

Background Guide

UNCSW

Implementing the Beijing Platform for Action in Alignment with the SDGs, with a Focus on Strengthening National Mechanisms for Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment

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Letter from the Executive Board

Greetings Delegates,

It gives us immense pleasure to welcome you to the **United Nations Commission on the Status of Women (UNCSW)** at **BITSMUN Pilani 2025**. Our agenda offers a rich platform to explore one of the most critical global challenges of our time.

The aim of this background guide is to give you a solid research-based foundation, but the proper degree of debate relies on how much delegates are willing to put into reading in between the lines and drawing connections.

Throughout this guide, you will find various viewpoints, case studies and statistics. However, you must bear in mind that what is useful to a given portfolio is not necessarily ideal for others. Your goal is not to be biased by your beliefs and feelings but to take into account your country's foreign policy and national interests in the first place. This difference has been particularly crucial in the past sessions of UNCSW, the commission where ideological conflicts and policy complexities abound.

On that note, we would like to take this opportunity to transparently elaborate on the criteria for judgment that we intend to follow during the sessions. We believe laying out these criteria ensures clarity and objectivity in our assessment. The parameters we will follow are as below:

1. **Research & Analysis**
2. **Structuring of Debate**
3. **Adherence to Assigned Country's Foreign Policy**
4. **Lobbying and Consensus Building**
5. **Points of Information, Moderated and Unmoderated Caucus Yields**
6. **Documentation (Working Papers, Draft Resolutions, Amendments)**

We can promise that the Executive Board will try their best to make the simulation both fair and competitive, as well as to create an intellectually challenging atmosphere that allows for the exchange of meaningful information and the provision of an interesting learning opportunity for all the delegates.

We look forward to seeing your hard work, diplomacy, and analytical skills come alive in committee.

Warm Regards,

The Executive Board

United Nations Commission on the Status of Women (UNCSW)

BITSMUN Pilani 2025

Legitimate Sources of Information

In order to ensure the authenticity and credibility of the research, the delegates should depend on the following sources. Evidence or proof is acceptable from sources:

Primary Sources:

- Reuters
- State-operated News Agencies – These reports can be used in the support of or against the state that owns the agency.
- United Nations Reports and Resolutions (UN Women, ECOSOC, CEDAW, SDG Progress Reports)
- National Government Reports and Ministry Publications
- World Bank, UNDP, and World Economic Forum Gender Data

Secondary Sources:

- Academic Journals, Research Papers, and University Publications
- Peer-reviewed Think Tank Publications (Brookings, Chatham House, etc.)

Note: Other websites and news agencies can be a source of initial information but will be excluded as evidence for the debate and your working papers/resolutions.

About UNCSW

History and Establishment

The United Nations Commission on the Status of Women (UNCSW) was established in 1946 as a functional commission of the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC). UNCSW was established in response to global movements and activism in favor of the rights and equalities of women and girls, particularly in light of the new principle of equality in the United Nations Charter.

Charter and Mandate

The commission operates under the following charters and mandates:

- **UN Charter (1945):** Especially Articles 55 and 56 which obligate the United Nations to promote "universal respect for, and observance of, human rights and fundamental freedoms for all without distinction as to race, sex, language, or religion." religion."
- **ECOSOC Resolutions:** The functional base for the CSW is noted in a number of resolutions of ECOSOC, in particular independent mandate ECOSOC resolution 11 (II) from 1946.
- **Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (1995):** This is still a milestone framework directing the work of the Commission.

- **2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (2015):** The 2030 Agenda which was issued in 2015, includes SDG 5 as a priority area for gender equity.

From the onset, UNCSW was given the mandate to advocate on the advancement of women in relation to political, economic, civil, social, and educational issues, and it has become the pre-eminent intergovernmental body advocating for gender equality.

The **core mandate** of the UNCSW is to:

- **Review the global progress** and challenges to gender equality
- Establish global **standards and norms** on the rights of women
- **Formulate policies** to promote women's empowerment
- Monitor and support the implementation of the **Beijing Platform for Action**
- Secure gender policy synergies with international legal instruments such as **CEDAW**

Major Events in the Past

- **Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) — 1979**
- Adoption of the **Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action — 1995**
- Integration of gender perspectives into global frameworks like the **Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)** and later, the **Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)**
- Annual **Agreed Conclusions** addressing themes like violence against women, women's political participation, climate change, and gender-responsive governance.

Relationship with Other UN Bodies

The UNCSW maintains strategic relationships with several UN bodies and entities:

- **UN Women:** The CSW Secretariat, overseeing its business functions, undertaking research and advocacy.
- **CEDAW Committee:** Monitors the state party cooperation with the CEDAW Convention, often in conjunction with choice or strategies of the CSW.
- **ECOSOC:** UNCSW reports directly to ECOSOC, impacting larger economic and social policy.
- **UN General Assembly and Human Rights Council:** CSW's findings and reports are often referenced in debates and resolutions in the UNGA and UNHRC.

Introduction to the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action

Historical Context

The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (BPfA) was unanimously adopted by 189 countries at the Fourth World Conference on Women, which took place in September 1995, in Beijing, China. The conference was an important moment in the ongoing struggle for gender equality across the globe and included governments, international organizations, NGOs, and activists. It reiterated the interdependence of women's rights and human rights, as well as the social pivots in the public and private spheres. The Declaration recognized sexual equality not only as a value in itself that would create social and economic benefit, but emphasized sexual equality as a central goal for sustainable development, peace, and security.

