



Women's Major Group High Level Political Forum – Position Paper (2017)

Executive Summary

More than ever, women and girls are most greatly affected by inequality, yet they are also key actors of sustainable development, knowledgeable in providing solutions to challenges. With just 13 years to implement the ambitious 2030 Agenda, issues such as climate change and ecological damage magnify the urgency of action needed to reach every woman and every girl of every age, place, ability and status.

“Eradicating poverty and promoting prosperity in a changing world” where just eight men hold the same wealth as the poorest half of the world requires tackling systemic barriers and structural inequalities, including neoliberalist capitalism, fundamentalisms, racism and patriarchy, that cause and exacerbate inequalities; it also requires addressing issues of militarism, corporate influence, consumption and production and shrinking civil society space.

Gender inequality (SDG 5) is one of the most pervasive inequalities, evidenced by numbers of women living in poverty (SDG 1); discriminatory laws/policies targeting women, including unequal inheritance or criminalization of abortion (SDGs 2, 3); predominant unsustainable industrial agriculture/fisheries models pushing out small farmers and artisanal fisherpeople, majority of whom are women (SDGs 2, 14); and reduction/elimination of essential services and infrastructure women and girls rely on, such as education/health services and social protection (SDGs 3, 9).

Solutions by, with and for women as actors in sustainable development must be elevated to guide coherence in addressing multiple SDGs, alongside systemic barriers. For example, women's groups support organic agriculture and solar energy cooperatives to produce healthy food, generate decent income and mitigate climate change (SDGs 1, 2, 5, 8, 9, 13).

The Women's Major Group highlights 5 essential areas for action:

- **Women's Human Rights** - Take a democratization and human rights-based approach to SDGs implementation
 - Recognise human rights and the rights and free, prior and informed consent of Indigenous Peoples, local communities, and women in all their diversity
 - Ensure safety of environmental and women human rights defenders
 - Safeguard bodily autonomy, end violence against women, and enhance respect for girls and women of all ages, including by respecting, protecting and fulfilling sexual and reproductive rights
 - Mainstream gender equality

- Ensure women's participation in peace negotiations and decision-making processes in humanitarian contexts.
- **Meaningful Participation** - Tokenistic representation will not be a solution
 - Institutionalize participation mechanisms for rightsholders in an inclusive and equitable manner
 - At HLPF create significant participatory spaces for Major Groups and other Stakeholders (MGoS)
 - At regional sessions, ensure civil society can express diverse voices rather than one consolidated voice
 - Openly promote women's civil society participation in preparing voluntary national reports
 - Provide sufficient time for MGoS to dialogue with reporting countries
- **Civil Society Space** - Member States and civil society must work together closely to maintain and enhance the space, building strength from diversity
- **Finance** - Directly resource women's rights groups
- **Accountability** - All actors have responsibility to Agenda 2030
 - Corporations must assess and address their impact through a binding framework
 - Governments must localize the SDGs, build baselines and creatively collect and analyze disaggregated data
 - Governments must develop mechanisms to ensure engagement of women-led organizations in localization and monitoring of SDGs
 - Develop new measures to understand the sustainability of natural resources use and management, the sustainability of consumption and production and the level of the gender equality index

To the SDGs and a transformative 2030 Agenda, Member States and all actors must address the gender and human rights dimensions of each goal and linkages between goals, taking into account women and girls of all ages and diversities.

[1] Oxfam | Even It Up. (January 2017). An Economy for the 99%. Available: https://www.oxfam.org/sites/www.oxfam.org/files/file_attachments/bp-economy-for-99-percent-160117-en.pdf

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1. Introduction

Achieving gender equality, the realization of women's human rights and the empowerment of all women and girls is essential to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Gender equality is cross-cutting, beyond just SDG 5 and gender equality must be mainstreamed in the implementation of all other goals.

Issues such as climate change, global warming, ocean acidification, and ecological damage render an unprecedented urgency to the entire 2030 Agenda, while multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination and systemic barriers exacerbate human rights violations, marginalisation and vulnerability of women and girls of all ages and diversities. More than ever, women and girls are those most greatly affected by inequality, yet they are also key actors of sustainable development, knowledgeable in providing solutions to problems.

