



## **Indore World Summit**

### **Study Guide (UN Women)**



### **AGENDA**

**Democratic Backsliding and the Backlash against Women's Rights-Understanding the current Challenges for Feminist Politics**

## ***Letter from the Executive Board***

### **Esteemed Delegates of UN Women,**

I am the type who often skips the letters from the DIAS so that I could get right down to the good stuff in a background guide, but let me tell you a little secret: here is where I'll tell you the secret to being a good delegate. It is my honor to be serving as your Chairperson; I hope to bequeath you a positive MUN experience that will leave you itching to learn more, challenge yourself, and become a global citizen.

I admire those who utilize compassion; skills like courage, public speaking, and wit are built strong with practice, and diplomacy proves to be no exception. It is not about how often you speak, but what you speak about. I encourage you to push yourself into being compassionate. Especially when it comes to a topic like this.

Addressing the Democratic Backsliding and the Backlash against Women's Rights while understanding the current challenges for Feminist Politics are issues that require urgent action; few would even argue that Anti-Feminism is not, by far, one of the most prominent issues facing humanity today. As you read through this background guide, take care to note who is being affected, how we can resolve this issue, and what it means to you.

When I say you, I don't mean just the country you represent. I mean you, the person behind the screen taking the time to read through my letter; I mean you, the ones preparing to debate this hurricane of a topic. Anti-Feminism will continue to affect us without a call to action. I wish you luck in your preparation, and look forward to seeing y'all at the Indore World Summit 2022.

With Regards,  
Your Chairperson, Aryan Anand.(He/Him)

Evidence/Proof admissible in the Committee

## (1). News Sources:-

(a). REUTERS — Any Reuters article which clearly makes mention of the fact or is in contradiction of the fact being stated by a delegate in council.(<http://www.reuters.com/>)

(b). State Operated News Agencies — These reports can be used in the support of or against the State that owns the News Agency. These reports, if credible or substantial enough, can be used in support of or against any Country as such but in that situation, they can be denied by any other country in the council.

Some examples to elucidate are as follows:-

(i). RIA Novosti (Russia) <http://en.rian.ru/>

(ii). IRNA (Iran) <http://www.irna.ir/ENIndex.html>(iii). BBC (United Kingdom) <https://www.bbc.com/>(iv). Xinhua News Agency and CCTV (P.R. China) <http://cctvnews.cntv.cn/>

(2). Government Reports — These reports can be used in a similar way as the State Operated News Agencies reports and can, in all circumstances, be denied by another country. However, a nuance is that a report that is being denied by a certain country can still be accepted by the Executive Board as credible information.

Some examples to elucidate are as follows:-



(a). Permanent Representatives to the United Nations Reports. <https://www.un.org/en/about-us/member-states>(Click on any country to get the website of the Office of its Permanent Representative)

(b). Multilateral Organizations like the NATO; (<https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/index.htm>), ASEAN; (<https://asean.org/>), OPEC; ([https://www.opec.org/opec\\_web/en/](https://www.opec.org/opec_web/en/)), etc.

(3). UN Reports — All UN Reports are considered as credible information or evidence for the Executive Board of the UN WOMEN.

Some examples to elucidate are as follows:-

(a). UN Bodies: Like the SC (<http://www.un.org/Docs/sc/>), GA(<http://www.un.org/en/ga/>),HRC(<http://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/HRC/Pages/HRCIndex.aspx>), etc.

(b). UN Affiliated bodies like the International Atomic Energy Agency (<http://www.iaea.org/>), World Bank (<http://www.worldbank.org/>), International Monetary Fund (<http://www.imf.org/external/index.htm>), International Committee of the Red Cross (<http://www.icrc.org/eng/index.jsp>), etc. Treaty Based Bodies like the Antarctic Treaty System (<http://www.ats.aq/e/ats.htm>), the International Criminal Court (<http://www.icccpi.int/Menus/ICC>), etc.

## UN Women Committee Guide

### Committee Overview UN WOMEN

#### Introduction:

UN Women is the United Nations entity dedicated to gender equality and the empowerment of women. A global champion for women and girls, UN Women was established to accelerate progress on meeting their needs worldwide.