Critical Areas of Concern

The BPfA outlined **12 key areas** where urgent action was needed to achieve true gender equality, which are relevant even today:

1. **Women and Poverty:**
 - Address the feminization of poverty
 - Ensure women's equal access to economic resources and credit
2. **Education and Training of Women:**
 - Ensure universal access to primary education for girls
 - Develop gender-sensitive educational curricula
3. **Women and Health:**
 - Address women's lack of access to affordable healthcare services
 - Focus on women's sexual and reproductive health rights
4. **Violence Against Women:**
 - Criminalize domestic violence and sexual harassment
 - Ensure women are protected in conflict zones and during humanitarian crises
5. **Women and Armed Conflict:**
 - Ensure women's full participation in peace negotiations and reconstruction efforts after crises
 - Implement UN Security Council Resolution **1325 on Women, Peace, and Security**
6. **Women and the Economy:**
 - Support women's access to labor markets
 - Ensure equal pay and a decent working environment
7. **Women in Power and Decision-Making:**
 - Increase women's political participation and representation
 - Implement electoral gender quotas where necessary

8. Institutional Mechanisms for the Advancement of Women:

- Establish and fund gender ministries, commissions and bodies responsive to gender equality
- Hold the national government accountable

9. Human Rights of Women:

- Eliminate laws and practices that discriminate against women
- Protect women's rights through adherence to international human rights conventions

10. Women and Media:

- Promote a balanced and non-stereotypical portrayal of women in media
- Support women's access to media and communications and information technologies (ICTs).

11. Women and the Environment:

- Ensure women's participation in environmental decision-making
- The ways in which climate change variations impact women as a distinction from men should be recognized and addressed.

12. The Girl Child:

- Eliminate child marriage and female genital mutilation (FGM)
- Promote education and protection for girl children

Relevance 30 Years Later

After nearly three decades of BPfA, it still stands steadfastly as a beacon guiding the global gender equality initiatives. But the implementation gap is still high in many countries due to:

- Continual gender-based violence
- Disparities in the economy
- Weak representation of women in the Parliament
- Fundamentally embedded inequalities in political cultures and social structures

Most of the targets taken in 1995 are yet to be achieved and new problems like climate change, digital inequality, and pandemics have deepened gender disparities.

The COVID-19 pandemic significantly turned back some of the progress that had been made since Beijing, mainly in women's employment, health access, and security.

Gaps and Challenges in Implementation

In spite of international agreement, there are a number of ongoing challenges:

- Underfunding: Most countries do not have effective channels.
- Intersectional discrimination: Indigenous, rural, LGBTQ+ and women with disabilities, face greater ingrained barriers.
- Violence against women: Continues both online and in person.
- Loopholes in law: There are uninformed discriminatory laws with rights to housing/property rights and family law.

In addition, emerging issues, such as disparity of technology and climate-induced displacement, were not expected in 1995, but will require modifications to how we approach the Beijing platform.

National Mechanisms for Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment

Definition and Importance

National mechanisms are institutional structures established by governments primarily to advance gender equality and women's rights. These mechanisms are legal and administrative institutions, however, they promote gender-sensitive policies, accelerate implementation, and commit the implementation of international obligations, in this instance, the Beijing Platform for Action (BPfA) and SDG 5, into national systems.

Functions of National Mechanisms

1. Policy Formulation

National mechanisms are responsible for developing action plans, amending discriminatory legislation, and ensuring ties between gender equality policies and international commitments.

2. Monitoring and Evaluation

They examine the evolution of SDG 5 and BPfA, present reports to relevant UN bodies, and gather qualitative gender-disaggregated data for policymaking.

3. Advocacy and Public Awareness

They initiate campaigns against harmful traditional practices, reinforce positive changes to gender role expectations, and work with the media to promote equal representation of women and girls.

4. International and Regional Engagement

National mechanisms represent their countries at international conferences like the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) and analysis of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) while also collaborating with regional institutional mechanisms.

Regional Realities and Common Challenges

Africa

African countries have devised rigorous frameworks for gender policy, but ongoing budget constraints and weak implementation limit these frameworks from having impact. National plans often leave gender ministries out of decision-making processes or rely on the ministries to address more complex issues, such as traditions, child marriage, or a limited leveraging of rural outreach.

Asia-Pacific

The Asia-Pacific region is extremely diverse, showcasing progressive reforms in some countries, such as the Philippines, while dealing with enormous challenges in more conservative, or conflict-affected, states such as Afghanistan or Pakistan. In countries where laws do exist, weak political will and patrilineal norms create significant enforcement gaps.

Middle East and North Africa (MENA)

Legal systems in this region are governed by personal status laws and principles under Sharia law, which are laid upon cultural or religious norms, leaving issues about gender equality secondary. Women rights advancement in MENA countries are often politicized or treated as a matter of regimes surviving, or as a means of responding to international scrutiny.

Latin America and the Caribbean

Latin America has experimented with gender quotas and advancements in movements for rights-based feminism, all while helping to progress non-discursive notions of global discourse. Nevertheless, violence against women remains high, which is a real concern for many women in Latin America, particularly indigenous and Afro-descendant women who face intersectional issues.

Europe and North America

This region has well-established gender bodies with clear mandates and considerable resources. Recently, their focus has shifted, including topics like LGBTQ rights, digital safety for people of all genders, and intersectionality, while still addressing the wage gap and underrepresentation of women in politics.

International Support and Partnerships

International actors such as UN Women support national gender mechanisms by providing funding, technical support, and policy guidance. Similarly, the World Bank, CEDAW Committee, Global Fund for Women, and regional organizations continue supporting gender equality efforts and national actions through national partnerships.

Key Challenges Faced by National Mechanisms

1. **Underfunding:** Gender departments often have the smallest budgets despite expansive mandates.
2. **Lack of Political Clout:** Ministries or commissions may be sidelined during national priority setting.
3. **Weak Implementation:** Progressive laws fail without enforcement or local buy-in.
4. **Data Gaps:** Inadequate gender-disaggregated data hinders monitoring progress.
5. **Resistance from Conservative Groups:** Cultural and religious norms undermine legal advances.
6. **Shrinking Civic Space:** Activists and gender rights groups face suppression, especially in autocratic regimes.

Intersectionality in Gender Empowerment

Understanding Intersectionality

Intersectionality is a crucial framework to understand the **overlapping and multiple systems of oppression** that impact women differently depending on their race, ethnicity, class, disability, sexual orientation, gender identity, and geography.

Scholar **Kimberlé Crenshaw** developed the concept of intersectionality to help illustrate that **gender inequity cannot be addressed in isolation** — it is connected to many other forms of discrimination that can further marginalize and disadvantage women.

I. Women in Conflict Zones

In conflict and post-conflict settings, women face **heightened levels of violence and systemic marginalization**. Gender-based violence, displacement, and loss of rights become common.

