies of the corporate free trade model that benefit the few and are skewed in favor of large agribusinesses and export-oriented food production, as opposed to women's small-scale farming practices, which benefit the many.
- Strengthen governance institutions at all levels against corporate capture.
- Phase out and redirect financial policies and incentives that promote plantations and instead support community-based approaches to forest conservation.

### *Data*

- Close the gender and age gap in evidence-based responses by collecting sex- and age-disaggregated evidence of actual and perceived tenure security in conjunction with

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<sup>150</sup> Global Forest Coalition. Page 26.

gender-sensitive disaggregation gathering on proportion of land that is degraded as per definition of indicators 1.4.2 and 15.3.1 to better inform policies and programs.

## **Sustainable Development Goal 16: Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels**

### ***Key Data***

- In 2020, in the midst of a global pandemic, total military expenditure increased 2.6% to reach USD 1.981 trillion.<sup>151</sup>
- According to Freedom House, since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, “the condition of democracy and human rights has worsened in 80 countries, with particularly sharp deterioration in struggling democracies and highly repressive states” with many experts expecting this negative impact to continue for at least three to five years.<sup>152</sup>
- In 2021, 235 million people will require humanitarian assistance, a 40% increase from 2020, according to UN OCHA. However, humanitarian relief operations remain critically underfunded.<sup>153</sup>

### ***Structural Barriers to Progress and Gendered Dimensions***

Many countries' COVID-19 responses have been characterized by “aggressive policing, punishments, criminal law and other conduct in the name of public health” alongside traditional public health measures and criminal sanctions.<sup>154</sup> This aggressive - and in some cases militarized response - compounds the human rights impacts on criminalized and marginalized populations, including migrants, lesbians, transgender people, and sex workers, and may discourage women from accessing health services, traveling to work, or leaving violent situations.

Today, the world is spending money on violence and war rather than gender justice and peace. In 2014-2015, only 5% of aid on peace and security targeted gender equality as a primary objective. Meanwhile, the number of forcibly displaced people reached a new high of over 80 million people in 2020.<sup>155</sup>

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<sup>151</sup> Stockholm International Peace Research Institute.

[https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/fs\\_2104\\_milex\\_0.pdf](https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/fs_2104_milex_0.pdf). Accessed 24 April 2021.

<sup>152</sup> Freedom House.

<https://freedomhouse.org/article/new-report-democracy-under-lockdown-impact-covid-19-global-freedom>. Accessed 24 April 2021.

<sup>153</sup> <https://gho.unocha.org>. Accessed 24 April 2021.

<sup>154</sup> UNAIDS. Page 11.

<sup>155</sup> UNHCR. <https://www.unhcr.org/refugee-statistics/>. Accessed 24 April 2021.

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Transparency and accountability of state institutions and rule of law and access to justice have been hampered by rising anti-rights movements and regimes globally. Human rights, especially of women, girls, non-binary, and gender diverse people are frequently the first targets of these regimes. Reaching a sustainable, equitable, and just world by 2030 necessitates an end to this democratic backsliding and increased transparency, accountability, rule of law, and access to justice.

Realizing SDG16 on peaceful, just, and inclusive societies requires a power shift that re-centers work on equality, development, and peace, and the human rights of women and girls in all their diversity, as well as the human rights of the most marginalized. This requires not just technical fixes, but structural transformation that dismantles war governance and institutionalizes peace governance for the benefit of people and the planet. In order to achieve sustainable development, it is vital that world leaders end and prevent armed conflicts and reverse the current trend of militarization.

### *Peace*

Current militarized approaches to peace and security consistently exclude and undermine women's participation, protection, and human rights, and systematically undermine opportunities for long term and sustainable peace.<sup>156</sup> Between 1992 and 2019, women made up on average 13% of negotiators, 6% of mediators, and 6% of signatories in major peace processes worldwide.<sup>157</sup> When they are present in peace negotiations, women and members of civil society are often relegated to advisory or consultative roles, limiting their ability to impact the structure or outcomes of negotiations.

This lack of inclusion in the process is reflected in the outcomes, which too frequently maintain an unequal status quo and reward perpetrators of violence with power. Most peace agreements do not include provisions on women's rights or gender equality, even though gender equality is a key factor in building peaceful societies that are based on human rights. According to the Secretary-General's report on women, peace and security from 2019: Between 1990 and the end of 2018, only 353 of 1,789 agreements related to more than 150 peace processes included provisions addressing women, girls or gender. In 2018, out of 52 agreements across a range of issues only 4 (7.7%) contained gender-related provisions, down from 39 per cent in 2015."<sup>158</sup>

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<sup>156</sup> Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF), *UNSCR 1325 at 20 Years: Perspectives from Feminist Peace Activists and Civil Society*, October 2020, page 10.