As per the General Assembly Resolution 64/289, the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) is responsible for electing representatives from 41 member states. These representatives make up the UN Women Executive Board and are elected for

a duration of three years. A representation of all regions is to be ensured.

#### Committee History:

Introduced in January 2006, the UN Women Committee emerged from the Resolution A/64/588, then called the Comprehensive Proposal for the Composite Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, reinforcing the importance and relevance of the United Nations' intervention as to achieve a specific goal: promote the social and economic equality of women and girls around the world. For many years, the United Nations faced serious challenges in its efforts to promote gender equality globally, including inadequate funding and no single recognized driver to direct UN activities on gender equality issues. In July 2010, the United Nations General Assembly created UN Women, the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, to address such challenges. This entity will be operational on a national level with an Executive Board as its governing body to provide intergovernmental support and oversee its functions and operational activities. In doing so, UN Member States took an historic step in accelerating the Organization's goals on gender equality and the empowerment of women. The creation of UN Women came about as part of the UN reform agenda, bringing together resources and mandates for greater impact. It merges and builds on the important work of four previously distinct parts of the UN system, which focused exclusively on gender equality and women's empowerment:

- Division for the Advancement of Women (DAW)
- International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (INSTRAW)
- Office of the Special Adviser on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women ] (OSAGI)
- United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM)

#### Committee Mandates:

The UN Women committee enumerates several roles and responsibilities. Working for the empowerment and rights of women and girls globally, UN Women's main roles are:



- To support inter-governmental bodies, such as the Commission on the Status of Women, in their formulation of policies, global standards and norms.
- To help Member States implement these standards, standing ready to provide suitable technical and financial support to those countries that request it, and to forge effective partnerships with civil society.
- To lead and coordinate the UN system's work on gender equality, as well as promote accountability, including through regular monitoring of system-wide progress.

It supports UN Member States as they set global standards for achieving gender equality, and works with governments and civil society to design laws, policies, programmes and services needed to ensure that the standards are effectively implemented and truly benefit women and girls worldwide. UN Women also coordinates and promotes the UN system's work in advancing gender equality, and in all



deliberations and agreements linked to the 2030 Agenda. The entity works to position gender equality as fundamental to the Sustainable Development Goals, and a more inclusive world. It works globally to make the vision of the Sustainable Development Goals a reality for women and girls and stands behind women's equal participation in all aspects of life, focusing on four strategic priorities:

- Women lead, participate in and benefit equally from governance systems
- Women have income security, decent work and economic autonomy



- All women and girls live a life free from all forms of violence
- Women and girls contribute to and have greater influence in building sustainable peace and resilience, and benefit equally from the prevention of natural disasters and conflicts and humanitarian action

### **Agenda:**

Democratic backsliding and the backlash against women's rights-understanding the current challenges for feminist politics.

### **Introduction:**

Gender equality is not only a basic human right, but its achievement has enormous socio-economic ramifications. Empowering women fuels thriving economies, spurring productivity and growth. Yet gender inequalities remain deeply entrenched in

every society. Women lack access to decent work and face occupational segregation and gender wage gaps. They are too often denied access to basic education and health care. Women in all parts of the world suffer violence and discrimination.

They are under-represented in political and economic decision-making processes. Women's rights are particularly vulnerable in fragile and nascent democracies where such rights have been more recently established and where the space for civil so



ciety actors to defend them is limited and even shrinking. While significant attention has been devoted to democratic backsliding, there is a striking lack of research into its gendered aspects and implications. Women's equal participation and leadership in political and public life are essential to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030. However, data show that women are underrepresented at all levels of decision-making worldwide, and that achieving gender parity in political life is far off.

As of 19 September 2022, there are 28 countries where 30 women serve as Heads of State and/or Government. At the current rate, gender equality in the highest positions of power will not be reached for another 130 years. Only 21% of government ministers were women, with only 14 countries having achieved 50% or more women in cabinets. With an annual increase of just 0.52%, gender parity in ministerial positions will not be achieved before 2077. Globally, there are 24 States in which women account for less than 10% of parliamentarians in single or lower houses, including three single/lower chambers with no women at all. At the current rate of progress,





gender parity in national legislative bodies will not be achieved before 2063. Data from 136 countries shows that women constitute nearly 3 million (34%) of elected members in local deliberative bodies.

