

POSITION PAPER ON

HLPF REVIEW

Women's
Major Group
Creating a Just & Sustainable Future

womensmajorgroup.org





INTRODUCTION

The Women’s Major Group (WMG) has been critically engaged with 2030 Agenda processes to “realize the human rights of all and to achieve gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls” among the commitments of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development including implementation of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).¹ We are deeply concerned that even before the COVID-19 crisis, after five years of SDGs implementation, the world is not on track in achieving the goals nor has any country fully achieved gender equality. The Global Sustainable Development Report 2019 (GSDR 2019) emphasized that much more is needed - and quickly - to bring about the transformative changes that are required. After years of stalled progress, as acknowledged in General Assembly resolutions 67/290, 70/299, 73/305 and 74/298, the GSDR 2019 presented views to address challenges to achieving the SDGs. This includes, according to the GSDR, addressing the cross-cutting impacts across the entire 2030 Agenda.

The UN75 Political Declaration states: “We will place women and girls at the center. Conflicts will not be resolved and sustainable development will not occur, without the equal and active participation of women at all levels. Human rights can never be fully upheld unless they are also enjoyed by all women and girls. Persistent gender inequalities and abuse, including sexual and gender-based violence have deprived us of a more just and better world. We will accelerate action to achieve gender equality, women’s participation, and the empowerment of women and girls in all domains.”

The fight for gender equality is inextricably linked to the 2030 Agenda, the promotion and protection of human rights, the environment and international peace and security. With this in mind, the Women’s Major Group (WMG) presents our Position Paper on the High Level Political Forum (HLPF) Review process.

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

The HLPF is not only mandated to provide political leadership and guidance, but also to enhance integration of economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development. It has the responsibility to address new and emerging sustainable development challenges—and in doing so, to investigate and remove structural barriers in achieving the SDGs. The WMG assessment on HLPF uncovers major gaps in addressing these structural impediments and offers meaningful processes throughout the follow up and review cycle. Our overall recommendations include the following:

¹ A/RES/70/1; https://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/RES/70/1&Lang=E

▶ **MORE FOCUS ON SYSTEMIC BARRIERS IN ACHIEVING SDGS**

HLPF should clearly expose both progress and implementation gaps at national, regional and global levels in order to allow for corrective actions and change of policies, programmes and institutions. HLPF needs to ensure an adequate analysis of the root causes and systemic determinants of slow progress in all areas including gender inequality, social protection and the global division of labour, hindering factors to environmental justice and socio-economic transformation. This requires special attention to situations of developing countries, global economic trade, tax, monetary and financial frameworks; as well militarism and social and cultural norms such as patriarchy, fundamentalism, racism, casteism, etc.

▶ **A MORE SYSTEMIC ANNUAL COMPREHENSIVE REVIEW OF THE SDGS SHOULD BE UNDERTAKEN**

The current clustered-siloed approach is not only blocking the advance on the effective implementation of the interlinkages, but also blocking the generation of knowledge and tools for transformational work. In WMG's experiences, governments primarily work and report on the SDGs in the clusters as recommended for each year. A comprehensive review requires greater attention to an integration of wider inputs including by diverse civil society organizations, members of affected communities, human rights defenders, academia, treaty body reports, and reports by Special Rapporteurs and Independent Experts. Furthermore, UN agencies also submit reports in a siloed manner. The HLPF process does not formally post and acknowledge the NGO Para 89 reports as part of the official meeting. A comprehensive approach enables HLPF to provide interlinkages and integration across the SDGs and sustainable development frameworks as well as opportunities for assessing synergies and tradeoffs.

▶ **HLPF SHOULD BE A TRUE OPEN POLICY SPACE FOR MEANINGFUL PARTICIPATION OF CIVIL SOCIETY**

Inputs by diverse civil society representatives of women, feminist and sexual dissidence groups, members of affected communities, human right defenders, have been key to learn about the impacts of social, economic and environmental policies. In the context of COVID-19 the virtual participation has increased the challenges for meaningful and sustained participation of the already weakened and limited space for their participation. The success of the future implementation of SDGs depends on the true open space for civil society participation

▶ **HLPF SHOULD EMPHASIZE POLICY COHERENCE WITH HUMAN RIGHTS AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IMPERATIVES**

including active participation of relevant Special Procedures, as well as links with human rights Treaty Bodies and UN Specialized Agencies, whose inputs should be discussed in the ECOSOC Integration Segment and reflected in the HLPF.



