Summit for Democracy Cohort on Gender Equality as a Prerequisite for Democracy

Roadmap of Recommendations

INTRODUCTORY OVERVIEW

Gender equality is an imperative for thriving democracies. Any effort to build strong democracies and inclusive institutions will be flawed if it excludes or marginalizes half the world's population. Countries where women prosper also tend to be healthier democracies.[1] Hence, empowering women and safeguarding democracy go together, gender equality is a prerequisite for inclusive democracy.

Around the world, gender equality and women's rights to participate in public life are being undermined by the same forces that are pushing back on democracy. For instance, gendered disinformation and online abuse against women in politics are increasingly used to erode the gains on gender equality, women's empowerment and democracy. Efforts towards more inclusive and equitable democracy are taking place but need to be strengthened and accelerated.

At the current rate of change, it is estimated that it would take about 286 years to close gaps in legal protection and remove discriminatory laws, 140 years for women to be represented equally in positions of power and leadership in the workplace, and at least 40 years to achieve equal representation in national parliaments.[2] Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 5.5 aims to "ensure women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision making in political, economic and public life."[3]

The recommendations of the Summit for Democracy's Gender Cohort, co-led by Sweden, Romania, the Georgetown Institute for Women, Peace and Security (GIWPS) and International IDEA, provide suggestions to strengthen democracy by striving for gender equality. The recommendations and proposed actions outlined

1   Exploring the Links between Women's Status and Democracy. Georgetown Institute for Women, Peace and Security, 2023.
2   Progress on the Sustainable Development Goals: the gender snapshot 2022. UN Women and UN Statistics Division.
3   Women's Political Participation, Africa Barometer, International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance, 2021

in this roadmap were identified in consultation with the cohort consisting of over 100 representatives of governments and civil society from all regions of the world.[i] Governments and civil society are encouraged to consider the recommendations as tools for strengthening democracy by promoting gender equality.

The recommendations focus on three pillars: inclusion; legislative and policy frameworks; and conflict prevention, peace and security. Each thematic pillar is fundamental for gender equality in democracy processes. Gender equality and women's political empowerment are directly and indirectly affected by a combination of complex social norms and practices, laws and policies. Socio-cultural norms and practices define *inclusion* and entrench the challenges that women encounter in exercising their democratic right to participate and be represented in public life and leadership. *Legislative and policy frameworks* shape the opportunities and abilities to participate and be represented in democratic processes and institutions. *Conflict prevention, peace and security processes* determine how a country or region addresses conflicts which have a disproportionate effect on women and girls. The participation and representation of women in all aspects of conflict prevention, peace and security processes are essential in enhancing women's safety and security and strengthening democratic processes and institutions.

INCLUSION

Identify and address harmful and discriminatory gender norms and practices in political, legal and educational systems and processes.
- **Proposed action:** Develop public advocacy campaigns tailored for women/girls and boys/men with messages to dismantle harmful stereotypes and promote gender equality and shared decision making in both the private and public spheres.
- **Proposed action:** Consider adopting educational curriculums for educators and students that empower women and girls and promote gender equality.

Discriminatory social norms, cultural beliefs and gender stereotypes underpin practices and behaviors that perpetuate gender inequalities in the social, political and economic spheres. Such harmful beliefs and practices sustained across generations make women less likely to enter politics and perpetuate the underrepresentation of women in leadership positions and public life. Gender equality as a prerequisite for democracy requires early and sustainable interventions to shift harmful gender norms and practices. Such interventions should focus on promoting positive messages that portray shared decision-making in all spheres and equal respect for the human rights of girls and boys, men and women.

Eliminate violence against women in politics (VAWIP) and address the proliferation of technology facilitated gender-based violence (TFGBV) and abuse.
- **Proposed action:** Adopt legal standards on zero tolerance for all forms of gender-based violence including online and between/within political parties.

- **Proposed action:** Address technology facilitated gender-based violence (GBV) and abuse in collaboration with social media companies. Increase coordination between online platforms and law enforcement entities in order to identify and respond to threats and hold perpetrators accountable.
- **Proposed action:** Develop strategies and tools to mitigate risks and threats towards women in politics, human rights defenders and civil society leaders. This includes measures to prevent, track, report and respond to online and offline threats and risks women encounter in civic spaces.