Only two countries have reached 50%, and an additional 20 countries have more than 40% women in local government. Balanced political participation and power-sharing between women and men in decision-making is the internationally agreed target. Most countries in the world have not achieved gender balance, and few have set or met ambitious targets for gender parity (50–50).

During the last decades, research on the role of women's movements in the advancement of women's rights has devoted a central role to movement-state relations. Rather than seeing governments and policies as contextual variables for women's movement activism, this literature discusses the state as an active partner of women's movement organizations and often sees femocrats (feminist bureaucrats) as movement actors. The literature on state feminism proposes that women's movements and governments are partners rather than opponents, thus going against traditional feminist critiques of the state as patriarchal structure and against social movement literature that also sees the state as opposed to movements.

This approach sees movement-state relations as fundamental for women's empowerment and looks at different interfaces (from women's policy agencies through feminist triangles of empowerment to femocrats) that have proved successful in achieving gender equal change.



Given the strong backlash against women's rights and their defenders, it is important to consider the implications of this for the gender equality rights, policies and institutional arrangements that have been established over the past decades. This progress can be attributed to the increased participation of women in political realms and existing institutional channels. In particular, the collective mobilization of women has been key to the advancement of women's rights.

### Statement of Issue:

Women face a number of significant barriers when considering their participation in political life. In many countries, there is resistance to women's political participation because of prevailing gender norms questioning women's ability to lead. For example, women may be underrepresented in politics because of perceptions that they are less qualified or do not possess sufficient leadership skills. These stereotypes are linked to women's roles as caregivers. Many women are unable to balance family and public life and are not granted support from their spouses and families. Women are also still responsible for the majority of childcare and household tasks in many countries. The long hours, lack of flexible working patterns and the lack of part time roles can be practical bars to women's participation in public and political life. Amnesty International notes that "...where women are the primary caregivers for children, access to child care and careful timing of political party leadership meet-

ings are crucial to women's ability to participate on an equal footing with men". Additionally, a lack of financial resources can significantly hinder women's participation in political life. Women frequently lack access to political party funding and financial resources for their election bids, and must pay for the advertising costs of their campaigns. Women often experience violence and sexual harassment at the ground level in political parties, which can make their participation dangerous. Male bonding and persistent stereotypical attitudes towards women can also discriminate against women. For example, in India, women's participation as candidates in national and state elections has declined because it is difficult for women to establish a foothold without patronage from powerful men in the party. In addition, Lebanese structures of political representation are dependent on familial ties from male to male relatives, which excludes women.

Another significant barrier that women face is a lack of experience and knowledge. Political parties may avoid female candidates because they come with fewer campaign resources and links to influential constituencies. A lack of knowledge can also lead to women being overlooked. For example, a lack of awareness of women's rights and responsibilities can work against women as candidates and members of political bodies. The Asian Development Bank noted in a study that more than 70% of councilors interviewed in Bangladesh were not aware of their rights and responsibilities as representatives. A lack of knowledge can lead to adverse effects on wom-



en's political empowerment: more than 80% also expressed their lack of confidence in their ability to conduct meetings. Female candidates tend to be less competitive and more risk averse than their male counterparts. Research shows that, despite comparable credentials, backgrounds, and experience, accomplished women are substantially less likely than similarly accomplished men to perceive themselves as qualified to seek office. Women and men rely on the same factors when evaluating their merit as candidates, but women are less likely than men to believe they meet these criteria.

Women may also experience barriers due to the nature of the political system. Federal political systems can play an important role in either maintaining or undermining gender inequality around the world. For example, federalism allowed for a US state, Wyoming, to enfranchise women and give them the vote before women were eligible to vote at the national level. In Switzerland, however, women were disenfranchised at the local level until the 1990s, 20 years after they were able to vote at the national level. The same country can also have widely divergent gender equality policies within a federal system.

In addition, policy backsliding might also be a considerable issue here. Backsliding here means increasingly hostile policy processes, where anti-gender equality positions negatively influence how policies are perceived and implemented and thus pose a potential challenge to the rule of law. A widely noted and prominent aspect of policy backsliding is changes in official political discourses from positions largely supportive or silent on gender equality to statements that openly challenge gender equality objectives, often going in opposition to the formally adopted and accepted policy positions of the country. Oppositional statements on gender equality made by high-level political actors who are part of the governing structure or governing political party question the legitimacy of gender equality as a goal and discredit existing policies.