Marginalization and inequality:

- Women and girls constitute the majority of people living in extreme poverty and make up two-thirds of the 796 million people worldwide who are illiterate. This is in part due to the intersection of inequalities and discrimination but also because poverty limits access to basic education and services (SDGs 1, 4)
- The predominant industrial agricultural and fisheries models are not sustainable and favour large agribusinesses and distant water fisheries, while pushing out small farmers and artisanal fisherpeople, a majority of whom are women who typically employ more sustainable practices (SDGs 2, 14)
- Sexual and reproductive health and rights violations continue to undermine and infringe on women and girls' bodily autonomy and the agency over decisions about their bodies (SDGs 3, 5)
- Women's health is compromised when women's bodies are targeted by systemic and often epidemic levels of sexual and gender based violence against women and girls in all of their diversity; by ecological threats from pollution, waterway and land degradation; by transnational corporations that displace local jobs and women's livelihoods; and by failure to uphold sexual and reproductive health and rights (SDG 5 and all others)
- Discriminatory laws and policies that target women, such as laws criminalizing abortion, forced pregnancy testing in the workplace, or unequal inheritance and citizenship laws, deny women their human rights and inhibit their participation in the public sphere (SDGs 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 8)

- Harmful practices, such as child, early and forced marriage and female genital mutilation, can lead to daily psychosocial stress for women and girls and have long term deleterious impacts on women's mobility, choices, health and well-being (SDGs 3, 4, 5, 9)
- Women and girls in climate frontline communities experience severe loss and damage. Decreased resilience in such communities exacerbates impacts, especially where climate-related losses are severe/permanent and where there are existing high levels of gendered social and economic inequalities (SDGs 1, 3, 5, 13, 14, 15)
- Women are specifically affected by waterway and marine litter due to nanoparticles in water and seafood, affecting their overall health and reproductive systems (SDG 14)
- Women suffer from the removal, reduction or elimination of essential services and infrastructure that women and girls rely on to reduce their unpaid care burden. This includes education and health services, social protection and pensions, and access to safe and accessible roads, food, water and sanitation (SDGs 5, 6, 9, 17)

Solutions with, by and for women:

- Women's rights organizations, feminist groups and social movements and allies are leading the way through advocacy and activism; project development and implementation; data collection, research, and analysis; and monitoring, evaluation and reporting at local and national levels - consciously addressing multiple SDGs
- Cross-movement building and joint advocacy by feminist, women's human rights, climate and labor groups brought coherence between the Commission on the Status of Women and the Paris Climate Agreement, enshrining language that expands the concept of a 'just transition' to low carbon economies for workers to also address the sexual division of labor and ensure gender just and equitable transition (SDGs 4, 5, 8, 9, 13, 17)
- Women's groups, including grassroots, train and build capacity on diverse topics: food safety (SDG 2), healthy lifestyles across the lifecourse and comprehensive sexuality education (SDG 3), climate-resilient agriculture (SDGs 2, 13), understanding and exercising rights (SDG 5), accessing credit (SDG 5), and using the SDGs in advocacy work (SDG 17)
- As the main producers of staple crops, women of all ages play a critical role in making a transition to sustainable agricultural economies through agro-ecological practices and knowledge-sharing; they require and advocate for access to credit, recognized land ownership, land tenure and access and control over natural resources to do so¹ (SDGs 1, 2, 5)

¹ <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/733Women.pdf>

- Women's groups support climate resilience, climate mitigation, healthy food production and income-generation through agro-ecological practices and solar energy (SDGs 1, 2, 5, 8, 9)
- Women in fisheries organize in the Pacific to seek recognition for paid and unpaid labour of women that goes towards sustaining the fisheries and fishing communities, highlighting the right of women to participate in decision-making. They call for increased access to financing, capacity building and technical assistance for women in small-scale fishing communities to participate in, and take responsibility for, integrated management of small scale and artisanal fisheries based on recognition and protection of access rights to marine resources. This includes increased access to sustainable and fair trade markets to improve the socio-economic situation of fishers and fish workers within the context of sustainable fisheries management (SDGs 1, 8, 10, 12, 13, 14).
- Governments should ensure effective support provisions and public investment in social protection programs and floors so that women are fully recognized for their contribution to the economy through their unpaid domestic and care work, not invisibly subsidizing it (SDGs 1, 3, 5, 8, 17).
- Women are key actors in small-scale renewable energy production, including as entrepreneurs; as key consumers of energy, can promote conservation policies (SDG 7).