Key Impacts:

- **Sexual Violence:** Used as a deliberate war tactic — seen in **Bosnia, South Sudan, Syria, and Myanmar (Rohingya crisis)**
- **Loss of Access:** Education, healthcare, and livelihood programs collapse, worsening women's vulnerabilities
- **Exclusion from Peace Processes:** Despite **UNSCR 1325**, women rarely participate in negotiations or decision-making on post-conflict rebuilding

Global Frameworks:

- **UNSCR 1325 on Women, Peace, and Security**
- **Global study on UNSCR 1325 implementation**
- **UN Women's advocacy for women's role in peacebuilding**

II. Rural and Indigenous Women

Rural and indigenous women experience **systemic exclusion** due to patriarchal traditions, limited state outreach, and environmental vulnerabilities.

Challenges:

- **Lack of Land Rights:** Traditional norms prevent land inheritance, making women economically dependent
- **Health and Education Barriers:** Distance, poor infrastructure, and societal barriers limit access

- **Climate Change Impacts:** Women farmers bear the brunt of climate-driven crises — droughts, floods, loss of livelihoods

Examples:

- **Latin American indigenous women** face triple discrimination: as women, as rural citizens, and as indigenous people
- **African rural women** contribute up to **70% of food production** but have minimal land ownership or political representation
- In **India**, tribal women face land alienation, lack of healthcare, and limited participation in local governance.

International Frameworks:

- **ILO Convention 169**
- **United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP)**
- **CEDAW General Recommendation No. 34** on rural women

III. LGBTQ+ and Gender-Diverse Persons

LGBTQ+ individuals and gender-diverse persons often **fall outside national gender equality mechanisms**, facing distinct and severe discrimination.

Challenges:

- **Criminalization:** Over 60 countries criminalize same-sex relations
- **Lack of Legal Recognition:** No access to marriage, inheritance, or reproductive rights
- **Violence and Social Exclusion:** Higher rates of homelessness, unemployment, healthcare discrimination

Examples:

- **Transgender women** face legal invisibility and extreme violence in many countries
- **LGBTQ+ activists** face harassment, arrests, and even killings (e.g., Uganda's Anti-Homosexuality Bill)

Global and National Gaps:

- Few countries integrate **SOGIESC (Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity, Gender Expression, Sex Characteristics)** in gender policies
- BPfA and SDG 5 implementation often remains heteronormative and exclusionary

IV. Persons with Disabilities

Women and girls with disabilities face **multi-layered discrimination** — sexism combined with ableism.

Issues Faced:

- Higher risk of **sexual abuse and domestic violence**
- Limited access to education, healthcare, and employment
- Stereotypes depicting disabled women as non-sexual or dependent

Data Highlights:

- Globally, women with disabilities are **3 times more likely to face sexual violence**
- Few national gender policies contain disability-specific provisions

Global Frameworks:

- **UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD)**
- **General Recommendation No. 18 of CEDAW** — focuses on disabled women

V. Young Girls and Adolescents

Young girls face **unique vulnerabilities** that are often overlooked in gender policies focusing only on adult women.

Key Vulnerabilities:

- **Child Marriage and FGM:** 12 million girls married before 18 every year
- **Digital Gender Gap:** Girls underrepresented online and vulnerable to cyber harassment
- **Limited Access to Reproductive Health:** Inadequate education and services

Examples:

- In **sub-Saharan Africa**, 4 in 10 girls are married before 18
- **Menstrual stigma and poverty** keep millions of girls out of school annually

Alignment Challenges Between Beijing Platform and SDGs

I. Conflicts in Targets or Implementation

The Beijing Platform for Action (BPfA) and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) share the overarching goal of achieving gender equality. However, **differences in design, priority areas, and implementation approaches** often create tensions or inconsistencies, making alignment challenging.

1. Scope and Focus Misalignment

- The BPfA, adopted in **1995**, focuses deeply on the **12 Critical Areas of Concern**, including issues like **women and armed conflict, media portrayal, and the girl child** — many of which are **underemphasized in SDG 5**.

- **SDG 5**, part of the broader **2030 Agenda**, addresses gender in a more **measurable, indicator-driven framework**, but sometimes **lacks the depth** of BPfA's social and cultural focus.

Example:

- BPfA emphasizes **media's role** in perpetuating gender stereotypes — largely **missing from SDG 5**, which doesn't directly address women's portrayal in media.

2. Measurability vs. Complexity

- SDG 5 is criticized for **oversimplifying complex gender issues into quantifiable targets**. For instance, counting **women's parliamentary representation** may mask the quality or real power of such representation — something BPfA emphasizes more.
- BPfA's nuanced focus on **intersectionality** (rural, disabled, indigenous women) isn't reflected in SDG monitoring frameworks.

3. Competing National Priorities

- Many countries prioritize **"easier" SDG targets** like access to education or healthcare while **neglecting sensitive BPfA areas** such as:
 - **Reproductive rights**
 - **Gender-based violence (GBV)**
 - **Women's rights in armed conflict**
- Result: Countries **"cherry-pick"** SDG targets while avoiding politically or culturally sensitive BPfA obligations.

4. Global vs. Local Discrepancies

- **BPfA is globally binding in spirit**, but **enforcement is weak**, while SDGs allow national adaptation, making governments **dilute women's rights goals** based on domestic politics.
- In countries like **Nigeria or Afghanistan**, BPfA's critical area on **violence against women** is largely ignored, while SDG reporting shows progress on gender education or maternal health.

II. Funding Gaps and Resource Allocation Challenges

1. Chronic Underfunding of Gender Mechanisms

- Both BPfA and SDG 5 depend on **strong, well-funded national gender institutions** — a major failure point.
- According to **UN Women's 2022 report**, less than **0.5% of global development aid** is dedicated directly to gender equality programming.
- National commissions or ministries of women operate on shoestring budgets — **Gambia, Nigeria, Pakistan** — making serious implementation impossible.

2. Gender Equality Deprioritized in Budgeting

- Despite gender-responsive budgeting being a BPfA and SDG 5 goal, only **25 countries globally** have consistently applied it.
- Governments often cut gender programs first in times of economic strain — COVID-19, financial crises, or conflict.
- Sectors like **military or infrastructure get disproportionate funding** while GBV prevention or female entrepreneurship programs are sidelined.