Moreover, the Council of Europe Convention on Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (the Istanbul Convention) has become one of the central sites of contestation over gender equality across Europe, at the national as well as the transnational level. Opened for signature in May 2011, the Convention is to date the most comprehensive international policy instrument addressing violence against women. Various actors started to mobilize to prevent its ratification in their countries. These include various ultra conservative organizations, men's rights groups,





churches (most prominently the Catholic and the Orthodox Churches) and related organizations, family protection groups advocating for traditional family models and also new grassroots initiatives. The main points of attacks appear to concern the attempt to introduce what opponents label 'gender ideology'. They engage with article 3 of the Convention, which defines gender as "socially constructed roles, behaviors, activities and attributes that a given society considers appropriate for women and men", and articles 12-16, which prescribe the requirement for States to "promote changes in the social and cultural patterns of behavior of women and men" by means of education and other methods. The concept of gender used in the Convention, in their view, goes against differences between biological sexes and traditional understandings of the family and the roles of women and men in society. Over the past five years, opposition has skyrocketed. Resistance is particularly strong across the CEE region, and attempts to block ratification have been successful in several countries (Bulgaria, Hungary, Latvia and Slovakia).

#### History and Relevant International Actions:

While political transitions can be a time of opportunity and possibility for advancing women's rights and gender equality, the possibility of regression can also nullify women's rights. In Pakistan during a coup regime, when the Huddood Ordinance was passed, rights enshrined in civil family laws were nullified and discriminatory sharia laws were introduced. In Fiji, the military government is actively discrediting women's rights organizing, to reinforce patriarchal norms, by refusing to work with individuals and organizations working with 'active and dissident' women's groups; through media attacks against women and women's groups; and through the ex-

clusion of women from decision-making processes pertaining to the constitutional reform process. This atmosphere of intimidation significantly hinders women's ability to claim their rights and stops women's advocacy efforts on behalf of gender equality and an end to discrimination.

In addition, while women may be very involved in the peace process, they can be excluded once the peace process has ended. In the case of women's political representation in Bosnia and Herzegovina, women were actively involved in the peace process, but have been sparsely represented in the new political structures. In 2008, women constituted only 13.33% of deputies in the House of Peoples and only 11.90% of deputies in the House of Representative of the Parliamentary Assembly of Bosnia and Herzegovina. In the case of the transition in Georgia, the number of women in parliament has also decreased. Even the 'Rose Revolution' of 2003 did not ensure women's participation and the power-struggle in Georgian politics has led to many women being discouraged from entering into politics. In 2008 in Georgia, the overall percentage of women members of parliament had decreased to 5%.

An important good practice in improving rates of women's participation in political life involves training for women to improve their campaign skills. In 2007, women in Syria retained 31 seats (12%) in a system with no quotas, helped by training through the Syrian Commission for Family Affairs and the General Women's Union, in collaboration with UNIFEM. In 2006, in Bahrain, one woman became the first-ever elected woman, and she had been one of 18 women candidates trained in campaign skills and aided by a government media blitz. The NDI works in many countries, such as Macedonia and Burkina-Faso, to train women candidates, in order to expand the pipeline of capable women in a given country. In Brazil, the Brazilian Social Democratic Party (PSDB) has a Political Training Program for Women, which is being implemented in all Brazilian states, with financing, to educate women party members. As a result of the program, more than 3000 PSDB women attended these courses in 2005 alone.

Another good practice relates to providing financial resources to support women candidates. In Cambodia, the Sam Rainsy Party provides women candidates with basic items, such as appropriate campaigning clothing and a bicycle for transportation. In Canada, the 1974 Elections Act was passed that allows child care expenses to be included in a candidate's personal expenses during a campaign. In Panama, Law 60 of the Electoral Code stipulates that parties use at least 25% of public funds

for capacity-building, out of which at least 10% must go to female candidates. In Costa Rica, no less than 20% of the total contributions to the Citizen's Action Party are allotted to training and organizational efforts, with no less than 15% being targeted at training women and youth.