To achieve gender equality and the SDGs, all must take action to overcome systemic barriers leading to inequalities within and between countries; adequately address the gender and human rights dimensions of each goal and linkages between goals; ensure policy coherence; and commit to genuine accountability processes, including meaningful engagement of civil society and justice for women's human rights defenders.

2. Addressing the systemic barriers

Eradicating poverty and promoting prosperity in a world where just eight men hold the same wealth as the poorest half of the world² requires flipping the status quo. Time is running out.

Tackling systemic barriers and structural inequalities means recognising and responding to the intertwined systemic issues of neoliberalist capitalism, fundamentalisms, militarism, racism and patriarchy as systemic drivers of gender and other forms of inequality. It is imperative to take a democratization and rights-based approach with a clear and justice-focused definition of prosperity that fully recognizes concepts such as *buen vivir*, *ecological sustainability* and sufficiency and climate justice.

² Oxfam | Even It Up. (January 2017). An Economy for the 99%. Available: https://www.oxfam.org/sites/www.oxfam.org/files/file_attachments/bp-economy-for-99-percent-160117-en.pdf

In this paper, the WMG highlights a set of systemic issues that diminish, undermine and infringe on women's human rights and the success of the SDGs: militarism, corporate influence, consumption and production patterns, and shrinking civil society space.

Militarism

Militarised political economies increase poverty, inequalities and violence against women by limiting investment in gender equitable social development while devastating communities and economies affected by armed conflict, and prioritizing defence expenditures over social sector spending. This is opposite of the right to development, and the “innovative finance” called for from Agenda 21(1992) to Beijing (1995) to the 2030 Agenda (2015).³ Global military expenditure was more than 12 times global expenditure for Official Development Assistance (ODA)⁴ in 2010, and the income of the global feminist movement (\$106 million for 740 women's organizations) was less than the cost of a single F-35 Fighter plane (\$137 million).⁵ Arms transfers may be financially lucrative but cost dearly in human rights and peace: In 2016, civil society shadow reports found that arms sales from Germany contributed to gender based violence and violence against women (SDG 5) in India, Iraq, Mexico; Yemen⁶ also found that arms transfers from the United Kingdom, Sweden, and France violated obligations on economic, social and cultural rights in Yemen including on health (SDG 3), education (SDG 4), and housing (SDG 11).⁷

Achieving the 2030 Agenda requires ending patriarchal assumptions that devalue and obscure the care economy while prioritizing war and conflict economies. It requires assessing the gendered impacts of current investments - from bloated military budgets and privatised services to emaciated humanitarian and women, peace and security action - and investing in economic fair play rather than masculine dominance models.

Corporate influence

Over the past 40 years, the world has been both encouraged and coerced into an era in which the most powerful law is not that of sovereignty but that of neoliberal capitalist supply and demand.

³ Agenda 21, 22.16 (1992); Beijing Declaration and Platform of Action, E.2; (see also SDG 17.1 and 17.3)

⁴ Institute for Economics and Peace. “The Economic Cost of Violence Containment.” (April 2017). Available: <http://visionofhumanity.org/app/uploads/2017/04/The-Economic-Cost-of-Violence-Containment.pdf> (p. 207)

⁵ See <http://www.awid.org/news-and-analysis/20-years-shamefully-scarce-funding-feminists-and-womens-rights-movements#sthash.m7CnwqtT.dpuf>

⁶ The Impact of Germany's Arms Transfers on Women: Germany's Extraterritorial Obligations under CEDAW (Joint Shadow Report CEDAW Committee, 66th Session). Available: www.reachingcriticalwill.org/images/documents/Publications/CEDAW-Germany.pdf

⁷ Explosive Weapons and the Right to Health, Education and Adequate Housing: Extraterritorial Obligations of France, Sweden, and the United Kingdom under CESC (Shadow reports to CESC 58th session) <http://www.reachingcriticalwill.org/resources/publications-and-research/publications/10914-explosive-weapons-and-the-right-to-health-education-and-adequate-housing>

Of the 100 largest economies in the world, 51 are corporations, and only 49 are countries.⁸ The rising power and extended reach of corporations - which can sometimes exceed the power of states - in the current era of globalisation, extractivism, impunity and extreme inequality is an urgent challenge.