3. Private Sector and Donor Dependency

- Many BPfA targets rely on **foreign aid and NGO funding**, creating sustainability risks.
- Example: Afghanistan's women's programs collapsed **entirely** when international aid was withdrawn post-2021.
- **Private sector engagement** in SDG 5 is weak — large companies may fund education or health but avoid investing in **controversial areas** like women's political participation or reproductive rights.

4. Lack of Data Financing

- Gender data collection is underfunded, leading to poor measurement and monitoring.
- Many countries **lack gender-disaggregated data** on labor, violence, land rights, etc., making both BPfA and SDG reporting ineffective.

III. Political Will and Cultural Barriers

1. Conservative Backlash and Politicization

- BPfA and SDG 5 face resistance from **conservative governments, religious institutions, and patriarchal cultures**.
- **Women's rights are politicized**, leading to stalled legislation, especially on:
 - Reproductive rights
 - LGBTQ+ inclusion
 - Marital rape criminalization
- Examples:
 - **Poland's abortion rollback**
 - **Nigeria's repeated failure** to pass the Gender and Equal Opportunities Bill
 - **Afghanistan's collapse of gender rights under Taliban rule**

2. Tokenistic Implementation

- Governments “tick the box” on gender targets by:
 - Appointing women without power
 - Creating policies that are **never enforced**
 - Prioritizing **symbolic actions over structural change**

3. Clash of International Norms and Domestic Laws

- BPfA principles **clash with Sharia-based or customary laws** in multiple countries, leading to dual legal systems.
- **Inheritance, property rights, family law** remain discriminatory in many parts of Africa, the Middle East, and Asia.

4. Weak Legal Enforcement

- GBV laws exist on paper but are **barely implemented**.
- Judicial systems lack gender sensitivity, leading to **low conviction rates and survivor re-victimization**.
- Example: **Latin America's femicide laws** see low enforcement despite rising violence rates.

IV. COVID-19 Pandemic Rollback Effects

1. Reversal of Gains in Women's Workforce Participation

- Global female labor force participation dropped dramatically during the pandemic:
 - **118 women for every 100 men** lost jobs
 - Over **47 million additional women pushed into poverty** (UN Women, 2021)

2. Surge in Gender-Based Violence (GBV)

- **"Shadow pandemic" of GBV** erupted worldwide:
 - Domestic violence increased by **30-50%**
 - Many countries **closed shelters or legal aid services** during lockdowns
- Example: **India's National Commission for Women reported a doubling of GBV cases** during the first lockdown.

3. Education Disruption

- **20 million girls globally** were at risk of dropping out permanently post-pandemic (Malala Fund).
- Early marriages surged as families sought to reduce financial burdens:
 - **UNICEF predicts an additional 10 million child brides** due to COVID-19 disruptions.

4. Gender Health Gaps Widened

- Sexual and reproductive health services deemed "non-essential" in many countries:
 - Increase in **maternal mortality**
 - Lack of access to **contraceptives and safe abortion**
- Example: Several US states temporarily banned abortions as elective procedures.

Role of International Organizations and NGOs

I. UN Women — The Lead Global Gender Equality Entity

Mandate and Functions:

Created in **2010**, **UN Women** leads **global gender equality advocacy**, supporting governments with **technical assistance, funding, and monitoring** of action plans aligned with the **BPfA** and **SDGs**, while publishing **gender statistics** and **SDG 5 progress reports**.

Impact on National Mechanisms:

UN Women helps establish **Gender Ministries, Women’s Commissions, and Gender Budgeting Units**, offers **policy frameworks** like **gender-responsive budgeting** and **GBV legislative templates**, and runs “**Flagship Program Initiatives**” on **women’s political participation, ending violence, and economic empowerment**.

Example:

- In **Tunisia**, UN Women provided expert support for drafting the **2017 Law on Violence Against Women**.
- In **Nigeria**, they fund programs increasing women’s political participation and supporting **state-level gender ministries**.

II. CEDAW Committee — Legal Oversight Body

Role and Relevance

The **CEDAW Committee** reviews **state reports every four years** on **gender equality progress** and issues “**General Recommendations**” offering detailed guidance on **national mechanisms** (e.g., **General Recommendation No. 28 on Core Obligations**). It also has the authority to **conduct inquiries into gross or systematic violations of women’s rights**, as seen in cases like **Afghanistan**.

Impact

- Helps align national laws with **international human rights standards**.
- Many countries have reformed discriminatory laws **after CEDAW reviews** — property rights in Kenya, domestic violence laws in India.

III. World Bank and IMF — Gender Financing and Economic Reforms

Role in Economic Empowerment

The World Bank integrates **gender indicators into national economic reform programs** and funds **gender-responsive social protection, entrepreneurship, and education programs** supporting national gender strategies.

Gender-Focused Projects

- **Nigeria:** Gender-informed financial inclusion programs
- **Rwanda:** Budget support to gender ministries
- **India:** World Bank-funded skilling programs for rural women

IV. Global Fund for Women and International NGOs

Grassroots Funding and Advocacy

Global Fund for Women, CARE, Oxfam, Women Deliver channel funds directly to local women's organizations and gender ministries. It supports **grassroots legal reforms, GBV prevention projects, and economic cooperatives.**

Impact on Strengthening National Mechanisms

- **Legal support:** Drafting gender laws and national policies
- **Capacity-building:** Training gender ministry staff, parliamentarians, police, and judiciary
- **Public campaigns:** Shifting societal norms, especially around child marriage and GBV

V. Regional Bodies and Multilateral Actors

African Union (AU) and ECOWAS

- AU's **Solemn Declaration on Gender Equality (2004)** requires annual progress reports — influencing national mechanisms.
- ECOWAS gender programs assist West African countries in **operationalizing national gender policies.**

European Union (EU)

- Funds gender reforms in **Middle East, Africa, and South Asia**
- Conditions trade deals and development aid on **gender rights progress**

Challenges

- **Donor Dependency:** Many national mechanisms collapse without external funding (e.g., Afghanistan's Ministry of Women's Affairs).
- **Mismatch in Priorities:** International NGOs may push western-centric gender agendas, clashing with local norms.
- **Fragmentation:** Duplication of efforts and lack of coordination between international actors and local gender bodies.