There are good practices in making political life more family-friendly in order to help women to ensure a work-life balance. In Australia, traditionally, sittings of the House of Representative could go until 11pm at night, which could be prohibitive for women. In 2003, the hours were amended to ensure that they rose no later than 9pm. Within the Parliament itself, a childcare centre was established so that parliamentarians could leave their children to be cared for. Furthermore, in the case where a woman is nursing a small infant, in her absence she can now ask her whip to vote on her behalf. Women politicians in the UK and in Australia have also recently advocated for the necessity of public breastfeeding in order that they can be fully supported in their roles as both mothers and parliamentarians.

Good practices in addressing the practical barriers faced by women as the primary caregiver can be found in Norway and Sweden. In Norway, the State heavily subsidizes public and private day-care centres to help with the burden of childcare faced by women, and it is ranked the best place in the world to be a mother. In Sweden, nurseries are available to women working in both the public and private sectors, and are financed partly by central government grants, partly by tax revenue and partly by parental fees. Sweden has a maximum fee policy that states that parents should only have to spend between 1% and 3% of the family income on childcare, depending on the number of children. In Sweden as of 1991, all children aged 18 months and over, whose parents are working or studying, have access to a place either in an approved day-care centre, registered family day care or a nursery school. Financial involvement on the part of the Swedish government has steadily increased since 1975.

While gender equality has always been contested, opposition to gender equality and to women's rights activism has become more vocal, global and better organized in recent years. A variety of actors has emerged and strengthened, including religious groups and conservative actors, right-wing populist and nationalist groups, men's rights groups and anti-gender ideology movements. Some of these groups are long-established actors and others, such as the anti-gender ideology movements, are newly emerging. Oppositional actors started to organize and network transna-

tionally in the mid-1990s when significant progress in women's rights was made at the international level. At the 1995 Beijing conference, religious and conservative governments and non-state actors made some small but significant inroads, including blocking the inclusion of sexuality rights in outcome documents. This created the impetus for conservative actors to seek further collaboration within the framework of the UN conferences. An alliance emerged between a wide range of conservative groups—such as fundamentalist religious groups, both Christian and Islamic, and States with governments that share a particular conservative and traditional perspective on gender issues—seeking to contest, undermine and prevent further progress of women's rights internationally. This coalition operates and mobilizes at both the transnational and national level in favor of traditional family values and roles for women and men and thus counteract gender equality progress. Over the last decade, oppositional forces have become stronger and better organized. The successful transnational counter mobilization of conservative and religious non-state and state actors potentially threatens existing international agreements and commitments and may undermine the work of international organizations and treaty monitoring bodies.

In order to ensure that women have a strong voice, it is necessary to take advantage of critical mass within elected bodies. For example, women's parliamentary caucuses should be established and strengthened in order to amplify women's voices. By uniting, women are better able to successfully shape the parliamentary and legislative agendas. In Sri Lanka, the NDI has worked with female politicians across all parties to identify non-partisan issues upon which they can all cooperate, leading to the drafting and endorsement of a platform for improving women's political participation. It is important to develop mechanisms for the political mobilization of women, for example by building effective constituencies, networks and solidarity to influence the democratic process; strengthening political constraints on women's political engagement; strengthening the judiciary systems based on accountability measures; and holding democratic institutions accountable to women and to meeting commitments to women's rights.

Another good example is the creation, in 1996, of the multi-party and multi-ethnic Forum of Women Parliamentarians (FFRP) in Rwanda. The FFRP is formally recognized by the parliament and all female parliamentarians from both houses of parliament are members of this caucus. Members work together across party lines on issues of importance to women and to ensure gender-sensitivity in the Parliament



and in legislation. In another example, in 2008, a women's caucus was established in Argentina, to include all female senators, with the objective to "advise, consult, oversee and monitor laws, policies and government actions related to equal rights and opportunities and the treatment of men and women". This committee formally promoted draft legislation in 2008 on the elimination of sexist language in public administration, and the declaration of 2009 as the national year of non-violence against women and fighting domestic violence. Uruguay's women's caucus helped to established the country's Gender Equity Committee, which has been instrumental in pushing forward a number of women's human rights laws, and in Brazil, the women's parliamentary caucus, in collaboration with women's advocacy groups, helped enact laws to protect women's human rights related to violence against women and sexual and reproductive health.