[https://www.wilpf.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/WILPF\\_UNSCR-1325-at-20-Years\\_Web.pdf](https://www.wilpf.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/WILPF_UNSCR-1325-at-20-Years_Web.pdf)

<sup>157</sup> UN. "Women, peace and security: Report of the Secretary-General." S/2020/946.

[https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/s\\_2020\\_946.pdf](https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/s_2020_946.pdf).

<sup>158</sup> Secretary-General. "Women, peace and security." 9 October 2019. Paragraph 15.

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Within the context of patriarchal and militarized conflict resolution processes, women are still excluded from participating at the peace table in substantive and meaningful ways, and often face reprisals for their leadership. The common refrain is that women require capacity building to negotiate in peace processes, while men who represent the armed parties only need to have held a gun.

Women are not necessarily safe even when the guns are silent, as they often experience heightened levels of insecurity, such as domestic violence and sexual assault, in their own homes and neighborhoods during post-conflict periods. This is because, as identified by feminist activists, violence, including sexual and gender-based violence and human rights violations, operates on a peacetime-wartime continuum.<sup>159</sup> Furthermore, the implementation of peace agreements and the provisions contained within can have a significant impact on women's livelihoods and human rights after conflict; if peace processes do not address the underlying root causes of conflict, instability can continue.

During armed conflict, women and girls experience violence, deprivation, and insecurity in multiple ways. They experience increased rates of gender-based violence, exacerbated by the presence and proliferation of weapons<sup>160</sup>, greater inequalities, child, early, and forced marriages, and are vulnerable to additional violence on their bodies and on their families through the use of sexual violence, sexual slavery, and kidnapping, among other violations. Women often take on roles traditionally preserved for men, such as head of household and breadwinner, taking care of the financial needs of the family, or as soldiers or militia members.

### *Human Rights Defenders*

There has been a rapid increase in violence against environmental and women human rights defenders and peacebuilders, with a disproportionate targeting of women activists. At least 330 human rights and environmental defenders were killed worldwide in 2020.<sup>161</sup> This increased climate of repression has contributed to shrinking space for civil society to operate and freely advocate for human rights.

Government and non-state actors have acted against activists for their work, including against women peacebuilders who have engaged with the UN system. The most recent documentation on reprisals from the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights reports a rise in cases of intimidation and reprisals for activists engaging with the UN system and members of their families.<sup>162</sup>

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<sup>159</sup> WILPF, UNSCR 1325 at 20 Years, page 15.

<sup>160</sup> WILPF, *UNSCR 1325 at 20 Years, page 11*.

<sup>161</sup> Frontline Defenders. (2020). "Frontline Defenders Global Analysis 2020."

<sup>162</sup> OHCHR. "Human rights: Reported reprisals on the rise, says UN." 19 September 2019.



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There are worrying signs that some governments have used the COVID-19 emergency to crack down on human rights defenders and limit press freedom while disinformation is rampant.<sup>163</sup> When governments gain powers during emergencies, they rarely give up those powers, even upon the end of emergencies.

### ***Recommendations***

We recommend that Governments at the national and sub-national levels:

#### *Peace and Conflict*

- Shift from funding militaries and weapons to funding human security. Invest in social protection over crisis response for just, equitable, and nonviolent governance.
- Take immediate action to end existing conflicts through inclusive peace processes that address the root causes of conflicts, with the full and meaningful participation of civil society and women in all their diversity.
- Take immediate steps towards full disarmament to prevent future violence, including by signing or ratifying the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons.
- Institutionalize leadership for peace (i.e., ministries of reincorporation, decolonization, peace, women) and support feminist peace movement building and leadership.
- Accelerate commitments, including national and regional action plans on Women, Peace and Security, as a key priority for achieving SDG16, and allocate funding for their implementation.
- Stop the trade in arms and ammunition, particularly in situations where weapons will directly contribute to armed conflict, violations of human rights, and gender-based violence.
- Ensure extraterritorial accountability, including on flows of small arms and light weapons, to strengthen prevention of gender-based as well as all forms of violence, including by strengthening implementation of national action plans on small arms and light weapons in line with the Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat, and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects.