Global Statistics and Trends

I. Gender-Based Violence (GBV)

1. **1 in 3 women globally has experienced physical or sexual violence** in their lifetime (WHO, 2023).
2. **Less than 40% of women who experience violence seek help** — and only 10% go to the police (UN Women, 2022).
3. **137 women are killed daily by a family member globally** (UNODC, 2022).

II. Women's Political Participation

4. **26.7% of parliamentary seats globally are held by women** (Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2023).
5. **Only 10 countries have women as Heads of State and 13 as Heads of Government** (UN Women, 2023).

III. Economic Participation and Labor

6. **Globally, women earn 77 cents for every dollar earned by men** (ILO, 2022).
7. **Only 47% of working-age women are in the labor force vs. 72% of men** (World Bank, 2022).
8. **Less than 20% of global landholders are women** (FAO, 2023).
9. **Women perform 76.2% of unpaid care work globally** (ILO, 2022).

IV. Education and Child Rights

10. **129 million girls are out of school worldwide** (UNESCO, 2023).

11. **12 million girls are married before age 18 every year** (UNICEF, 2023).

12. **4 million girls remain at risk of Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) annually** (UNICEF, 2023).

V. Health and Reproductive Rights

13. **287,000 women died from preventable maternal causes in 2022** (WHO).

14. **214 million women globally lack access to modern contraception** (UNFPA, 2022).

VI. Gender Digital Divide

15. **Only 57% of women use the internet vs. 62% of men globally** (ITU, 2023).

VII. Conflict and Crisis Impact on Women

16. **70% of women in conflict-affected areas experience GBV** (UN Women, 2022).

17. **Women account for 50% of displaced populations but less than 10% of peace negotiators** (UN, 2023).

VIII. Funding and Resources

18. **Only 5% of bilateral aid globally goes to gender equality as the principal objective** (OECD, 2023).

19. **Globally, less than 1% of gender equality aid reaches grassroots women's organizations** (AWID, 2023).

IX. Intersectionality Gaps

20. **Women with disabilities face up to 10 times higher GBV risk** (UNPRPD, 2022).

21. **LGBTQ+ individuals are criminalized in 67 countries** (ILGA, 2023).

Bloc Positions and Alliances

I. Progressive/Feminist Bloc — Scandinavia, Canada, Western Europe, New Zealand

The bloc is comprised of countries heading global gender equality advocacy, in every sense, domestically and internationally. **Sweden, Norway, Finland, Denmark, Canada, New Zealand, Germany, France, and the Netherlands** are at the forefront of this block, with a focus on feminist foreign policies, intersectional

gender framework, and the complete realization of the **Beijing Platform for Action and Sustainable Development Goal 5**.

These countries have created **gender equality ministries** with considerable budgets and legal authority. **Sweden and Canada** pioneered feminist foreign policies that incorporated gender into a country's efforts at diplomacy, aid, trade, and defense. **France and Spain** are other examples of countries with strong GBV laws domestically and have allocated resources.

This bloc advocates:

- **Mandatory gender quotas** in politics, judiciary, and corporate sectors
- **Intersectionality**, focusing on LGBTQ+, disabled, migrant, and indigenous women
- **Comprehensive sexual and reproductive rights**, including abortion access
- Strong collaboration with **UN Women, CEDAW, and grassroots feminist movements**

Despite facing backlash by conservative blocs claiming "western feminist imperialism," these countries provide significant funding for gender equality which allows them to play a significant role in shaping norms across the globe and establishing funding mechanisms to support gender equality within their countries

II. African Union (AU) Bloc — Nigeria, South Africa, Rwanda, Kenya, Ghana

Components of this AU bloc have **varied internal dynamics**, yet collectively uphold regional gender commitments such as the **Maputo Protocol**. Rwanda leads the world in female representation in parliaments, while **Nigeria and Sudan** remain challenged regarding the implementation of statutes and norms mandated by AU and regional protocols, given religious and cultural pushback.

The AU Gender Policy emphasizes:

- **Gender quotas in governance.**
- Combating **GBV and harmful traditional practices** including child marriage and FGM
- **Economic empowerment** of rural women and land rights reforms
- Recognition of **intersectional challenges** — focusing on indigenous and marginalized groups

However, many AU members suffer from:

- **Weak institutional capacity**
- Chronic underfunding of gender ministries
- Resistance from **patriarchal customs, religious laws, and political instability**

This Bloc often pushes for greater financial and technical expertise from the international community, although they may express more hesitance to situations involving interference of socio-cultural issues. Progressive AU members and/or countries conflicted with conservative governments have debated issues around inclusion, gender and sexual orientation continuum (LGBTQ), reproductive rights, etc.

III. Middle East and North Africa (MENA) Bloc — Egypt, Saudi Arabia, UAE, Iran, Tunisia

The MENA bloc is **highly polarized** on gender issues. Countries like **Tunisia** showcase progressive gender laws, while others like **Saudi Arabia and Iran** maintain **strict gender-based legal restrictions** rooted in Sharia and customary laws.

Common features:

- Resistance to international frameworks perceived as **clashing with Islamic principles**
- Minimal progress on **political representation and economic participation**
- Legal systems often exclude women from **inheritance, family law protections, and property rights**

Recent years saw **gradual reforms** in Saudi Arabia (lifting the driving ban, allowing female employment), but critics label them **cosmetic changes**.

MENA's bloc position:

- **Protects “cultural sovereignty”**, opposing international mandates on **LGBTQ+ rights or reproductive freedoms**
- Supports **selective SDG 5 targets** — education and health — while rejecting CEDAW’s optional protocol or Beijing’s full commitments
- Calls for **regional approaches** to gender equality that align with religious and cultural values

IV. Asia-Pacific Bloc — India, China, Japan, ASEAN Nations

This bloc reflects diverse gender equality trajectories — **high-performing nations like the Philippines** alongside **lagging states like Afghanistan**.