The case of Costa Rica offers a good practice to ensure gender balance in parliamentary committees. In 2003, several female deputies and one male deputy sought an injunction from the Constitutional Chamber regarding the unequal gender make-up of the Standing Committees, citing CEDAW and the American Convention. A second similar request was also filed in 2003, and another two in 2009, which declared that the deputies' right to equality had been violated. Following this declaration, the President of the Legislative Assembly was ordered to take steps to guarantee, insofar as possible, the participation of female deputies in special standing committees. Since 2009, it has been clear that it is the legislative leadership's duty to comply with the Constitutional Court's ruling.

### **Analysis:**

An ideology of equality does not always accompany political transitions, which can contribute to a regression in women's rights during these periods of change. In the case of the transition from socialism to democracy in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union, the initial years after the transformation were characterized by a reversal of equality norms, towards strongly defined separate gender roles for men and women. In Russia, for example, after the transformation, right-wing discourses appeared in the public sphere, which emphasized the 'cost' of women's emancipation and highlighted women's desire to stay at home and focus on the family as part of women's 'natural' occupation as mothers. As a result of the rise of these right-wing discourses, emphasizing the division of male and female spheres of life, some feminists have argued that, "Perestroika, though in itself intended to augment the sphere of individual freedoms, represented a period of post-socialist patriarchal

renaissance". In Eastern Europe during the 1990s, as with the 'Arab Spring' more recently, women were actively engaged in the pro-democracy movement, but were then ejected from formal politics after the change of regime.

This dual opportunity for progress and regression in political transitions can be seen in the 'Arab Spring' uprisings in the Middle East region since 2010. For example, Tunisia is passing through a critical moment for gender equality, where Tunisian women actively participated in the uprisings, but may still face backlash against their rights with the victory of the moderate Islamic party, Ennahda, during the first free



election since the uprising against President Ben Ali. Particularly in debates about the role of sharia law in the new constitution, women's rights activists are concerned about backsliding on key gains for gender equality and have been active in ensuring that constitutional reforms clearly embody the concept and practice of gender equality and non-discrimination in both public and private spheres. For example, in August 2012, thousands of Tunisians protested in the streets over the new constitution that referred to women as 'partners' of men throughout the country's history, sharing 'complementary' roles within the family. Due to national and international pressure, this concept was removed from the constitution and the latest version guarantees women's rights gains and even goes further to combat all forms of discrimination against women.

While electing women to public office is an important first step to ensure women's political participation, it is also important to ensure that women have a voice once they have been elected. When women are empowered as political leaders, countries experience higher standards of living and positive developments in education, infrastructure and health. Studies show that women's political participation results in tangible gains for democratic governance, including greater responsiveness to citizen needs; increased cooperation across party and ethnic lines; and more sustainable peace. Research suggests that the gender of legislators, for example, clearly affects their policy priorities; however, this might not be the case if women are not empowered to have a strong voice in public office.

Women can have a stronger voice in political life by strengthening legislative and political institutions, and changing political-institutional culture to better meet women's needs. In Arab and African states where there has been an increased women's parliamentary presence, there has been 'substantial change' in parliamentary language and behaviour. It is important to continue to strengthen the legislative institutions through enabling greater inclusiveness in policy-making processes. While it is difficult to determine how gender is being incorporated into institutions, Sweden, which is the second highest ranked country in the Western region in terms of women in national parliaments, has adopted a special plan for gender mainstreaming. This plan describes how "under this strategy, each Minister is responsible for gender equality in his or her policy area and the Minister for Gender Equality is responsible for ensuring that progress is made and for following up measures at an overarching level".

Accountability processes—especially policymaking and consultation with women's rights advocates—are recognized as a critical element in the field of gender policy progress. Policy inclusion is not only a policy outcome in itself but also a factor in securing more gender equality-sensitive policy outputs. Gender equality policies may be particularly hollowed out if women's rights advocates are not meaningfully involved in policy processes beyond agenda setting. As discussed in the section on the relationship between the state and women's organizations, breaking of accountability loops and de-democratizing policymaking processes can be identified as a critical element of backsliding in gender policy. As we wrote, accountability can be undermined by changing or closing altogether consultation platforms. The functioning of civil society organizations and their participation in consultation can also be undermined by cutting resources, creating alternative voices for consulta-

tion processes or even persecution. These patterns of action make participation of women's rights organizations in consultation processes difficult if not impossible. We argue that this is not only a problem in terms of the relationship between the state and women's rights advocates but should factor importantly in our understanding of backsliding. An essential element of backsliding in the context of the economic cri-



sis is the breaking of accountability loops and the de-democratizing of policymaking processes.

