

## **Women as leading forces for the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals in the post-Covid-19 world**

### **Context and challenges**

The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (the Convention), remains a crucial tool for the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (the Committee) continues to integrate the SDGs in its work. The Committee has included the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in its mandate, considering that the fulfilment of women's rights is a prerequisite for its implementation. It makes reference to the SDGs in a standard paragraph in its concluding observations and systematically raises the issue of taking into account SDG 5, on women's equality and empowerment, and more generally the cross-cutting nature of women's rights in the implementation of the Agenda. The Committee, with its strong focus on current generations and particularly on the future of girls, recommends accelerating the eradication of all forms of discrimination and harmful practices that deprive girls of their vital empowerment and the full enjoyment of their rights.

The Committee notes the consideration given to the Sustainable Development Goals, in particular to SDG 5, in State party reports, but at the same time it regrets the lack of explicit reference to the legal framework for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and its coordination with women's rights. The Committee has observed that the strategies remain mostly distinct at the institutional level.

The Committee would like to see greater coordination of public policies and institutional plans for the implementation of the SDGs and women's rights. It would also suggest an evaluation methodology, based on precise data quantifying the progress made and the objectives still to be achieved.

### **Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic**

The Covid-19 pandemic crisis has seriously affected the promotion and protection of human rights and has disproportionately affected women and girls, due to pre-existing gender inequalities, deep-rooted and often systemic discrimination, and lack of gender-balanced leadership. The Committee expresses its concern about the lasting impact of the crisis on women's rights, and it deplores the fact

that, not only are women's rights not sufficiently consolidated to allow them to better prevent violations and to resist and overcome crises, but worse, a random and sometimes regressive evolution of women's rights can be observed. Recalling the international community's promise to 'build back better' in reference to the necessary strengthening of the fight against all inequalities and to better respond to current and future crises, in all areas, the Committee considers that the Covid crisis and the strategic challenges the world faces today, call for an acceleration of equality as a fundamental right and a force for positive transformation of societies.

As noted by the Committee in its most recent [General Recommendation on the rights of indigenous women and girls \(General Recommendation No.39, \(2022\)\)](#), the participation of diverse groups of women and girls and the development of their leadership capacity in government and communities is essential to ensuring that the prevention of and response to disasters is effective and incorporates perspectives from all sectors of society. Promoting the participation of girls and young women in the creation, development, implementation and monitoring of policies and plans relating to climate change and disaster risk reduction is essential, because those groups are often overlooked, even though they will experience the impacts of those phenomena throughout their lifetimes. Furthermore, as stated by the Committee in the concept note for its [Half Day of General Discussion on the equal and inclusive representation of women in decision-making systems \(22 February 2023\)](#), “representation in decision-making systems enables individuals and communities to have greater control over their lives and to shape, rather than be subjected to, the institutional and public changes and policies that directly affect them”.

In this regard, the Committee calls for an acceleration of the implementation of the Convention as a necessary condition for the success of the SDGs. It calls on States to make a paradigm shift based on the lessons learned from the Covid 19 crisis to give new impetus to the fight against all forms of inequality and discrimination, strengthening, as a priority, the Cedaw Convention as an instrument for sustainable change. This approach should, in the Committee's view, take into account women in all their diversity, particularly the most vulnerable populations.

### **Recovery from the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) and the full implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development**

Sustainable Development Goal 5 on achieving gender equality and empower all women and girls has a cross-cutting focus that promotes equality in the implementation of sustainable development and

the inclusive participation of women in that process. The HLPF in 2023 will also review SDGs 6 on clean water and sanitation, 7 on affordable and clean energy, 9 on industry, innovation and infrastructure, 11 on sustainable cities and communities, and 17 on partnerships for the Goals. The empowerment of women is inextricably linked with these goals and are addressed by the Committee in its work.

### ***SDG Goal 6 Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all***

The estimated 40% shortage of water resources in 2030 is likely to have a major impact on already vulnerable populations, especially women. The Committee, in its [General recommendation No.37 \(2018\) on gender-related dimensions of disaster risk reduction in a changing climate](#), stressed the importance of the empowerment of girls and women and their effective participation in all development and resource protection programmes. It noted that the categorization of women and girls as passive “vulnerable groups” in need of protection from the impacts of disasters is a negative gender stereotype that fails to recognize the important contributions of women in the areas of disaster risk reduction, post-disaster management and climate change mitigation and adaptation strategies. The General recommendation also emphasises that “well-designed disaster risk reduction and climate change initiatives that provide for the full and effective participation of women can advance substantive gender equality and the empowerment of women, while ensuring that sustainable development, disaster risk reduction and climate change objectives are achieved”.