Since corporations are dedicated to making profit while states are obligated to uphold a social contract, disparities in power often create conflicts between action for profit and action for human rights, peace, and sustainability. For example, forced evictions by mining companies in Guatemala involved gang rape⁹ (SDG 5) while women in the mining sector in the Democratic Republic of Congo have no safe access to water (SDG 6), food (SDG 2), education (SDG 4), or health (SDG 3), while generally engaged in the most toxic work at the mining sites (SDG 8).¹⁰ The private sector is held up as a source of innovative finance, yet corporate tax evasion, illicit financial flows and lack of transparency diminish public funding sources for sustainable development, gender equality and universal human rights.

Consumption and production

Unsustainable production and consumption patterns are inextricably linked to a neoliberal capitalist system that values growth and profit over justice, sustainability and sufficiency. These patterns exacerbate unequal distribution of resources¹¹ and negatively impact achievement of gender equality and women's human rights.

Extractivist, profit-oriented patterns of production and consumption contribute to climate change (SDG 13), ocean acidification (SDG 14), pollution, excess traffic and waste (SDGs 6, 7, 8, 9, 11, 12), which impact food security (SDG 2), health (SDG 3), water (SDG 6), soil (SDG 2) and air quality (SDG 13) for many, and bring prosperity for few. These patterns are primary contributors to greenhouse gas emissions that are responsible for climate change and are the historic responsibility of developed countries, in the context of common but differentiated responsibilities.

In the larger context of inequality, racism and intersecting discriminations, the impacts from overproduction and consumption are more intense for marginalized populations whose neighborhoods are often the site of overcrowding, polluting industry and heavy traffic (SDG 10). Additionally, due to gendered roles, it is most often women who take care of children, the ill, people with disabilities and the elderly, and they experience loss of health, education, time and income and social protection as a result (SDGs 1, 4, 5) and suffer from a lack of access to justice, in law and in practice.

⁸ http://www.ips-dc.org/top_200_the_rise_of_corporate_global_power/

⁹ <http://wilpf.org/indigenous-womens-struggle-against-corporate-abuse-in-guatemala/>

¹⁰ <http://www.peacewomen.org/resource/case-study-corporations-peace-and-gender-equality-drc>

¹¹ http://www.wedo.org/wp-content/uploads/S_Consumption-English_Final1.pdf

Shrinking civil society space

Civil society organizations have the capacity to mobilize financial and human resources necessary to successful implementation of SDGs, ensuring that the historically-ignored indicators, such as women's empowerment and gender equality (Targets 5.a, 5.b, 5.c) and participatory and representative decision-making (Target 16.7), do not fall into silos of the state-centric mechanisms.¹² But feminist and women led groups and social movements, and women and environmental human rights defenders, who are on the frontlines of SDG monitoring and implementation, are often overlooked and undervalued when budgets and projects for sustainable development are decided, compromising their positive impact in some cases.

In other cases, it is civil action itself that is under threat, and civic space is shrinking worldwide.¹³ This can be seen in Berta Caceres and others in Honduras, and repressive, punitive measures against civil society in Colombia¹⁴, Syria¹⁵, Libya¹⁶, Russia¹⁷, West Papua¹⁸ and elsewhere¹⁹. There are also measures through which member states limit the access of civil society to international decision-making at the UN.²⁰ The growing trends of political pressures of member states against civil society signal a real threat to the legitimacy of existing human rights, rule of law, and the normative framework of international peace, security, and development that are enshrined in the main principles of the 2030 Agenda.