▶ **THE HLPF MUST CHANGE FROM BEING A SPACE TO PASSIVELY REPORT TO A SPACE TO ACTIVELY REVIEW AND ACT**

The HLPF needs to be a place where countries actively engage to address and complete in-depth analysis of human rights and systemic challenges, a space where engagement and asking difficult questions is encouraged to enable a more in-depth analysis and reporting on human rights and systemic challenges to sustainable development. The current Voluntary National Review (VNR) processes at the HLPF, with its time limitation for the government's presentation as well as questions from other member states and civil societies, disallow meaningful engagement in the process as well as undermining the enormous efforts taken to produce the report and data. HLPF should discuss building **follow-up of VNRs**, which would immensely increase the effectiveness and efficiency of the HLPF.

▶ **INCREASE THE ROLE OF REGIONAL FORUMS AND IMPROVE LINKAGES BETWEEN NATIONAL, REGIONAL AND GLOBAL LEVELS**

The HLPF should not be seen merely as a 2-week-long process in UN Headquarters in New York, but as a sustained and connected year-long process of follow up and review, and use the mechanisms at the national, regional and global levels. It should recognise and maximise the role of regional forums in the preparation of and complementing the process at the HLPF. The HLPF should build on the agreed-upon work/documents completed at ECOSOC commissions, forums as well as the agreements/resolutions forged during the GA committees.

Based on these recommendations, WMG has developed this briefing paper outlining our concrete proposal for HLPF review.

WMG PROPOSAL FOR HLPF REVIEW

PROPOSAL FOR THE THEMES OF HLPF 2022-2024

As the global community coalesced to celebrate the 75th Anniversary of the United Nations in September 2020 under the shadow of COVID-19, Member States in their Declaration [A/RES/75/1](#), made commitments to strengthen the multilateral system and set forth plans to “build back better”. Among the tools to do so, as recognized by UN leadership and Member States, are the 2030 Agenda and its Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Their importance is highlighted by marking 2020 as the start of the Decade of Action, the final 10 years to achieve the SDGs, as well as the widespread recognition that COVID-19 is threatening to reverse development gains over the past decade. Also, in September during the GA, Member States reacknowledged their pledge to achieve gender equality by recommitting to the Beijing Platform for Action.

At the 2020 HLPF, Secretary-General António Guterres highlighted these concerns: “The COVID-19 crisis is having devastating impacts because of our past and present failures. Because we have yet to take the SDGs seriously. Because we have put up with inequalities within and between countries that have left billions of people just one crisis away from poverty and financial ruin. Because we haven’t invested adequately in resilience in universal health coverage; quality education; social protection; safe water and sanitation. Because we have yet to right the power imbalances that leave women and girls to constantly bear the brunt of any crisis. Because we haven’t heeded warnings about the damage that we are inflicting on our natural environment. Because of the shocking risks we are taking with climate disruption. And because we have undervalued effective international cooperation and solidarity.”

With this emphasis on growing inequalities in mind, the Women’s Major Group submits a proposal for non-siloed alternatives to the HLPF for 2022-2024. The proposal reflects the need for this integrated and cross-cutting review of opportunities and systemic challenges critical to advancing the 2030 Agenda.

Our proposal presents three themes for the remaining years of the HLPF this cycle. With “Building Back Transformatively” as the overarching theme of the proposal, the themes are rooted in understanding and uncovering inequalities of wealth, power and resources in the context of COVID-19. The non-siloed proposals will see all SDGs reviewed each year. The proposed themes are:

- [Building Back Differently: Transforming to a Just Global Economic Governance](#)
- [Building Back Justly: Reducing Inequalities and Sustaining Peace](#)
- [Building Back Sustainably: Tackling Climate Change and Sustainable Use of Natural Resources](#)

This focus on inequalities is bolstered as the UN 75th Anniversary Political Declaration, adopted at the level of Heads of State in September 2020, recognizes the cross-cutting nature of COVID-19 recovery: “the COVID-19 pandemic has reminded us in the most powerful way that we are closely interconnected and only as strong as our weakest link.” In the same way that global COVID-19 recovery is dependent upon global commitment, so too are the SDGs from climate and inequalities, to financing and governance, the interlinkages are increasingly evident.

