



Global Social Observatory 2016 General Assembly Interactive Dialogue on Gender and the SDGs – July 2016

As part of its 2016 General Assembly, the Global Social Observatory was pleased to feature an interactive dialogue on gender as an integrating dynamic for implementation of all seventeen of the SDGs in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Katherine Hagen, the Executive Director of the GSO, moderated the dialogue by observing that progress on gender equality has been notable but remains far from being fully achieved. The special session was being convened to share ideas on what we have learned for a better understanding of the challenges and solutions that may help us reach the goal of full gender equality.

Two special guests were invited to start the dialogue - Sultana Khanum from Bangladesh and active in the Civil Society Network for the Scaling Up Nutrition Movement, and Caitlin Kraft-Buchman, founder of Women@TheTable and active in the formation of the International Geneva Gender Champions. Sultana highlighted the issue of empowerment for women depending on the cultural and legal framework in which women operate, while Caitlin described how supportive cultural symbols and mobilizing senior leaders in international Geneva can produce the commitments for specific actions that can open the way to genuine empowerment.

GSO members and friends then joined in a lively interactive dialogue, confirming that there is a new understanding of the issues and solutions that should be integrated into the implementation strategies for the 2030 Agenda. Participants shared their wide-ranging expertise on gender in law and practice, research and communications. They agreed that the dialogue should continue, and the GSO is invited to explore ways to make this an ongoing interactive dialogue.

Issues:

- Empowerment is not enough when there is no decision-making control to go with it.
- There is a divide in many countries between elementary schooling for girls and opportunities for adolescent girls.
- In many countries, women still encounter major legal barriers to ownership of land, access to financial resources or markets.
- Micro-credit programs have been popular among women, but they are not working to advance women economically, beyond essentially low-income settings.
- Women are also missing in the mid-levels of business development and in the leadership circles of chambers of commerce and other business associations.
- Women are often invisible – people don't recognize their credentials even when they are perfectly qualified. This is not new, but it is far more evident as women seek to move into new fields in the world of work.
- Opportunities for women to participate in civil society organizations and events are often failures because of missing skills – or because they are expected to conform to the Western model of successful participation.
- Quotas in governing bodies tend to operate as a ceiling as well as minimum threshold.



Solutions:

- As one of multiple SDGs, the SDG on gender equality can be linked to a widening array of development issues – to apply a gender lens to any of the other SDGs. This has opened up the possibilities for things like empowering women to be active in climate change, etc.
- Integrating a gender lens to all foreign policy and development objectives should be encouraged.
- Projects can be developed to broaden the visibility of role models and other possibilities – such as internships that are being organized by a Geneva-based group of women ambassadors from Africa.
- The World Bank is helping change the legal framework in many countries with its series on Women in Business that surveys the laws and reforms to score countries on their progress.
- Education policy and programming has succeeded in increasing the number of girls completing primary education but now needs to concentrate on mid-level schooling for girls.
- Mobile phone apps can link maternal information with other information drawn from multiple sectors to help raise awareness and increase relevant information for women to take steps to improve their status.
- There needs to be greater awareness of the balance between skills development for capacity to participate in civil society organizations and respecting the characteristics of local cultures and practices.
- Financing vehicles and other support systems need to be opened up for women entrepreneurs to develop medium-level enterprises.
- The IPU has had a successful policy of penalties for not meeting a 30 per cent quota of female participation for all delegations at all IPU meetings. The IPU is now looking at raising this to 40 per cent since the quota system seems to be operating as a ceiling as well as a minimum.
- Others, such as the ILO, are relying on a “name and shame” approach which does seem to be working to increase participation of women.
- The IPU can be an important partner in efforts to change the legal barriers to women in business.
- Story telling is an important means of communication to highlight the significance of particular issues and to make them relevant to the local setting.
- The Gender Champions approach to ensure that all panels include women as panelists can help to eliminate the dilemma of “invisibility” of qualified women.
- Additional support systems can be put into place to gather information on women who are qualified and available for panel.