Backsliding may occur when a policy problem is radically reframed so that the new frame contrasts with gender equality meanings or allows for contrasting interpretations, as is shown in the example of changes in the Croatian family law with respect to domestic violence. Reversal may happen when gender-sensitive issues present in the diagnostic or prognostic frames of policy regimes disappear. Re-framing policies from targeting equal opportunities to, for example, protecting family values or re-familiarizing and giving preference to family care is a pattern that can be observed to reverse progress in gender equality policy regimes. Reversal may take the form of dismantling or removing existing policies. However, radical changes can also take place by reframing policies so that their objectives change. Policy regimes are underpinned by a set of ideas or policy frames about the nature of the problem, its causes and consequences and its solutions. Policy frames are useful tools to analyze reversal or dismantling.

Dismantling of policies can take less direct forms, called dismantling by default. In



such cases, policies may stay in place but institutional arrangements serving effective policy implementation are challenged. Backsliding can thus affect policy enforcement agencies, mechanisms of policy coordination, intergovernmental and other partnerships, strategic and programmatic processes or allocated budgets. The literature about the gendered implications of austerity measures points to stalling strategic programming processes, closing gender equality institutions and cutting funds that make their operation feasible. Dismantling institutional capacities for implementation contributes to sustaining facade democracies in which laws and policies remain 'dead letters'. Dismantling of implementation arrangements is a relatively easy and low-key form of rolling back policies.

Moreover, Literature on anti-gender mobilization points to the infiltration of anti-gender actors in different state structures, as well as their capacity to mobilize the grassroots are often supported by religious actors and related organizations. States, along with international actors, can also facilitate the emergence of quasi autonomous anti-gender equality actors. This is more likely in countries where conservative and religious traditions were not politicized previously. Conservative religious actors and right-wing populist organizations act in concert to promote their views and block or alter policies and legislation they see as a threat to traditional values. Their repertoire of action includes demonstrations, stand-ins and sit-ins, petitions and the collection of signatures, litigation, expertise and knowledge production, lobbying, referendum campaigns, electoral mobilization and party politics. Anti-gender activists are extremely active on the web and make extensive use of the opportunities and possibilities offered by new information and communication technologies.

## Possible Solutions:

### Recommendations for Governments

- Eliminate all continuing discriminatory laws
- Provide clear and explicit provisions within the constitution and legislation of the State on gender equality and non-discrimination against women
- Ensure ratification and integration within national law of other relevant international human rights and legal instruments

- Implement constitutional reform to ensure gender equality framework
- Ensure an inclusive process and extensive consultation of all stakeholders, including civil society and women's organizations
- Emphasize the principles of gender equality and non-discrimination
- Ensure that the constitution explicitly permits the possibility of taking positive actions to promote gender equality
- Ensure the constitution corresponds with international legal obligations
- Improve training on gender equality for practitioners in the field of police, civil servants, and judiciary, and in national education curriculums
- Ensure gender-responsive national budgets and development plans

**“Something which  
we think is  
impossible now is  
not impossible in  
another decade.”**

CONSTANCE BAKER MOTLEY



- Ensure that women and men have equal opportunities during election campaigns, such as providing public funding, access to the state media, setting campaign spending limits, and ensuring that campaign finances and expenditures are disclosed
- Adopt multi-sectoral strategies to improve women's access to education, employment, health, social security, and other fundamental economic, social and cultural rights
- Ensure that policies designed to promote women's participation include accountability measures
- Involve the media in promoting a culture of gender equality that combats gender-based stereotypes
- Adopt awareness-raising initiatives in the media to address prevailing gender-based social stereotypes
- Adopt educational strategies around women's human rights and women's role in public and political life
- Ensure that the condition and position of women who face multiple forms of discrimination improve and take all measures to facilitate the elimination of discrimination against these women.
- Develop comprehensive data compilation methodology and include relevant sex-disaggregated statistics, to assess trends and impact of programmes.
- Guarantee that women obtain an adequate legal remedy when their right to participate in public and political life free from discrimination is violated
- Establish and/or expand skills training and capacity-building for women and girls, and women's non-governmental organizations on new forms of ICT
- Ensure accessible, affordable childcare and facilities for women involved in public and political life (and parental leave, where relevant)