The Declaration also identifies addressing inequality within and among countries as it “leads to mistrust between countries, and to people’s mistrust in institutions of governance... We will address the root causes of inequalities, including violence, human rights abuses, corruption, marginalization, discrimination in all its forms, poverty and exclusion as well as lack of education and employment”.



1 Building Back Differently: Transforming to a Just Global Economic Governance

Discussions related to macroeconomic recovery have been a major topic across the discussion within the UN following the COVID-19 pandemic. This proposal to focus on transforming to a Just Global Economic Governance is rooted in the knowledge that discussions of economic development and reconstruction post-COVID cannot be divorced from the SDGs. To achieve progress on gender equality, a feminist reform must consider the implications of macroeconomic policy for sustainable development more broadly in respect of our limited resources. A Just Global Economic Governance prioritizes underlying **macroeconomic, financial and trade structural injustices and inequalities** including climate justice, social protection schemes, trade, debt, illicit financial flows, and corporate capture. A Just Global Economic order requires **shifting priorities** and developing an understanding that **a country's development is not measured by GDP growth and profit, but rather the wellbeing of people and planet**, as well as the unique vulnerabilities it may face.

Secretary-General Antonio Guterres highlighted the role of the UN in promoting reform of the macroeconomic and financing mechanisms, central to the Decade of Action and delivery on the SDGs. In a [video statement](#) to civil society he noted:

“For too long, we have been underserved by our global financial architecture. We now have a chance to re-imagine global financing frameworks and put them at the service of humanity. This is the only way we will build a strong recovery from the pandemic and create communities and societies fit for the challenges of the future, from infectious diseases to the climate crisis and economic shocks.”

President of ECOSOC, Volkan Bozkır, also referenced this, calling on Member States to “look at ways in which we can begin the process of institutional change and transformation, which is going to be required”. The co-convenor of the High-Level Event on Financing for Development and COVID-19 and Permanent Representative of Canada went further, saying that “it’s a great effort to change global institutions and to make them more responsive... we must continue it by revitalizing UN institutions... But also, the United Nations itself has to lead the way in bringing people together and helping make reform and change happen.”



Building Back Justly: Reducing Inequalities and Sustaining Peace

This theme will focus on the intersections of development and peace, with a recognition of the increased importance of the humanitarian-development-peace nexus as governments transition from COVID-19 relief efforts to sustainable development efforts. It will be critical to ensure the transitions include civil society participation and solutions, tackling discrimination, racism, patriarchy, fundamentalism, heightened militarism, corporate capture of debates and decisions, and colonialism as interlinking systems of oppression, all of which are impeding progress on and draining resources away from the SDGs in the Decade of Action. As women's rights and gender equality are viewed to be "under threat" worldwide, governments must confront the enabling environments of militarism, violence and patriarchal power inequalities.

In a time where the world is running out of its resources, extractivism of all resources and of the labour force is at its maximum, when measures to stop COVID-19 expansion forced many countries into taking drastic measures to sustain the health and wellbeing of their populations, we understand the importance of global solidarity, collaboration and the need for meaningful multilateral action much better. The well-being of all of us and the planet is dependent upon one another. Meanwhile, the corporate elite grows in power and control of multilateralism, militarism, conservative forces, colonialism and other interlinking systems of oppression are taking crucial resources away from the welfare and wellbeing of peoples.²

At the SDG Moment 2020, activist Malala Yousafzai cited: "On education alone, 20 million more girls may never go back to the classroom when this crisis ends [and] the global education funding gap has already increased to 200 billion dollars per year. When will you commit the necessary funding to give every child 12 years of quality education? When will you prioritize peace and protect refugees? When will you pass policies to cut carbon emissions?".

² In 2019, military expenditure was \$1.9 trillion USD according to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute. This marks the largest annual increase in a decade. Set against this backdrop of rising militarism and militarized responses to the COVID-19 pandemic, it is critical that the HLPF addresses these as systemic impediments to realizing the 2030 Agenda.



