



Asia Pacific Regional CSO Engagement Mechanism

Session 5. High Level Panel on Gender Equality and Women Empowerment Presented by Losana Tuiraviravi, Fiji Women's Forum

I am from the women constituency of the Regional Civil Society Mechanism (RCEM). We are comprised of more than 100 women's rights organizations and activists from across Asia Pacific. And just the last 3 days, we've had our own civil society convening where we discussed and captures some of broad trends of the root causes of inequality, barriers for the achievement of Goal 5 and women's rights and some recommendations on how to address it.

Madam Chair, I would like to point out that the most comprehensive research conducted into the conditions that allow changes in policy and practice to advance gender equality across the global and across 20 years. That research found that the single most important feature in countries that advanced women's rights was the existing of autonomous feminist movements. And at the root cause of women's inequality, is also the prevailing economic model that perpetuates, and often relies on, the systematic discrimination and disadvantage experienced by women in order to generate growth. Women's cheap labor is viewed as the source of competitive advantage for corporations, thereby keeping women's wages low. The promotion of public-private partnerships in the context of the Agenda 2030 implementation is alarming as we have seen that when privatization or cuts on social services happens, women are forced to fill in these gaps with their unpaid care work. As many women remain in the informal sector, they are denied the decent wages, better working conditions and social protections as their counterparts in the formal sector.

The other feature that needs addressing is the clear consequence of the current political climate – rising authoritarian governments – both in our region and notoriously in other parts of the world coupled with enormous inequalities of wealth and the impact of climate change are all gendered threats, as I have experienced in the Pacific.

Challenging gender inequality therefore requires directly challenging economic policies, institutions and accounting that have entrenched social inequalities and often undermined the regulatory capacity of States. Therefore, we believe that the regional roadmap needs to include a focus on the coherence between trade agreements and Agenda 2030. It also requires the adoption of an expansive notion of women's empowerment that goes far beyond the idea that women are economically empowered when, as proposed by the World Bank, they have the agency to compete in markets.

If women's empowerment is to mean anything, it must extend to strengthening women's capacity to exercise real power and control over land, natural and alternative resources, their control over their bodies, and freedom to express their sexuality without violence or coercion or discrimination. And most importantly, their own lives. Therefore, we call upon all member states to ensure through affirmative actions the participations of women and girls' in development decision-making at all levels including the localization, implementation, monitoring and reporting processes of the SDGs.

Member states' commitment on gender equality should not be limited within Goal 5, it should be viewed as a cross-cutting commitment across all of the Agenda 2030 goals.

The future women want, is one where we shift the current model of development to one that is just and sustainable.