As duty bearers of human rights, governments have an obligation to their citizens to protect and uphold human rights. Thus, it is important to entrust civil society with power and resources and to create safe spaces for candid engagement of civil society with governments that builds trust for longer-term mutual collaboration. State violence against the members of civil society and restrictions of their freedoms should be addressed by the international community and individual governments as a matter of priority. It is of utmost importance to fully protect the lives and political participation of civil society activists and human rights defenders, ensuring full

¹² http://wilpf.org/wilpf_publications/through-the-lens-of-civil-society-summary-report-of-the-public-submissions-to-the-global-study/

¹³ <http://civicus.org/index.php/media-resources/reports-publications/2802-people-power-under-attack-findings-from-the-civicus-monitor>

¹⁴ <http://www.peacewomen.org/resource/dispatches-investigate-killings-activists-amid-peace-talks-colombia>

<http://www.peacewomen.org/resource/wilpf-statement-death-threat-women-peace-activist-colombia>

¹⁵ <http://wilpf.org/activism-in-difficult-times-wilpf-holds-a-side-event-of-civil-society-in-syria/>

¹⁶ http://wilpf.org/wilpf_statements/multidimensional-insecurity-and-its-impacts-on-libyan-women/

¹⁷

https://www.boell.de/sites/default/files/uploads/2015/12/20160601_civil_socieity_under_pressure_shrinking_spaces_englisch.pdf

¹⁸ <https://etan.org/news/2013/01/wpat.htm>

¹⁹ http://wilpf.org/wilpf_statements/open-letter-to-un-secretary-general-from-wilpf-and-mena-women-civil-society-organisations/

²⁰ http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/womens-meaningful-participation-the-missing-ingredient_us_58c28dd7e4b0a797c1d39b6f

<http://www.france24.com/en/20170310-burundian-peace-activist-barred-un-meeting>

investigations of the crimes committed against them, identifying and prosecuting the intellectual and material authors of these serious criminal acts.

3. Accountability, data and coherence

Accountability

The sustainable development framework and the human rights framework can and must be harmonized in order to ensure that states meet their existing obligations under human rights treaties and their political commitments espoused in the 2030 Agenda.

Agenda 2030 was not drafted in a political or legal vacuum, but in the context of international agreements and conventions such as the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), Beijing Platform for Action, International Conference and UN Framework Convention on Climate Change. In this way, a rights-based approach to sustainable development is not an option, but an obligation.

As the HLPF has a mandate of sharing and peer-learning, utilizing the existing human rights review mechanisms presents an opportunity to transform the sustainable development agenda from burgeoning rhetoric into rights realization. In this way, we will ensure that women's voices are not only heard, but answered. This is the essence of accountability.

In addition, public-private partnerships should be accountable to citizens, ensuring compliance with human rights, gender equality, and labour and environmental standards, through a legally binding corporate accountability mechanism.

Data and indicators

Tracking progress is critical to success of the 2030 Agenda, and if monitoring and evaluation of programmes are taken seriously, then disaggregated data should be easily available and accessible. However, data is lacking or incomplete for many indicators, providing an incomplete picture for women and girls. For example, violence against women, is not tracked well, and data should be tracked particularly in rural communities and conflict areas or humanitarian contexts. In addition, many of the most critical indicators for gender equality do not have agreed methodology yet and, therefore, no globally comparable data. This lack of data weakens the ability to monitor SDG progress. Greater integration of the human rights system with the sustainable development agenda can help bridge these data gaps as the statistical community strengthens and creates agreed methodologies. In addition, the HLPF should create a mechanism to incorporate shadow reports into the voluntary national review process, as a credible strategy for filling the current lacuna.

Policy coherence

The SDGs are crucial vehicles to move the world in a sustainable direction, but alone they are far from enough. The multiple, overlapping and sometimes competing international processes result in pages and pages of commitments that look good on paper but can be tough to implement for small countries with limited resources. The HLPF can facilitate greater dialogue and collaboration between processes, for example the three Rio Conventions to achieve coherent and mutually supportive climate change, biodiversity and desertification policies, for example, by connecting the conventions' secretariats and facilitating active cooperation.²¹

45. Conclusion

Gender equality, good governance, respect for human rights and access to justice are critical enablers and drivers of shared prosperity and sustainable development. Rights holders and duty bearers must work together to amplify voices and actions that address the systemic barriers to sustainable development.

Recommendations in the body of the paper can be summarized in 5 broad categories, with each more fully described in the Executive Summary:

- **Women's Human Rights** - Take a democratization and human rights-based approach to SDGs implementation
- **Meaningful Participation** - Ensure more than token representation of women and civil society
- **Civil Society Space** - Maintain and enhance the space, building strength from diversity
- **Finance** - Directly resource women's rights groups
- **Accountability** - All actors take responsibility for Agenda 2030

A holistic engagement with Agenda 2030 is the only way to bring transformation. And in our changing world, the pace must be quick to eradicate poverty and promote prosperity in a way that reaches every woman and every girl of every age, place, ability and status.