Building Back Sustainably: Tackling Climate Change and Sustainable Use of Natural Resources

Climate change disproportionately impacts already vulnerable populations, specifically women of all ages in developing countries, and if unchecked will widen the development gap and global inequalities. We cannot end the environmental and climate crises without ending violence against women and girls or the extractive economic system. An emphasis on sustainability requires all SDG progress to take place within planetary boundaries. Without this intersectional approach, progress in any of the 17 SDGs will be in jeopardy. As Small Island Developing States (SIDs) warn that climate action remains inadequate, it is critical we re-think approaches to industries, economic models, decarbonization, and corporate accountability. As stated in the principles of the Feminist Response to COVID Collective: “A just and equitable transition involves communities in decarbonization and the transformational shift from the privatization and commodification of resources toward regenerative, sustainable, cooperative, and collective models.” This requires a close review of industries around the world, to understand and remedy the disproportionate effects on global value chains upon which the most vulnerable populations depend—including agricultural, fishing and care sectors.

At the 2020 Climate Roundtable, the Prime Minister of Antigua and Barbuda named climate inequalities as a critical issue: “whereas small island states...contribute negligibly to global emissions, they continue to suffer disproportionately from the profligacy of others without any mechanism whatsoever to fund compensation for loss and damage.”

The President of Honduras called for action in the 75th Session of the General Assembly General Debate: “It’s time to move from theory to the nitty-gritty of reality. Climate change has been an emergency for years and we still don’t know where these green climate funds are found. Why are they not reaching the neediest?” This was further bolstered by a common statement by the Prime Minister of Bhutan at the Climate Roundtable, calling on Member States to identify both “what we must not do or what we have to undo to actually meet our targets by 2050 or middle of this century.” This task must be taken up at the HLPF, requiring a focus on the interlinkages of the various SDGs to ensure countries are on track to harmonize climate targets across all 16 other SDGs.

PROPOSAL FOR THE HLPF FORMAT

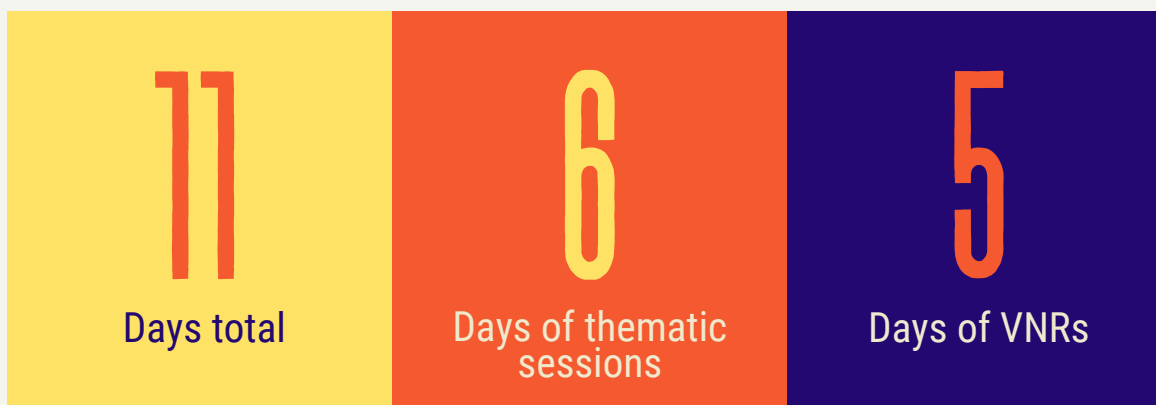
HIGH LEVEL POLITICAL FORUM (HLPF)

The Forum currently meets annually under the auspices of the Economic and Social Council for eight days, including five days thematic sessions, a three-day ministerial segment and every four years at the level of Heads of State and Government under the auspices of the General Assembly for two days.

The WMG proposes to increase HLPF days from 8 days to 11 days (by transferring 3 days of ECOSOC meetings to HLPF), consisting of 6 days of thematic sessions, 5 days of VNRs.

For the thematic segment, the non-siloed proposals will see all SDGs reviewed each year through day to day categorisation of four different pillars: cross-cutting for day 1 (emphasizing the interconnected nature of all the SDGs and goals 5 and 17 as cross-cutting goals), the economic pillar for day 2 and 3 (goal 2, 3, 8, 10, 12), the social pillar for day 4 (goal 1, 4, 11, 16), as well as the environmental pillar for day 5 and 6 (goal 6, 7, 9, 13, 14, 15). To ensure gender equality and means of implementation are discussed across all the goals, specific guiding questions (see below) would assure their integration and discussion in all the pillars.