#### *Environmental and Women Human Rights Defenders*

- Take immediate steps to protect environmental and women human rights defenders and peacebuilders against all violence and reprisals, including by non-state actors.
- Stop the criminalization of the work of environmental and women human rights defenders.

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<sup>163</sup> Reporters Without Borders (RSF), “2021 World Press Freedom Index: Journalism, the vaccine against disinformation, blocked in more than 130 countries”, <https://rsf.org/en/2021-world-press-freedom-index-journalism-vaccine-against-disinformation-blocked-more-130-countries> Accessed 28 April 2021.

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- Any emergency measures enacted during the COVID-19 crisis that restrict the activities of human rights defenders must be rescinded as quickly as possible.

### *Civil Registration*

- Ensure that all children, including and especially girls, are registered at birth, and that women and girls are allowed to register their own children without the need for permission from male partners or legal guardians.

### *Governance*

- Ensure that transparent accountability structures and checks and balances are in place in the governance of states, and that democracy and respect for human rights are at the core of governance.

## **Sustainable Development Goal 17: Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development**

### *Key Data*

- Net official development assistance (ODA) flows increased from 2019 to 2020 to 0.32% of DAC donors' combined gross national income (GNI), but are still below the target of 0.7% ODA to GNI.<sup>164</sup>
- According to UNICEF, in many countries governments spend more in debt payments than they do in social expenditures, such as health, education, social protection, or water, sanitation, and hygiene.<sup>165</sup>

### *Structural Barriers to Progress and Gendered Dimensions*

#### *Financing for the 2030 Agenda*

If we look deeply into the key financing strategies to achieve the 2030 Agenda that have been prioritized and promoted, we only realize that not only are they fundamentally in contradiction with the commitment to achieve all the SDGs by the agreed deadline, but that they risk jeopardizing any progress feminist and women's rights movements have been able to achieve to date.

The key financing strategies prioritized for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda include trade and investment liberalization, a significant influential role for the private sector through public-private partnerships (PPPs), and international private finance. These strategies all

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<sup>164</sup> [https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/27610SG\\_SDG\\_Progress\\_report\\_2021.pdf](https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/27610SG_SDG_Progress_report_2021.pdf). Accessed 15 May 2021.

<sup>165</sup> UNICEF. "COVID-19 and the Looming Debt Crisis." April 2021.

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undermine mobilization of domestic resources, particularly in developing countries, despite the considerable emphasis put on the role of domestic resource mobilization as a source of financing for development.

Governments, and international actors, have increasingly given the private sector a significant role in policymaking and programming, abdicating their central responsibility to provide services to their populations. Lack of accountability structures and institutions for the violations of human rights and environmental protections by the private sector remains an existential threat to the fulfillment of Agenda 2030. This outsourcing of government responsibility to fulfill human rights and the SDGs, also undermines civil society organizations, including women and girls' rights organizations, and other development actors. This trend goes against the SDGs' objectives of reducing inequality, poverty, leaving no one behind, and promoting peace and justice.

### *Public-Private Partnerships*

Rather than plugging corporate tax loopholes and ensuring tax justice, private-public partnerships are being touted as a key solution for means of implementation. By its nature, privatization puts profits over social goals, and that very fact is fundamentally in contradiction with the government's human rights obligations. The past year has seen a number of new PPPs emerge in response to COVID-19.

PPP offers deals which are abusive: they are profiting even higher from deals with the public sector than they would in the regular market. In these partnerships, governments bear the risk, while companies make profits even in the case of a failure.

Combined with a sovereign debt crisis and austerity / structural adjustment programs enforced by international financial institutions, privatization or cuts in public spending as a means of SDGs implementation put the rights of women and girls and the achievement of gender equality at greater risk.

When public services are cut or privatized, women and girls are forced to fill in those gaps providing unpaid care and household work. According to Oxfam, women and girls globally do more than 75% of unpaid care work and are two-thirds of the paid care workforce.<sup>166</sup> Funding toward the public good and services would have a greater impact on achieving Goals 3, 5, 8, and 10, and would prevent adverse impacts on women due to privatization.

### *Trade*

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<sup>166</sup> Oxfam. "Not all gaps are created equal: the true value of care work." 20 January 2020. <https://www.oxfam.org/en/not-all-gaps-are-created-equal-true-value-care-work>. Accessed 5 May 2020.

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While trade agreements under the World Trade Organization are being considered tools to achieve the SDGs, none of these, including bilateral and multilateral trade and investment agreements, have been assessed for compatibility with human rights obligations and the SDGs. Moreover, the private sector uses investor state dispute settlement mechanisms (ISDS) present in these treaties to challenge legislation related to investments and environmental protection, workers’ rights, and human rights. ISDS can pose threats to women and girls’ human rights where investors have taken control over public services, such as health, water, education, or transportation, and have grabbed resources such as land, forests, and marine resources.