56. Contributing organizations

African Women's Rights Collective

[All Pakistan Women's Association](#)

Asia Pacific Alliance for Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (APA)

~~[All Pakistan Women's Association](#)~~

Asian-Pacific Resource and Research Centre for Women (ARROW)

Asia Pacific Forum on Women, Law and Development

²¹ authors: Simone Lovera Bilderbeek, Joyeeta Gupta, and Mirjam Ros-Tonen. available at: http://csds.uva.nl/binaries/content/assets/subsites/centre-for-sustainable-development-studies/sdg_policy_brief_2_forests_and_biodiversity-final.pdf?1468174964536.

Association de l'éducation Environnementale pour les Futurs Générations(AEEFG)
 Association for Farmers Rights Defense, AFRD Georgia
 Bahir Dar University, Ethiopia
 Beyond Beijing Committee
 Beyond Beijing Committee-Nepal
 CADIRE CAMEROON ASSOCIATION
 Centre for Community Economics and Development Consultants Society (CECOEDECON)
 Centre for human Rights and Climate change research/Gender Justice and Sustainable
 Development Network
 CHOICE for Youth & Sexuality
 Community Science Centre
 Congregation of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd
 Dawn Nelson, WILPF-Ann Arbor
 Diverse Voices and Action (DIVA) for Equality, Fiji
 Echoes of Women in Africa (ECOWA)
 Ecosystem based Adaptation for Food Security Assembly
 Feminist League
 FEMNET (African Women Development and Communication Network)
 Fundacion para Estudioe investigación de la Mujer - FEIM-
 Gender and Water Alliance (GWA)
 Gender Equity: Citizenship, Work and Family
 Gender-Center, Republic of Moldova
 Global Forest Coalition
 Global Policy Forum
 International Council of Women
 International Women's Development Agency
 International Women's Health Coalition
 International Women's Rights Action Watch - Asia Pacific (IWRAP)
 Kenana Association for women empowerment
 KOTHOWAIN (vulnerable peoples development organization)
 Landesa/Rural Development Institute
 NAWO, the National Alliance of Women's Organisations (UK)
[NERDS RULE INC.](#)
 NETWORK OF RURAL WOMEN PRODUCERS TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO
 Niger Delta Women's movement for Peace and Development
 NIGERIAN NETWORK OF WOMEN EXPORTERS OF SERVICES
 OFALV
 Okogun Odigie Safewomb International Foundation (OOSAIF)
 Pacific Feminist SRHR Coalition
 Pacific Partnerships on Gender, Climate Change and Sustainable Development (PPGCCSD)

Pari o Dispare
Plan International
Psychology Coalition of NGOs Accredited at the UN (PCUN)
RAINBOW PRIDE FOUNDATION
Realizing Sexual and Reproductive Justice (RESURJ)
Red de Educación Popular entre Mujeres A Latina y el caribe, REPEM LAC
Regional Centre for International Development Cooperation.(RCIDC)
Sansristi/SMRC
Semie Memuna Sama
Servicios Ecumenicos para Reconciliacion y Reconstruccion - S.E.R.R.
Sherouk Association for sustainable development
Society for the Psychological Study of Social Issues (SPSSI)
Society of Catholic Medical Missionaries
Soroptimist International of the South West Pacific
Southeast Indigenous Peoples' Center
Support for Women in Agriculture and Environment (SWAGEN)
Temple of Understanding
WAVE (Women in Adult & Vocational Education inc.) Australia
WOMEN 2030
Women Engage for a Common Future (WECF)
Women Environmental Programme
Women in Law and Development in Africa -Afrique de l'Ouest (WILDAF-AO)
Women for Women's Human Rights - New Ways
Women Organizing for Change in Agriculture and Natural Resources Management (WOCAN)
Women Thrive Alliance
Women's Environment and Development Organization
Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF)
World changers foundation
Young Women For Change /Youth Champion Advocacy Network Nepal