Progress on gender equality and democracy is being undermined by a "pandemic" of online violence and harassment. A survey of youth across 180 countries found that "52% of young women and girls have experienced online abuse, including threatening messages, sexual harassment, the sharing of private images without consent and 87% of the young women and girls think the problem is getting worse."[4]

These same tactics are being used to perpetuate violence against women in politics. According to the National Democratic Institute's (NDI) #NotTheCost campaign, women are bearing a significant personal cost for their political participation and representation. NDI identifies "democratic backsliding, a rise in 'strong man' politics and technological innovations" as factors shifting the environment and creating new "means of perpetrating violence against politically-active women."[5]

Around the world, efforts are underway to address VAWIP and TFGBV but more is needed. Bolivia was the first country in the world to pass a national law which specifically criminalizes "political violence and harassment against women." Ecuador, Peru, Costa Rica and Mexico have proposed similar legislation. The Latin America and Caribbean region is also leading in crafting "specific laws on cyberstalking and harassment, grooming and cyberbullying" which largely affect women.[6] Furthermore, countries such as Austria and Estonia have used innovative approaches to confront digital violence to supplement penal code reforms.[7]

Engage men and boys in transforming discriminatory practices, attitudes and behaviors that prevent gender equality and women's political empowerment.

- **Proposed action:** Build the capacity of men and boys to become strategic allies and advocates for gender equality by challenging discriminatory practices, attitudes and behaviors in societies, within organizations and political parties.
- **Proposed action:** Build alliances with traditional community leaders to address socio-cultural norms, stereotypes and harmful social practices that hinder gender equality and women's participation, representation and leadership.
- **Proposed action:** Develop national/regional networks of male political leaders as champions for gender equality, women's political empowerment and leadership in public life.

4   The World Wide Web Foundation, "Survey—Young people's experience of online harassment". 2020.
5   #NotTheCost, Ending Violence Against Women in Politics
6   "The Law and Violence Against Women in Politics". Juliana Restrepo Sanin, University of Denver, 2018.
7   "No space for violence against women and girls in the digital world". Dunja Mijatović, March 15, 2022.

Socio-cultural norms and behaviors that exclude and discriminate against, women and girls also hinder men and boys from fulfilling their societal and family roles. A 2022 study by UN Women found that most men and women agree that gender equality is important in all areas. The study also reports that during the COVID-19 pandemic, "attitudes towards domestic violence have slipped backwards and young men now hold some of the most regressive attitudes towards gender."[8] Engaging men as allies and beneficiaries of gender equality will require men to challenge rigid gender norms as this is crucial to advancing inclusive democracy. More efforts such as UN Women's global HeforShe campaign are needed to promote the role of men in accelerating progress on gender equality and encourage convened high-profile, influential men, including world leaders to use their platforms and visibility to promote gender equality.[9]

Foster conditions that promote women's political empowerment, leadership and representation in decision making.

- **Proposed action:** Support strategic networks and access to resources by earmarking funding for women's political empowerment and leadership programs; convene networks of women for mutual support and collaboration across political parties to promote opportunities for knowledge sharing, collaboration and mentorship.
- **Proposed action:** Invest in women's economic empowerment; promote a more equitable distribution of care work between men and women; encourage media actors to recognise and address gender stereotypes in the coverage of women in politics and promote a culture of equality and equity.
- **Proposed action:** Call upon political parties to adopt inclusive and transparent policies and practices to proactively support gender equality and women's political empowerment. This includes adopting gender equality commitments within political parties' policy frameworks and political parties adopting candidate lists that alternate men and women candidates to enable women to compete equally.

More than 75 percent of the world's unpaid care work is done by women.[10] This disproportionate distribution of work responsibilities is one of the largest barriers to women's participation and representation in political life and leadership. Addressing this barrier is critical to bolstering women's inclusion in political, economic and public life. For example, Iceland's policy decision to provide high-quality, universal childcare and shared parental leave led to an increase in the number of women in parliament, providing transformational access to the workforce and public life.[11] In 2021, Costa Rica and Paraguay rolled out national care policies as part of a regional effort to support childcare and other services that provide more options for working mothers—and all parents.[12] Furthermore, enabling women and girls to decide and exercise control over their own bodies— including their sexuality, reproductive health and fertility—can also increase their prospects of participating in the workforce and in political life.

8   "UN Women Reveals Concerning Regression in Attitudes Towards Gender Roles During Pandemic in New Study". UN Women, June 22, 2022.
9   He for She, UN Global Solidarity Movement for Gender Equality
10   Findings from "Addressing Barriers to Women's Democratic Representation" Panel. OECD Global Forum & Public Governance Ministerial Meeting. November 2022.
11   "This is why Iceland Ranks First for Gender Equality". World Economic Forum, March 1, 2017.
12   UN Women Highlights 2021–2022.