Common priorities include:

- Focus on **economic empowerment, education, and health outcomes** for women
- Skepticism toward western-centric gender agendas, especially around **LGBTQ+ rights and reproductive freedoms**
- Tendency to **frame gender equality as development-driven**, linking women’s rights to economic growth

Countries like **India and Indonesia** push for legal reforms, but **patriarchy, caste, and religion** weaken national mechanisms. **China** endorses BPfA and SDGs but avoids external accountability mechanisms like CEDAW inquiries.

Bloc Challenges:

- **Intersectional exclusions** (indigenous women, LGBTQ+, caste minorities)
- Underfunded gender bodies

- Rising **authoritarianism and shrinking civic space** hurting grassroots women's groups

Overall, this bloc supports incremental gender reforms but resists sweeping international dictates, preferring localized implementation strategies.

Guiding Questions for Debate

1. How can national mechanisms be financially independent and institutionally powerful to survive political changes and regime shifts?
2. Should gender quotas be mandatory across all national sectors — politics, judiciary, law enforcement, and private industries — and how can their effectiveness be measured beyond numbers?
3. What role should international organizations and donor agencies play in ensuring accountability and progress of national gender mechanisms, especially in conflict-affected or conservative states?
4. How can intersectionality — covering rural women, LGBTQ+, Indigenous populations, and persons with disabilities — be fully integrated into national gender mechanisms without causing a political backlash?
5. What innovative approaches can national mechanisms adopt to tackle gender-based violence (GBV) as a structural issue, beyond just criminalization?
6. How can national mechanisms ensure gender equality policies are enforced uniformly in rural, indigenous, and marginalized regions?
7. Should international bodies like UN Women and the CEDAW Committee have the power to sanction or penalize countries failing to uphold gender commitments?
8. How can countries integrate gender-responsive budgeting as a mandatory component of their national development plans?
9. How can digital technology and AI be leveraged to monitor and evaluate the progress of national mechanisms for gender equality?
10. What steps can be taken to ensure that national mechanisms address emerging challenges like cyber violence and online harassment of women?
11. How can educational reforms be structured to promote gender equality from an early age and dismantle deep-rooted biases?

Case Studies

United Nations Commission
on the Status of Women



BITSMUN Pilani 2025

29th - 30th March, 2025

Case Study 1: Rwanda — Gender Quotas and Parliamentary Leadership

Background and Historical Context

Rwanda, a small landlocked country in East Africa, is globally recognized as a **pioneer in women's political representation** and gender equality policies. However, this achievement is rooted in a tragic history — the **1994 Rwandan Genocide**. After the genocide, which killed an estimated **800,000 people**, the country faced a demographic shift where **70% of the surviving population was female**.

This unique circumstance forced Rwanda to reconstruct its society with women playing a central role — socially, economically, and politically. It laid the groundwork for **radical gender reforms**, making Rwanda a case study for countries striving to strengthen national mechanisms for gender equality.

National Mechanisms Established

Rwanda institutionalized gender equality through a **multi-pronged approach**, creating some of the most progressive national mechanisms in the world:

1. Ministry of Gender and Family Promotion (MIGEPROF)

- Established as the **lead national gender mechanism**
- Oversees the implementation of gender policies, family promotion, and gender mainstreaming across sectors
- Coordinates gender-related international cooperation and agreements

2. Gender Monitoring Office (GMO)

- An independent body tasked with ensuring compliance with gender equality laws
- Monitors public, private, and civil society institutions
- Publishes the **National Gender Statistics Report** and other evaluation documents

3. National Women's Council (NWC)

- Grassroots structure present at village, sector, district, and national levels
- Empowers women to participate in local governance and development planning

4. Constitutional and Legislative Gender Quotas

- **Rwanda's 2003 Constitution (Article 9)** mandates that **at least 30% of positions in decision-making bodies be reserved for women**
- Gender quotas apply to Parliament, local governments, judiciary, and other public institutions
- Gender-responsive laws enacted across sectors — land rights, labor, education

Impact of National Mechanisms

Rwanda's structured approach to gender equality has produced **remarkable results**:

1. Political Representation

- Rwanda holds the **world record for female representation in Parliament**:
 - **61.3% of lower house (Chamber of Deputies) seats held by women** (as of 2023)
 - **38.5% in the Senate**
- Female mayors, ministers, judges, and police officers have increased exponentially
- The gender quota system **normalized women's leadership** in politics and society

2. Economic Empowerment

- **Land Law reforms** (2004) guaranteed equal inheritance and ownership rights for women
- **Women's cooperatives and entrepreneurial initiatives** supported through public-private partnerships
- Access to credit and land ownership among women has increased by **over 50% since 2000**

3. Legal Reforms

- Enactment of laws on **gender-based violence (GBV), domestic violence, marital rape**
- Establishment of **One-Stop Centers** nationwide for GBV survivors offering medical, psychological, and legal aid

4. Education and Health

- **Gender parity achieved in primary and secondary education**
- Reduction in maternal mortality rates due to targeted healthcare programs
- Massive improvement in women's access to reproductive health services

Challenges and Limitations

Despite success, Rwanda's model is not without challenges:

1. Political Context

- Rwanda is an **authoritarian state** with limited political freedom
- Some argue that **women's representation is symbolic** — power remains concentrated within the ruling elite

2. Economic Vulnerabilities

- Majority of Rwandan women still work in the **informal and agricultural sectors**

- Gender pay gaps persist, especially in non-agricultural sectors

3. Social and Cultural Barriers

- Deep-rooted patriarchal norms continue to influence women's decision-making power at the household level
- Domestic violence, while criminalized, remains underreported

4. Donor Dependency

- Many gender programs rely heavily on **foreign aid and donor funding**
- Risk of unsustainability if external funding diminishes

Global Recognition and Replicability

Rwanda's gender equality model has received global praise:

- Referenced in **UN Women** reports as a best practice for **quota implementation**
- Studied by the **World Bank and World Economic Forum**
- Regular speaker at **CSW sessions** on gender mainstreaming

However, experts caution that the **success of Rwanda's model is context-specific** — driven by post-genocide reconstruction needs and a unique demographic shift.

Case Study 2: Sweden — Feminist Foreign Policy and Domestic Gender Mechanisms

Background and Context

Sweden is globally recognized as a leader in **gender equality, women's rights, and feminist governance**. With its long-standing social democratic tradition, Sweden's gender equality framework is deeply institutionalized and embedded across all policy levels.