## Recommendations for Parliaments

- Finalize the process of withdrawal of the reservations to CEDAW and begin process of legislative reform to meet obligations under CEDAW
- Bring legislation in the area of marriage, family, inheritance and personal status law in line with international human rights standards
- Introduce legislation to prevent and protect women from all forms of gender-based violence
- Improve access and knowledge of CEDAW and its optional protocol
- Introduce legislation on specific measures aimed at promoting women's representation in elected public bodies at all levels
- Remove legislation that may hinder women's equal participation
- Implement mechanisms for the monitoring and evaluation of political parties regarding gender policies and practices
- Seek to achieve gender parity in all decision-making bodies, by establishing incremental time-bound targets for increasing women's representation
- Strengthen national women's machineries to ensure the effective implementation, monitoring and mainstreaming of national, regional and international commitments on gender equality
- Enact special measures to guarantee women access to the legislature and decision-making positions, including through legislated quotas within a proportional representation system or reserved seats within majoritarian systems with specific and effective sanctions for non-compliance.

## Recommendations for Political Parties

- Develop mechanisms or special measures to increase the number of women



in party leadership and decision-making positions

- Implement effective gender quotas with the aim of achieving equitable representation of women in elected positions
- Allocate equal and adequate resources for women's political campaigns and electoral processes
- Adopt clear and transparent rules to ensure internal democracy, with attention to gender equality
- Provide clear rules for candidate selection to allow or meaningful input from party members in the process of selecting candidates
- Promote women's candidacies through the adoption of special training programmes, recruitment and financial incentives.

### **Recommendations for Civil Society Organizations**

- Build alliances with men and other women's organizations to promote women's participation in public and political life
- Conduct training on existing national and international legal norms to facilitate their implementation
- Hold government, legislatures and political parties accountable for progress in increasing women's participation and representation
- Develop monitoring plans to evaluate and assess governments of their implementation of commitments related to gender equality
- Strengthen civic and citizenship training in schools and continuing adult education regarding gender equality and non-discrimination
- Facilitate women's education regarding new forms of communication technology such as the Internet and enable women in developing countries to have access to and use of new technologies, for their empowerment.

## Recommendations for the United Nations bodies and multilateral/bilateral donors

- Provide financial and technical support to build women's capacity for political participation
- Build partnerships with government, private sector and civil society to advance women's participation in public and political life
- Engage in information and data-collection efforts related to women's participation in public and political life at all levels
- Promote women's participation and interests at critical moments in political settlements, and at the highest levels of power.

## Conclusion:

During the last decade we have witnessed a visible drive against gender equality across the globe that threatens hard-won gender equality and human rights, including reproductive rights, protection against gender-based violence, funding for women's services and resistance to women's political participation. This gender equality backlash is led by transnational networks of conservative, religious and right-wing actors: political parties, churches, NGOs and also governments. The ascendance to power of right-wing parties in many countries provides a window of opportunity for these actors to challenge and reverse gender equality rights and policies. Increasingly, hostile governments are discrediting gender equality objectives and opposing or sidelining the defenders of such rights. We see attacks on gender equality rights, attacks on women's rights groups and—along the way—a change in state openness to include women's rights advocates in policy processes. This alters the relations between women's movement organizations and the state and leads to the backsliding of gender policies in the longer run. As democracy scholars have noted, democratic backsliding is particularly affecting more recent democracies and democracies that were part of the so-called 'third wave' such as Central and Eastern Europe and Latin America. Whether the patterns found in the CEE region are applicable across world regions requires further research that moves beyond the CEE to understand commonalities and country- or regionspecific patterns of gendered backsliding and

feminist resilience to it.

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mans, including men and women, are created equal. We see that violence and gender discrimination would be a violation of human rights. We also think that women, like men, should be allowed a larger role in practically every facet of life.

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