

#### ***#4 Policy Brief: Voluntary Country Reviews – ensuring meaningful participation and ensuring gender equality targets and goals are forefront***

##### **Key Messages:**

Taking into account the 2030 Agenda's theme, "Leaving no one behind", the national review process needs to ensure meaningful engagement of all civil society, in their diversity, ensuring specific focus on groups that are marginalized and are less well represented in the country's decision making bodies.

Governments need to recognize the significant contributions that Civil Society can make to the preparation and in review of reports, especially women's NGO, grassroots organizations, and groups, particularly regarding SDG Goal 5 and gender responsive implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

All national policies and development funding need to be SDG-proofed, ensuring for all budgets that they are in line with Gender Equality, Human Rights and Environmental Sustainability.

##### **Background:**

At the High Level Political Forum 2016, 22 UN member states have volunteered to present their reports on how they are preparing the implementation of the 2030 Agenda on Sustainable Development (see <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/hlpf/inputs>).

The WMG has reviewed the information provided by these 22 countries, based on a survey to which 29 women's organizations and networks – representing ca 100 CSOs - responded. The survey of the Women Major Group covered 21 out of 22 countries (as 1 country did not upload information on the UN website). The conclusions and recommendations of the survey were published in a short report and presented at a side event on July 12<sup>th</sup>, see [www.womenmajorgroup.org](http://www.womenmajorgroup.org)

The WMG is supportive of those countries which have taken the initiative to be the first countries to present their national country reviews at the HLPF and by doing so, inviting constructive criticism from other member states and civil society. In light of this, the WMG recognizes that the criticism and recommendations, which have emerged from the WMG survey, are meant as an invitation increase cooperation and dialogue with the governments.

##### ***Relevant language from the WMG survey report:***

**"Meaningful participation"** means the right to provide inputs, express opinions and to discuss and exchange information and to attend policy meetings, best through institutionalized Civil Society engagement mechanisms in which diversity of participation is ensured by reserving specific spaces for groups who are often not present in policy negotiations. UN Member States have committed to this in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in which they agree to engage "Major Groups and Stakeholders", as according to the point 89 of the Resolution adopted by the General Assembly: *The high-level political forum will support participation in follow-up and review processes by the major groups and other relevant stakeholders in line with resolution 67/290. We call upon those actors to report on their contribution to the implementation of the Agenda.*

**"Symbolic Participation"** is when a small number of Civil Society and women's NGOs/CSOs are invited resulting from a restrictive criteria. And also when they are only invited to listen to reports near to completion or that are finished and are requested to send comments giving 1or 2 days to do that within an impossibly short time.

**Data not accessible to CS** so access to information is a basic need for Civil Society and women's groups in order to validate the report.

**Women's NGOs can support governments** due to their experience in monitoring and elaborating Shadow Reports for national, Regional and Global reviews of Conferences, CSW and Treaty Bodies, women's NGOs and groups could play an important role to disseminate, make liaisons with different governmental sectors such as parliamentarians, judiciary, academic and others. WMG is closely working with those who are directly engaging at community and national levels, as such, we have the critical role in ensuring that the content of global civil society advocacy is informed by local and national women's rights concerns.



## Recommendations

We propose in the Recommendations of this HLPF to incorporate the following:

- Institutionalize the incorporation of the diversity of women's NGOs /CSOs, especially feminist, LGBTI and others, in all the stages of the Agenda 2030: implementation, design of review mechanism and strategy of implementation in an open and transparent process.
- Ensure the access to information by everybody and incorporate qualitative data as well as quantitative and gender disaggregated data.
- Governments and donors should commit to financing, capacity building and supporting Civil Society's groups, especially women's groups when needed so they can accomplish an inclusive and meaningful participation without leaving anyone behind.
- Progress and challenges SDG5 and gender equality must be included in National Review Reports.
- Adopt a model for National Review Reports in order to allow comparisons along the time and among countries.
- The Agenda implementation should start without any more delays in countries which have not started yet
- Other UN mechanisms should be utilized to ensure the effective implementation of the SDGs, such as the Agreed Conclusions from the CSW, the treaty bodies committee observations as the CEDAW, DESC, and others.

- The state machinery on gender equality and women's human rights should be strengthened both qualitatively and quantitatively for it to be able to function effectively and strongly within the state coordination mechanisms on SDGs
- **Ensure access for women in vulnerable situations to grants and credits;**
- **Promote the introduction of quotas or other mechanisms,** as a temporary special measure for increasing women's participation in decision making mechanisms, including political participation, in close cooperation with nongovernmental and international organizations;
- Strengthened political commitment to recognize, promote, protect, and fulfill women's rights and ensure women's access to justice.