As the Committee noted in its General Recommendation, in many societies women and girls have the primary responsibility for collecting fuel and water and therefore are disproportionately affected by a lack of available, affordable, safe and accessible drinking water and fuel sources. The Committee called on States parties to promote and protect women’s equal rights to adequate drinking water and sanitation with particular attention being paid to ensuring that women living in poverty, especially in the context of disasters and climate change;

Similarly, in its most [General Recommendation on the rights of indigenous women and girls \(General Recommendation No.39 \(2022\)\)](#), the Committee reiterated the importance of a clean, healthy and sustainable environment, which includes, among other things, access to safe and adequate water.

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

The Committee calls on States parties to review energy policies, in particular policies on the extraction and export of oil and gas, in order to ensure that they take into account the impact of climate change and environmental degradation on women, including women living in poverty and rural and indigenous women. It further calls for the rational management of natural resources to protect health and the preservation of nature. Recalling the territorial and extra-territorial obligations of States in the field of risk reduction and climate change, the Committee urges international solidarity in moving forward. As ever, the meaningful and equal participation and leadership of women in the elaboration of energy policies at local, regional and global level is a crucial element to ensure sustainable development in this area. With regard to the actions of non-state actors, the Committee recommends that States parties adopt relevant legislation with a monitoring mechanism to ensure that businesses are held accountable for the impact of their activities on women's human rights and the environment. Furthermore, States parties should encourage entrepreneurship among women and create incentives for women to engage in businesses involved in the clean energy sector and should encourage businesses working in this area to increase the number of women whom they employ, in particular in leadership positions.

***SDG Goal 9: Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization and foster innovation***

The Committee calls on states and companies to take social and environmental responsibility, to strengthen infrastructures and to prevent natural disasters, particularly those linked to deforestation. As regards sustainable development and innovation, the Committee recognises the increasing role that artificial intelligence plays in society today and is mindful of the potential benefits the digital transition can have for the empowerment of women. It is, nevertheless, concerned that women remain largely absent from this fledgling sector. If women's voices are not effectively integrated into this sector at its foundation level, they risk seeing their rights regress significantly as the world comes to rely increasingly more on artificial intelligence for decision-making. The Committee draws the attention of States parties to this alarming gap and calls upon the international community to strengthen equality in this area through education, both basic and continuing. It also recommends the use of temporary special measures, in accordance with article 4 of the Convention in order to address the disparity between men and women in the sphere of artificial intelligence and close the gap. The Committee urges States to take the necessary measures to ensure that national strategies for artificial intelligence integrate the concept of gender equality and to prevent gender-based discrimination in the design of algorithms.

In line with its General Recommendation No.39 (2022) on the rights of indigenous women and girls, the Committee calls upon States parties to ensure that indigenous women and girls have access to the benefits of scientific progress and technological innovation to be able to achieve food and water security, that they are compensated for their contributions and technical knowledge and that their scientific contributions are recognized.

***SDG Goal 11: Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable***

The Committee stresses the importance of implementing the Cedaw Convention at local level and regrets the lack of visibility of this international instrument. In this regard, the Committee recommends the adoption of local plans to implement the provisions of the Cedaw Convention locally in all sectors, including through:

- Increasing awareness of the Convention at all levels of administration in conjunction with civil society;
- - The establishment a community-based police and local justice system, coupled with training of relevant actors on the provisions of the Convention;
- - The creation of an appropriate environment and application of a zero tolerance policy towards all forms of violence, including street harassment against girls and women;
- - The establishment of public services accessible to all women, including women with disabilities
- - Policies to ensure equal and effective representation of women in local decision-making bodies
- - The provision of support for NGOs and HR defenders

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

The mobilisation of stakeholders is a necessary condition for the success of the SDGs. The Committee supports the creation of participatory spaces with civil society and the establishment of an institutionalised dialogue with cultural, political and religious leaders. In recent years, the Committee has strengthened its collaboration with the major international bodies, such as the Inter-parliamentary Union and also but also with the other Human rights committees, aware of the importance of this cooperation. In this regard, the Committee supports enhanced cooperation between States,

particularly with international bodies and the private sector, to speed up the implementation of equality.