In **2014**, Sweden made history by becoming the **first country in the world** to officially adopt a **Feminist Foreign Policy (FFP)** — signaling that **gender equality would be at the heart of its international engagements**. This bold move was complemented by **strong domestic mechanisms** ensuring that Sweden's global advocacy reflected its internal gender equality achievements.

National Mechanisms and Institutions

1. Ministry for Gender Equality

- Embedded within the Ministry of Employment but works cross-sectorally
- Tasked with creating gender equality strategies, overseeing implementation, and ensuring compliance with national and international commitments (CEDAW, SDG 5)

2. Swedish Gender Equality Agency (Jämställdhetsmyndigheten)

- Established in **2018**
- Monitors, evaluates, and coordinates gender equality efforts across municipalities, regions, and central government agencies
- Focuses on **economic equality, ending violence against women, health, education, and political participation**

3. Discrimination Ombudsman (DO)

- Independent national authority ensuring compliance with **Sweden's Discrimination Act (2008)**
- Handles cases of gender discrimination in employment, education, housing, and healthcare
- Acts as a watchdog with investigative powers

4. Gender Mainstreaming in Governance

- Gender budgeting integrated into **every level of government spending**
- **Gender mainstreaming (Jämställdhetsintegrering)** is mandatory in all policy and service delivery
- Universities, municipalities, and state agencies required to implement gender equality plans

Feminist Foreign Policy (FFP): A Landmark Initiative

Core Principle:

Sweden's FFP is founded on three R's:

1. **Rights:** Safeguard the human rights of women and girls
2. **Representation:** Ensure women's participation in decision-making
3. **Resources:** Allocate funding towards women's rights initiatives globally

Key Features:

- Mandatory **gender analysis in foreign aid, trade, defense, and diplomatic engagements**
- Global advocacy against gender-based violence, child marriage, and for reproductive rights
- Directed **60% of development aid towards gender equality projects** in targeted countries

Examples of FFP Impact:

- **Yemen, Syria, Afghanistan:** Prioritized women's participation in peace negotiations
- **Support for UN Women and CEDAW enforcement**
- Focused diplomatic efforts to repeal abortion bans and discriminatory laws in partner countries

Legal and Policy Frameworks

1. The Swedish Discrimination Act (2008)

- Prohibits discrimination based on sex, transgender identity, or expression
- Obligates employers and educational institutions to take proactive measures for equality

2. Gender Equality Act

- Addresses equal pay, workplace harassment, parental leave, and work-life balance
- Promotes **shared parental leave** — globally recognized as a best practice

3. National Action Plans

- **Violence against Women (2017–2023)**: Addresses domestic violence, honor crimes, and online harassment
- **LGBTQ+ inclusion** integrated into gender policies

Key Impacts of National Mechanisms

1. Political Representation

- **46% of Swedish MPs are women (2023)**
- **50% female representation in Cabinet**
- Women occupy key leadership roles — foreign ministers, defense ministers, and business leaders

2. Economic Equality

- **Gender pay gap among the lowest globally (~4-6%)**
- High female labor force participation (**82%** of women aged 20-64 employed)
- Mandatory corporate reporting on gender balance in leadership

3. Reproductive and Sexual Rights

- Free access to **abortion services, contraception, and sexual education**
- Comprehensive support for maternal health and family planning

4. Violence Prevention

- State-funded shelters, hotlines, and legal aid for victims of domestic violence
- Specific action plans against **honor-based violence and human trafficking**

Challenges and Limitations

1. Immigrant Women's Integration

- Gender equality mechanisms sometimes **fail to reach immigrant and refugee women**
- Higher unemployment and social isolation among migrant women

2. Backlash and Political Polarization

- Rise of right-wing, anti-feminist parties criticizing feminist policies
- FFP suspended in **2023 by the new conservative-led government**, citing political shifts

3. Gender Stereotypes Persist

- Despite progress, traditional gender roles influence unpaid care work and domestic responsibilities
- Women still shoulder **two-thirds of unpaid household labor**

Global Leadership and Influence

- Sweden's model is globally **emulated and studied**
- **Canada, Mexico, France, and Spain** have since launched their own **Feminist Foreign Policies**
- Regular contributor to **CSW, UN Women, and international feminist coalitions**

Case Study 3: Tunisia — Legal Reforms and National Mechanisms for Gender Equality

Background and Context

Tunisia, located in North Africa, is often regarded as **one of the most progressive Arab nations** regarding women's rights. Since gaining independence from France in **1956**, Tunisia has made significant strides in legislating gender equality — driven by a combination of secular governance and strong civil society activism.

The **2011 Arab Spring**, which originated in Tunisia, reinvigorated gender debates, with women playing crucial roles in protests, political movements, and drafting the new constitution. Tunisia's approach shows how **legal reforms and national mechanisms** can drive progress in regions facing deep-rooted patriarchal and religious challenges.

Key National Mechanisms and Legal Frameworks

1. Ministry of Women, Family, Children, and Seniors

- Tunisia's primary government body responsible for gender equality policies
- Coordinates national strategies on violence prevention, economic empowerment, and education for women and girls
- Monitors international commitments like CEDAW and the SDGs

2. National Council for Women and Family

- Advisory body created to strengthen women's rights and family policies
- Provides policy recommendations to the government
- Facilitates cooperation with international organizations and NGOs

3. Independent High Authority for Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms

- Monitors compliance with constitutional rights, including gender equality
- Investigates violations, especially in rural and marginalized regions

4. Strong Legal Reforms

Tunisia has passed several **landmark laws** strengthening gender equality:

- **Personal Status Code (1956):** Abolished polygamy, improved women's rights in marriage and divorce
- **2014 Constitution:** Explicitly enshrines gender equality (Article 46) and commits the state to protect women's rights and fight violence
- **Law on Eliminating Violence Against Women (2017):** Comprehensive — covers physical, sexual, psychological, and economic violence