### *Official Development Assistance*

Official development assistance (ODA) is a key financing strategy to achieve the 2030 Agenda and yet countries still have not met the 0.7 percent commitment in the Addis Ababa Action Agenda.<sup>167</sup>

While developed countries have not yet met their ODA commitments, current trends in the allocation of ODA are seen to deepen the “militarization of aid” and its diversion to countries and purposes linked to the strategic security interests of major provider countries. These resources can be used to suppress movements calling for protection of human rights.

### *Policy Coherence*

Although the 2030 Agenda is universal and requires policy coherence across the goals, action on the SDGs is “aligning” but not “integrating.” Rather than creating holistic cross-sectoral priorities and strategies that evaluate impacts on people and planet, traditional siloed approaches that promote profit over people and violence over justice are continuing.

The 2030 Agenda was not crafted in a policy vacuum. The implementation of the 2030 Agenda will be stronger when governments design policies to fulfill other existing obligations, including for women and girls’ human rights.

### ***Illustrative Interlinkages***

In her 2020 report of on the effects of foreign debt and other related international financial obligations of States on the full enjoyment of all human rights, particularly economic, social and cultural rights, Independent Expert Yuefen Li highlights:

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<sup>167</sup> Inter-agency Task Force on Financing for Development, p. 81.

“All Governments must focus on protecting and promoting human rights and fighting inequalities in their responses to COVID-19, in particular in their allocation of financial resources. People in situations of poverty or vulnerability should benefit from the resources used to fight the pandemic, and big corporations and privileged individuals in society should not be the main and final beneficiaries. International institutions, States and the private sector should all fulfil their human rights obligations in these common efforts to overcome the pandemic.”<sup>168</sup>

The cycle of debt that many Global South countries are currently in reduces their ability to dedicate resources to women and girl's human rights and sustainable development, especially public services, such as health, education, or social protection (SDGs 3, 4, and 1). Where these public services are lacking, women and girls fill in the gaps with their time and labor limiting their abilities to pursue educational, professional, or personal aspirations and further entrenching inequality (SDG 5).

### ***Recommendations***

We recommend that Governments at the national and sub-national levels:

#### *Official Development Assistance*

- Fulfill all ODA commitments. Redouble efforts and establish time-bound targets to deliver on long-standing ODA commitments.
- Reverse the trend of militarization of aid. Use ODA to address the root causes of conflict and end its misuse for security, military, and corporate interests, and focus on addressing the root causes of conflict to push for conflict resolution and prevention.
- Stop diverting ODA to promote private finance, blended finance, which includes public-private partnerships, or private sector investments, especially those directed through international financial institutions with the aim to leverage private sector funding.

#### *Debt*

- Unconditional cancellation of public external debt payments by all lenders - bilateral, multilateral and private lenders - for all countries in need for at least the next four years as an immediate step and a clear program towards the unconditional cancellation of outstanding debt.

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<sup>168</sup> <https://undocs.org/A/75/164>.

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- Under the auspices of the UN, create a fair, transparent, binding, and multilateral framework for debt crisis resolution that would comprehensively address unsustainable and illegitimate debt.
- A debt relief initiative to bring developing country debts down to sustainable levels and which considers countries' long-term financing needs to pursue the SDGs, climate goals, and human rights and gender equality commitments.
- Provide additional, emergency finance without creating more debt or conditionalities.

### *Trade*

- Ensure the compatibility of trade and investment agreements against human rights and SDGs. The provisions of trade and investment agreements that are found to be inconsistent with the human rights obligations of governments should be revised or terminated.
- Remove ISDS provisions in trade and investment agreements. Unequal trade and investment deals must be rescinded.
- Conduct ex-ante, periodic, and ex-post gender-responsive human rights and environmental impact assessments for all trade and investment agreements.
- Support TRIPs waivers for COVID-19 vaccines, medicines, equipment, and other technologies.

### *Tax Justice*

- Establish transparent, accountable, and progressive tax systems.
- Support the creation of a global tax body within the UN to facilitate the creation and coordination of a just global tax system.

### *Budgeting*

- Ensure gender-responsive budgeting systems in public, private and donor agencies.