Each pillar would be divided by 5 levers of discussion/session: (1) progress and systemic barriers in achieving the goals, then continue to concrete policy action oriented recommendations in terms of (2) governance (AM session), (3) economy and finance (AM sessions), (4) Science & Technology (PM session) and (5) Countries in Special Situations (PM Sessions). Each session will start with panel discussion from Regional Commissions representatives, UN experts, UN treaty bodies or mandate holders, civil societies and academies.





HLPF THEMATIC SEGMENT

	DAY 1	DAY 2	DAY 3	DAY 4	DAY 5	DAY 6
	Cross-cutting	Economic		Social	Environment	
	SDGs 5 & 17	SDGs 3, 8, 10, 12		SDGs 1, 4, 11, 16	SDGs 6, 7, 9, 13, 14, 15	
LEVERS	Progress & systemic barriers in achieving the goals (AM session)					
	Governance (AM session)					
	Economy & Finance (AM session)					
	Science & Technology (PM session)					
	Countries in special situations (PM session)					

Guiding questions for each level:

- What are the **systemic issues** that hinder us from achieving X, Y or Z? For example: What are the systemic issues that hinder us from achieving decent work and a living wage (goal 8) in the context of just global economic governance? What are the systemic issues that hinder us from tackling inequalities within and between countries (goal 10) and sustainable consumption and production in the context of just economic governance? What are the systemic issues that prevent women from having secure tenure rights to improve their contribution to sustainable development? And what are the specific impacts of these systemic issues on gender equality and human rights?
- What are the needs of the **countries in special situations** and what solutions can the 2030 Agenda offer to alleviate these problems? What resources would be necessary, which actors need to be involved and how can these be mobilized? How can we ensure women are involved and receive benefits?
- To be able to build back differently, what are policy recommendations in relation to **governance** that address systemic issues? For example: How can corporate abuses be reduced? How can the private sector engage in the 2030 Agenda and SDGs implementation while protecting and prioritising human rights, labour rights and the environment? How have CSOs participated in this process?
- What measures should be taken in economy and finance, globally and regionally, to ensure that X, Y, or Z can be achieved in due time? How could science and technology aid us to achieve X, Y or Z? How can we ensure an inclusive and just approach to the development and distribution of these technological advances, without harming people and ecological health?

The Ministerial Segment will be done in 5 days, allocating more time for individual countries, with every country reviewed individually, (e.g. 45 minutes VNR time-allocation per country - 15 minutes presentation and 30 minutes Q&A), 8 countries per day, 40 per year, 200 every 5 years—allowing space for all member states). Countries should present their VNR only once per cycle, with two reports: one from the government containing the important observations and recommendations developed in the Regional Forum presentations, so this will be a short and concise presentation and another one containing statistics, and inputs from the UN system, including UN human rights experts. The VNR must include statistics and responses related to human rights issues mentioned by the experts from HR treaties.

Regarding the question and answer portion, the CSOs from the country will have the possibility to ask questions to the VNR country, as well as governments from the region. Other stakeholders can also ask questions if time allows. It's important for the government under review to answer these questions during the sessions.³

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³ Possible guiding questions for this segment include: (1) Which goals show progress and what are lessons that we can learn from these successes? (2) Which goals show little progress, are stagnant, or going in the reverse direction? What are the systemic issues hindering progress? What are the recommendations to tackle these issues? (3) How can the government ensure to leave no one behind, particularly ensuring the meaningful participation and inputs from marginalised groups?

HLPF VNR SEGMENT

	DAY 7	DAY 8	DAY 9	DAY 10	DAY 11
	<hr style="width: 80%; margin: auto;"/> V N R S <hr style="width: 80%; margin: auto;"/>				
AM SESSION	2 Member States	2 Member States	2 Member States	2 Member States	2 Member States
	2 Member States	2 Member States	2 Member States	2 Member States	2 Member States
PM SESSION	2 Member States	2 Member States	2 Member States	2 Member States	2 Member States
	2 Member States	2 Member States	2 Member States	2 Member States	2 Member States

TOTAL # of Member States presenting per HLPF: 40 Member States

REGIONAL FORUMS

The regional forums also need to be restructured to ensure that they can inform the HLPF process and the VNRs in a more efficient way. Subregional and regional consultations should be directly feeding into the HLPF.