Harmful gender stereotypes in the media impact citizens' perceptions of women, including women in leadership, and represent another key barrier to women's inclusion. Globally, women politicians and candidates are also often portrayed unfairly in the media which undermines their opportunities and credibility. The coverage often focuses on women's appearances and overlooks women's unique life experiences, qualities, political merits and policy positions.[13]

A recent Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) study found that a major reason why young women decide not to pursue a political career is because of the way women are represented in media and their fear of sexist comments.[14] In Ukraine, the platform Povaha, which means 'respect,' has leveraged social media to crowdsource pushback against sexism in media and politics. It has gained traction across the country among women of all ages[15] and represents a promising model that could be replicated elsewhere.

LEGISLATIVE AND POLICY FRAMEWORKS

Implement policies and legal reforms for achieving gender equality in political and public life.

- **Proposed action:** Identify gaps in legislative frameworks to eliminate discriminatory laws and policies, including addressing conflicts between formal laws and customary laws and practices.
- **Proposed action:** Integrate gender equality in broader democracy agendas and leverage existing international gender frameworks such as the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), the Istanbul Convention and the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) Agenda to strengthen gender equality in democracy building endeavors.

Legislative and policy frameworks are fundamental for achieving gender equality as a prerequisite for democracy. Currently gender gaps in national laws and policies combined with the lack of political will and resources for reform mean that "girls and women still have only three-quarters of the legal rights of boys and men."[16]

Half the world's countries now use some form of electoral quota for parliaments.[17] While legislative quotas are the most common special measure used to increase women's participation, other mechanisms could be beneficial, especially on political financing. About 30 countries have gender-targeted public funding that either ties the amount of public funding to the level of gender balance among a party's proposed candidates for elections or earmarks a proportion of public funding for gender-related activities.[18]

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[13] *A Digital Resilience Toolkit for Women in Politics, Kristina Wilfore, #ShePerists.*
[14] Findings from "Addressing Barriers to Women's Democratic Representation". OECD Global Forum & Public Governance Ministerial Meeting. November 2022.
[15] "Women and Digital Advocacy in Post-Euromaidan Ukraine". Tanya Lokot, January 27, 2016.
[16] https://unfoundation.org/blog/post/gender-equality-in-2022-the-best-the-worst-the-most-surprising-and-most-ridiculous/
[17] Gender Quotas Database, International IDEA.
[18] "Political Finance Reforms, How to respond to today's challenges?". Yukihiko Hamada and Khushbu Agrawal, International IDEA, 2020.

Quotas are also used by private companies to increase gender parity in leadership. In the European Union, the European Parliament passed a new law to ensure an increase in the number of women on the boards of publicly listed companies by July 2026.[19]

Incorporate gender-responsive planning and budgeting into policies and resources allocation.

- **Proposed action:** Create national systems to collect and analyse gender-disaggregated data to inform policy decisions of national and local governments.
- **Proposed action:** Adopt gender budgeting to ensure that resources are equitably distributed and promote the empowerment of women and girls.

Gender-disaggregated data enables policymakers to understand how best to target and prioritize funding across all sectors based on the realities and different needs of women, men, boys and girls and how gender impacts access to resources.[20] However, "funding for gender data decreased by 55 percent in 2020 despite the widespread recognition of gender disaggregated data as critical to achieving gender equality in SDG5 and beyond."[21] Efforts to collect intersectional gender data must be scaled up and sustained across gender equality and democracy building efforts.

Gender-disaggregated data is therefore needed to inform gender budgeting, which is a key tool and policy mechanism to guide the resourcing and implementation of policy decisions. The majority of G20 countries widely collect gender-disaggregated data and have budget structures that integrate gender policies, but these efforts require intentional measures and have to be strengthened across regions of the world.

CONFLICT PREVENTION, PEACE AND SECURITY

Leverage UNSCR 1325 and the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) Agenda to strengthen democratic processes and institutions.

- **Proposed action:** Ensure the participation and contributions of women in all aspects of peace and security processes. Prioritise women's meaningful inclusion as a key strategy to prevent and address conflict, build peace and security and strengthen democratic resilience.
- **Proposed action:** Improve coordination and resource allocation between Women, Peace and Security efforts and democracy-building efforts. This includes adopting WPS National Action Plans (NAPs) as a mechanism for advancing women's roles in peace building, governance and security efforts.

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19   "Gender Equality in 2022: The Best, the Worst, the Most Surprising and Most Ridiculous". Sia Nowrogee, UN
       Foundation, December 16, 2022.
20   "Three ways to tackle gender data gaps—and 12 countries embracing the challenge", Anna Tabitha Bonfert,
       Talip Kilic, Heather Moylan, and Miriam Muller. February 7, 2022.
21   "A Sharp Decline in Funding for Gender Data Puts SDG 5 at Risk: Charting a Way Forward". Data 2x,
       December 8, 2022.