### *Data*

- Invest, as a priority, in the formulation, generation, and analysis of disaggregated data.
- Countries providing funds and technical support to enhance the capacity for the collection of statistical data for developing countries should ensure that this support builds capacity for the collection of sex-disaggregated data.

## **Contributors**

Drafted and edited by:

## Women's Major Group High Level Political Forum 2021 Position Paper

Rachel Jacobson

### Contributors:

Alice Fookes, NAWO and UN WOMEN UK, United Kingdom

Almudena Rodriguez, , L' Associació de Drets Sexuals i Reproductius/Agenda 2030 feminista,  
Spain

Dr. Ameena Zia, Blue Ridge Impact, United States

Andrea Vega Troncoso, Women's Environment and Development Organization, United States of  
America

Atef Saad Gerges Soliman, Gatef Organization, Egypt

Association d'Aide à l'Education de l'Enfant Handicapé (AAEEH), France

Barbara Bedeschi-Lewando, Global Goals Institute, New Zealand

Bette Levy, Soroptimist International, United Kingdom

Biplabi Shrestha, Asian-Pacific Resource and Research Centre for Women (ARROW), Malaysia

Charlotte King, IWRAW Asia Pacific, Malaysia

Cecilia Espinoza Palacios, Ipas, Nicaragua/USA

Constanza Pauchulo, IWRAW Asia Pacific, Malaysia

Corlett Letlojane, Human Rights Institute of South Africa, South Africa

Daksha Vaja, Community Science Center, India

Dana Zhang, FLAME and Realizing Sexual and Reproductive Justice (RESURJ), Taiwan

Elena Marmo, Global Policy Forum / Global Policy Watch, United States of America

Faustina Araba Boakye, Network of Women's Rights of Ghana (NETRIGHT), Ghana

GABRIEL TRIPURA, Vulnerable Peoples Development Organization (KOTHOWAIN ),  
Bangladesh

Genevieve Riccoboni, Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, United States of  
America

Gertrude Kenyangi, Support for Women in Agriculture and Environment (SWAGEN), Uganda  
Haki Nawiri Africa, Kenya

Hawa Sidibe, Association du Développement et de la promotion de Droit de l'Homme,  
Mauritanie

Janice Cox, World Animal Net, South Africa

Karin van der Velde, Rutgers, Netherlands

Laura Viladevall Corominas, Creation Positiva, Spain

Lesha Witmer, Women for Water, Netherlands

Mabel Bianco, Foundation for Studies and Research on Women (FEIM), Argentina

Madeleine Kennedy-Macfoy, Education International, Belgium

Mara Dolan, Women's Environment and Development Organization (WEDO), United States of  
America

## Women's Major Group High Level Political Forum 2021 Position Paper

Marcela Ballara, International Council for Adult education, Chile  
Mari-Claire Price, Realizing Sexual and Reproductive Justice (RESURJ), United Kingdom  
María Victoria Curzel, International Planned Parenthood Federation - Western Hemisphere,  
United States of America  
Marisa Viana, Realizing Sexual and Reproductive Justice (RESURJ), Brazil  
Mary Makinda, Tanzania Home Economics Association, Tanzania  
Mohinder Watson, Action on Child, Early and Forced Marriage,  
Mir S, WUNRN EU, United Kingdom  
Mónica de Pinto Ribeiro Hancke, Women Deliver, United States of America  
Mulenga Tembo, Voluntary Service Overseas, Zambia  
Nana Abuelsoud, Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights (EIPR) and Realizing Sexual and  
Reproductive Justice (RESURJ), Egypt  
Nazmun Zaman  
Pamela Rice, Barbara Schliefer Clinic, Canada  
Pooja Adhikari, OXFAM Deutschland, Germany  
Raga Abdelrhman Ali Elzian, Almaa Organization, Sudan  
Ruchi Tripathi, VSO, United Kingdom  
Sachini Perera, Realizing Sexual and Reproductive Justice (RESURJ), Sri Lanka  
Salma Ali, Bangladesh National Women's Lawyers Association (BNWLA), Bangladesh  
Sarah Baird, Let There be Light International, United States of America  
Sehnaz Kiyamaz Bahceci, Women's Major Group, Global  
Selamawit Tesfaye, International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF), United States of  
America  
Shaima Aly, Kenana Association for Sustainable Development and Women Empowerment,  
Egypt  
Shamala Chandrasekaran, Asian-Pacific Resource and Research Centre for Women (ARROW),  
Malaysia  
Shanta Laxmi Shrestha, Beyond Beijing Committee, Nepal  
Sibusiso Malunga, The Lotus Identity and Realizing Sexual and Reproductive Justice (RESURJ),  
Zambia  
Subha Wijesiriwardena  
Tara Daniel, Women's Environment and Development Organization (WEDO), United States of  
America  
Dr. Uzodinma Adirieje, Afrihealth Optonet Association [CSOs Network], Nigeria  
Valentina Bodrug-Lungu, Gender-Centru, Republic of Moldova  
Women's World Summit Foundation, Switzerland