We recommend countries present their VNRs initially at regional forums, giving civil society organizations and other stakeholders an opportunity to comment and make suggestions at this level. Lessons learned from other countries should be shared and the remarks and recommendations made at the regional level should be integrated into the content the country will present at the HLPF. Accountability should be an important part of the regional forum for each country. A benefit from the regional consideration of the VNRs is that the presentations at HLPF will be stronger. Presentations at HLPF would then include the results of the regional review with recommendations, along with the accountability aspects and the summary of current best practices available. If there is not sufficient time between the regional review and HLPF then it could be possible to make this review into a biannual review, at the regional level, every 2 years, so the countries will have time to bring recommendations from the regional to the global level.

This way, it would be possible to discuss the reasons for slow progress and undertake a deeper analysis of systemic issues in HLPF VNR presentations. Moreover, good practices from the regional level—the inclusion of Special Rapporteurs, Human Rights Experts and UN agencies, CSOs, and more in the VNR discussion—can also be included at the global level of HLPF as well as the regional forums.

At the regional level, we also propose to develop a follow-up process, especially to evaluate the consideration of regional/global recommendations and contributions to implementation and lessons learned.

PREPARATIONS	REGIONAL FORUMS (at least 2 days)	
<p>The regional commissions prepare guiding questions for the thematic roundtables in the first day, in consultation with the regional civil society engagement mechanisms</p>	Thematic	VNR Reviews
	<p>Overall progress of the region to the theme of HLPF</p> <p>Roundtables to discuss the SDGs that include all stakeholders, and at least 1 representative from related UN HR bodies.</p> <p>Means of implementation</p>	<p>Voluntary reviews for those year's countries and last year's countries (as a follow up) based on the theme of the year (should also include inputs from UN HR bodies)</p>



FOLLOW UP AND REVIEW AT THE NATIONAL LEVEL

Our experiences and the feedback from our members throughout the world, clearly indicate that good, inclusive and participatory coordination of SDG implementation, monitoring and review at the national level can enable and support having systemic discussions and holistic reviews each year at the HLPF. As stated in the WMG Guidelines on Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs), “The presentation at the HLPF is not the end of the process or the ultimate goal. The ultimate goal is the full implementation of the SDGs. The VNR process is one tool to meet that goal.” Therefore, the process should start at the national level, build up to regional and global levels and return and feed back into the national level. Moreover, it's important that after the HLPF, the national civil society groups continue their dialogue with the government to incorporate recommendations and strengthen implementation, inputting into the National Action Plans for SDGs to advance the 2030 Agenda.

When countries adopted the 2030 Agenda, they agreed on a set of principles for the VNR process and report to:

- be voluntary and country-led taking into account different national realities, capacities, and levels of development;
- track progress in ways that respect the universal, integrated, and interrelated nature of the three dimensions; support the identification of solutions and best practices;
- be open, inclusive, participatory, and transparent;
- be people-centered, gender-sensitive, respect human rights, and have a particular focus on those furthest behind;
- build on existing platforms and processes; be rigorous and based on evidence; and,
- benefit from the support of the UN system and other multilateral institutions. (Adapted from General Assembly Resolution 70/1, paragraph 749)

While much has been written and suggested, also by the UN system, for the preparation of the Voluntary National Reports, in line with the above principles, in order for this process to truly feed into the national implementation and achievement of the SDGs by 2030, we need a follow up to the VNRs at the national level, as inclusive and participatory as the preparation process. We need to focus on lessons learned and emerging issues from that year's HLPF and the VNR review, to make a roadmap with the participation of all stakeholders, especially civil society, for progress until the country's next VNR.

Further, the coherence in reviews and applications of SDGs, require it to be connected to the reviews under other international mechanisms, especially to those in the UN human rights reporting mechanisms. As a holistic agenda, the 2030 Agenda should be integral to all sustainable development work at the national level and utilize all the other levels of accountability, regional and global, towards the successful implementation and realization of the SDGs.

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Written by :

Mabel Bianco (Fundación para Estudio e Investigación de la Mujer)

Wardarina (Asia Pacific Forum on Women, Law and Development)

Elena Marmo (Global Policy Watch)

Bette Levy (Sorooptimist International)

Sadia Mir (WUNRN EU)

Şehnaz Kıymaz Bahçeci (WMG Secretariat)

Andrea Vega Troncoso (WMG Secretariat)

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