- **Proposed action:** Integrate the WPS Agenda into post-conflict reconstruction and political transition processes to establish and strengthen democratic processes and institutions and good governance structures.

Work collaboratively to develop strategies and tools to mitigate risks to women politicians, human rights defenders and civil society leaders.

- **Proposed action:** Partner with democratic governments, civil society, law enforcement and women in politics to develop strategies to identify and respond to risks women face; tools to track and report threats and violent incidents; and rapid response plans.

- **Proposed action:** Redefine security more broadly to encompass the day-to-day safety needs of women and provide women with security training to mitigate threats and access to resources that increase safety.

It is well-documented that inclusive peace processes lead to better and more durable outcomes.[22] Women's inclusion is equally important as democratic institutions are renegotiated or established during political transitions or after violent conflict. These are critical junctures to establish policies and practices that support inclusive governance and women's political leadership. Women have played a role in maintaining commitments to anchor gender equality and parity measures in constitutions, new electoral codes or party bylaws.[23] For example, the Mano River Women's Peace Network (MARWOPNET) in West Africa shows how women can be effective agents of change in political transitions and peace negotiations.

Despite data that shows the positive impact of women's inclusion, women largely remain left out of peace processes and negotiations and sidelined from decision making and leadership roles. The WPS Agenda, which promotes women's participation in peacebuilding and post-conflict transitions, is an existing policy framework that can be leveraged to advance the role of women in democracy building efforts and strengthen democratic institutions.[24] Today, 105 countries have developed National Action Plans (NAPs) to advance the Women, Peace and Security Agenda. WPS NAPs offer a strategic entry point to promote women's inclusion in decision making, build democratic resilience, safeguard women's rights and increase women's protection from violence.[25]

ENDNOTE

[i]   **Annex 1-Gender Cohort Members List**

[22]   *Women's Participation in Peace Negotiations and the Durability of Peace.* Jana Krause, Werner Krause, and Piia Bränfors, International Interactions 44, no. 6 (2018): 985–1016.

[23]   "Breaking the Cycle of Exclusion in Political Party Development", Saskia Brechenmacher and Caroline Hubbard. Carnegie Endowment for Peace, March 24, 2020.

[24]   Exploring the Links between Women's Status and Democracy. Georgetown Institute for Women, Peace and Security, 2023.

[25]   National Action Plans, At a Glance.

Annex 1

**MEMBERS LIST
SUMMIT FOR DEMOCRACY COHORT ON GENDER EQUALITY
AS A PREREQUISITE FOR DEMOCRACY**

Sweden
Romania
International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance
Georgetown Institute for Women, Peace and Security
Australia
Chile
Finland
Germany
Liberia
Iceland
Republic of Kosovo
Republic of Korea
Panama
Paraguay
Peru
Demo Finland
National Democratic Institute
Amnesty-Sweden
Arab Women Parliamentarians Network for Equality
Carnegie Endowment for International Peace
COMESA Secretariat
Fundación Multitudes-Chile
The International Foundation for Electoral Systems
The Garden of Hope Foundation-Taiwan
The Carter Center
Westminster Foundation for Democracy
Spanish Agency for International Development Cooperation (AECID)-Spain
U.S. Agency for International Development, Center for Democracy, Human Rights
and Governance (DRG)
UN Women
International Republican Institute
Inter Parliamentary Union
Organization of Ibero-American States for Education, Science and Culture (OEI)
Inter-American Commission of Women (CIM OAS)
Center for American Women and Politics (CAWP)-Rutgers University
Human Rights Watch-Sweden
Her Voice Liberia
AVAAZ-Netherlands

ACT Svenska Kyrkan
Chr. Michelsen Institute CMI
Folke Bernadotte Academy-Sweden
Gender Centre for Empowering Development (GenCED)-Ghana
Kvinna till Kvinna-Sweden
CSO Gender Platform-Gambia
Plataforma Feminista Liberal-Paraguay
RFSU-Sweden
Association for the Implementation of the UN Convention against Corruption
FEMNET
Concord- Sweden
BCW-Global
Hologic, Inc
Professional Women's Network Global
Svenska Freds-Sweden
Union to union-Sweden
Women and Law in Southern Africa -Eswatini
Women NGO Secretariat-Liberia
Amazon
IKEA Sweden
Vodafone
Professor Anne Marie Goetz, Center for Global Affairs, School of Professional Studies, New York University