### Signatories:



## Women's Major Group High Level Political Forum 2021 Position Paper

Alessandra Nilo, GESTOS – HIV, Communication and Gender, Brazil  
Alexa Johns, Asia Pacific Alliance for Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights, Thailand  
Almudena Rodriguez Garcia, L' Associacio. Drets Sexuals i Reproductius, Spain  
Dr. Ameena Zia, Blue Ridge Impact Consulting, United States of America  
Asha Hans, Shanta Memorial Rehabilitation Centre, India  
Beatriz Ramírez David, Fundación Unid@s, Colombia  
Berfu Seker, Women for Women's Human Rights - New Ways, Turkey  
Bette Levy, Soroptimist International, United Kingdom  
Bridget Burns, Women's Environment and Development Organization (WEDO), United States of America  
Cecilia Espinoza, Ipas, United States of America  
Chandy Eng, Gender and Development for Cambodia, Cambodia  
Constanza Pauchulo, International Women's Rights Action Watch Asia Pacific (IWRAP Asia Pacific), Malaysia  
Daksha Vaja, Community Science Centre, India  
Danièle Ramiamanana, FOFIFA, Madagascar  
Elena Marmo, Global Policy Forum, United States of America  
ElsaMarie DSilva, Red Dot Foundation, India  
Ernestine NGO MELHA, Association d'Aide à l'Education de l'Enfant Handicapé (AAEEH), France  
Esperanza Delgado, Fundación Mexicana para la Planeación Familiar, A. C. MEXFAM, México  
Esther Wambui Kimani, Zamara Foundation, Kenya  
Evi van den Dungen, Rutgers, Netherlands  
Filomena Ruggiero, Federacion Planificacion Familiar Estatal, Spain  
Filomena Ruggiero, Plataforma de Impacto de Genero Ya, SPAIN  
Genevieve Riccoboni, Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF), United States  
Gertrude Kenyangi, Support for Women in Agriculture and Environment (SWAGEN), Uganda  
Gülbanu Dertli, Ka.Der Ankara, Turkey  
Lady Edith Uzodirije, Dr Uzo Adirije Foundation (DUZAFOND), Nigeria  
Lesha Witmer, Women for Water Partnership, Netherlands / Global  
Mabel Bianco, Foundation for Studies and Research on Women (FEIM), Argentina  
Manisha Agarwal Garg, HaritaDhara Research Development and Education Foundation, India  
Marcela Ballara, SEDRA, Chile  
Nalini Singh, Fiji Women's Rights Movement, Fiji  
Nina Chala, LPW NGO, Ukraine  
Noelene Nabulivou, Diverse Voices and Action (DIVA) for Equality, Fiji  
Olabukunola Williams, Education as a Vaccine, Nigeria  
Olga Djanaeva, PA Women's organization Alga, Kyrgyzstan

## Women's Major Group High Level Political Forum 2021 Position Paper

Prof. Pam Rajput, APWW/ NAWO/Women 2030, India  
Quazi Baby, Participatory Development Action Program, Bangladesh  
Rose Pélagie Nasso, Cameroon Ecology / REFACOF, Cameroon  
Sachini Perera, Realizing Sexual and Reproductive Justice (RESURJ)  
Sarah M Baird, Let There Be Light International, United States of America  
Selamawit Tesfaye, International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF), United States of America  
Selma Acuner, Women's Coalition - Turkey (Kadin Koalisyonu), Turkey  
Shamala Chandrasekaran, Asian Pacific Resource and Research Centre for Women (ARROW), Malaysia  
Suzanne Lea, Red Dot Foundation Global, United States of America  
Dr. Uzodinma Adirieje, Afrihealth Optonet Association (CSOs Network), Nigeria  
Dr. Uzodinma Adirieje, Society for Conservation and Sustainability of Energy and Environment in Nigeria (SOCSEEN), Nigeria  
Valentina Bodrug-Lungu, Gender-Centru, Republic of Moldova  
WUNRN & WUNRN EU, WUNRN EU, Brussels  
Yee Siang Yong, Buddhist Tzu Chi Foundation, United States of America