



INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT LAW ORGANIZATION

JUSTICE FOR WOMEN AND GIRLS: A TRANSFORMATIVE APPROACH TO WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT

Written Contribution to the G20 Ministerial Conference on Women's Empowerment

IDLO welcomes the focus of the G20 Ministerial Conference on Women's Empowerment, the first G20 ministerial event dedicated to this urgent cause. Women's empowerment is essential for the fulfilment of women's human rights and is therefore fundamental in the achievement of sustainable development, as underscored by SDG 5 of the 2030 Agenda.

Women's empowerment enables women to enjoy and claim their human rights across a range of areas, such as education, healthcare, employment, and political participation. A key element is strengthening women's agency to provide leadership, make strategic decisions, and influence the direction of social change.

However, pervasive discrimination against women persists in all regions, as they are often deprived of the political, social, economic and cultural rights afforded to men. COVID-19 has widened this divide, with the estimated time required to close the global gender gap having recently increased from 99.5 to 135.6 years.¹

As the only global intergovernmental organization exclusively devoted to promoting the rule of law to advance peace and sustainable development, IDLO supports a rule of law-based approach to gender equality and women's empowerment. Across all of its programmes, advocacy and research, IDLO works to empower women, with the rule of law both as a broad frame of reference and a flexible tool.

A rule of law-based approach is key to eliminating the multiple, intersecting layers of discrimination that prevent women and girls, in all their diversity, from participating equally in society. It enables people-centred justice systems to protect the human rights of women and girls, and enhances their ability to claim their rights, especially in times of crisis. Effective laws and institutions support the emergence of equitable and sustainable models of development that provide an enabling environment for the advancement of women and girls.

IDLO's work on women's empowerment centres on reducing the justice gap for women and girls, with a focus on three main areas:

First, we advocate for the elimination of discriminatory laws and social norms, and support the development of gender-responsive legal, regulatory and policy frameworks. The law is a powerful tool for promoting and protecting women's full enjoyment of human rights, helping them to access essential services and facilitating their participation in society on an equal basis.

Together with UN Women and national partners, we are working in several countries to undertake comprehensive reviews of existing legislation. Such reviews are key to identifying discriminatory laws and policies, and are the first step in gender-equal legal reform.

Second, we work to combat all forms of violence against women and girls. Gender-based violence is one of the most pervasive obstacles to women's empowerment. It is a deterrent to women's ability to access, enjoy, and claim their rights, including to participate fully and freely in political processes.

¹ World Economic Forum, The Global Gender Gap Report 2021: <https://www.weforum.org/reports/global-gender-gap-report-2021>

IDLO has an extensive track record of programming to address gender-based violence in diverse contexts, including in situations of conflict and fragility. Our work in this area focuses on (a) strengthening the capacity of justice sector institutions to respond to gender-based violence, whether they are formal or informal institutions; (b) increasing women's legal empowerment to access justice and claim their rights; and (c) supporting the emergence of gender-responsive legal and policy frameworks on gender-based violence.

Third, we support the equal and effective participation and leadership of women in all arenas. Women leaders and women-led organizations are the most important drivers of change for gender equality. Despite this, women's organizations are under-funded, and women continue to be underrepresented in positions of power and decision-making, including in the justice sector.

IDLO champions the increased participation of women in the justice sector through programmes to promote the inclusion and full participation of women as judges, prosecutors, lawyers and police officials.

For instance, IDLO is supporting National Associations of Women Judges in advocating for gender-responsive justice in the courts. As many women resolve legal disputes through customary and informal justice systems, we also work with Alternative Dispute Resolution Centres to ensure that they meet international standards and include women as adjudicators, counsellors and advisors.

The increasingly severe impacts of climate change have further shown the pressing need for innovative and sustainable solutions for women and girls, who are often among those disproportionately affected by environmental crises.

Climate justice for women and girls accordingly represents an important emerging area of IDLO's work. In our new strategic cycle, IDLO is supporting a rule of law-based approach to gender-equal climate action through four interlocking interventions:

- empowering women and girls to claim their environmental rights and participate in climate-related decision-making;
- strengthening their ability to access, and benefit from, land and other natural resources, through legal empowerment;
- working with governments and civil society to address gender-based inequalities and discrimination and support the development of gender-responsive climate laws and policies; and,
- helping to build an evidence base on the effects of natural disasters on gender-based violence and women's access to justice.

Implementing a gender-transformative approach to sustainable development requires targeted, ambitious, and collective action. IDLO stands ready to support the G20 Ministerial Conference on Women's Empowerment to promote the empowerment of women and girls and deliver on the promise of gender equality.