Key Impacts of National Mechanisms

1. Political Participation and Representation

- **Gender parity principle** included in the 2014 Constitution for elected bodies
- Electoral law mandates alternating male and female candidates on party lists
- **36% of parliamentary seats** held by women as of 2019 (highest in MENA region)

2. Legal Protection from Violence

- The **2017 Violence Against Women Law** recognized marital rape — a first in the Arab world
- Established **specialized police units, hotlines, and shelters** for survivors
- Created legal pathways for women to claim financial compensation

3. Economic Empowerment

- **National Strategy for the Economic Empowerment of Women and Girls (2022-2025)**
- Focus on reducing women's unemployment — especially in agriculture and informal sectors
- Programs launched for women entrepreneurs and rural women's cooperatives

4. Reproductive Rights and Health

- **Abortion legalized since 1973** — unique in the Arab world
- Access to contraception and family planning services integrated into public healthcare

- Decline in fertility rates, rise in women’s education, and labor market participation

Challenges and Limitations

1. Social and Cultural Resistance

- Despite progressive laws, **deep-seated patriarchal norms** prevail, especially in rural and conservative areas
- Women face **societal pressure, honor-based violence, and family control**

2. Inconsistent Law Enforcement

- Police and judiciary often **lack gender sensitivity training**
- Survivors of violence face **re-victimization or societal stigma** when seeking justice

3. Economic Vulnerabilities

- **24% female unemployment rate** (2022), much higher than men’s
- Majority of women in low-paid, informal, or agricultural work without social protection

4. Rising Conservatism and Political Instability

- Recent political shifts, including President Kais Saied’s centralization of power, have **sparked fears of rollback** on gender gains
- Civil society reports increasing restrictions on women’s rights activists

Global Recognition

- Tunisia is seen as a **regional leader** in Arab women’s rights
- Cited in **UN Women and CEDAW reports** as a **model for legal reforms** on violence and reproductive rights
- Regular participant in **CSW sessions and global gender equality forums**

Role of Civil Society

Tunisia’s progress is significantly credited to **strong women’s movements** and NGOs:

- **Tunisian Association of Democratic Women (ATFD)**
- **Association Tunisienne des Femmes Juristes**
- Advocacy led to the **2017 violence law** and constitutional gender clauses

These groups continue to monitor state policies and provide legal aid, shelters, and empowerment programs for women across Tunisia.

Case Study 4: India — National Gender Mechanisms, Schemes, and the National Commission for Women (NCW)

Background and Context

India, the world's largest democracy, is home to **over 685 million women and girls** — nearly 17% of the world's female population. Its gender landscape is **complex and diverse**, influenced by caste, religion, class, region, and urban-rural divides.

Despite constitutional guarantees of equality, women in India have faced persistent barriers ranging from **child marriage, gender-based violence, and economic exclusion to underrepresentation in politics**. In response, India has created a **multi-layered system of national mechanisms** focused on women's empowerment, legal protection, and social welfare.

National Mechanisms and Key Institutions

1. Ministry of Women and Child Development (MWCD)

- **Nodal agency** for formulating gender equality policies and schemes
- Oversees welfare programs, coordinates with state governments, monitors international treaties (like CEDAW)
- Launched flagship initiatives targeting **nutrition, health, safety, and economic empowerment**

2. National Commission for Women (NCW)

- **Statutory body established in 1992**
- Monitors the implementation of constitutional and legal safeguards for women
- Investigates cases of rights violations, conducts research, and recommends legislative changes
- **Intervenes in court cases, inspects prisons, shelters, and offers legal counseling**

3. State Commissions for Women

- Function at the state level, working alongside NCW
- Address region-specific gender issues like female foeticide, trafficking, and dowry deaths

4. Legislative Framework

- India's Constitution guarantees **gender equality (Articles 14-16)**
- Progressive laws such as:
 - **Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act (2005)**
 - **Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace Act (2013)**
 - **Prohibition of Child Marriage Act (2006)**
 - **Maternity Benefit (Amendment) Act (2017)** — offers **26 weeks of paid leave**

Major National Schemes Promoting Gender Equality

1. Beti Bachao Beti Padhao (BBBP) — ‘Save the Daughter, Educate the Daughter’

- Launched in **2015** to address declining **child sex ratio (CSR)**
- Combines **health, education, and advocacy**
- Targets regions with poor CSR, aims to shift societal mindsets
- Impact: Improved girl child enrollment in schools, though criticism remains over fund utilization

2. Nirbhaya Fund

- Established post **2012 Delhi gang rape (Nirbhaya case)**
- Funds **women’s safety initiatives** like emergency response systems, self-defense training, CCTV in public transport
- Supports the **One Stop Center scheme** for survivors of gender-based violence

3. Mahila Shakti Kendra (MSK)

- Grassroots scheme operating at village, block, and district levels
- Provides women with **legal, health, financial literacy, and vocational training services**
- Empowers local women to access government services and claim rights

4. Sukanya Samridhi Yojana

- **Savings scheme for the girl child**
- Encourages families to invest in daughters’ education and future financial independence

Key Impacts of National Mechanisms

1. Political Empowerment

- **33% reservation** for women in **rural local governments (Panchayati Raj Institutions)**
- Over **1.4 million elected women representatives** at grassroots level
- Push for **Women’s Reservation Bill** (pending) — proposes 33% reservation in Parliament and State Assemblies

2. Legal and Social Safeguards

- Laws criminalize dowry, marital rape (under cruelty), acid attacks, and sexual harassment
- Helplines, fast-track courts, and special police units created for gender-based crimes

3. Economic Participation

- Initiatives like **Stand-Up India** and **Mudra Yojana** provide loans to women entrepreneurs

- **Self-Help Groups (SHGs)** and microfinance programs empower rural women economically

4. Education and Health

- Near-universal enrollment of girls in primary schools
- **Improvement in female literacy rates** — from **54% (2001) to 70.3% (2023)**
- Expansion of **Janani Suraksha Yojana** — incentivizes safe institutional deliveries

Challenges and Gaps

1. Implementation Weaknesses

- Poor fund utilization — **Beti Bachao Beti Padhao spent 80% on publicity**
- Corruption and inefficiency weaken grassroots impact

2. Gender-Based Violence

- Despite legal frameworks, crimes against women are rising — **rape every 16 minutes (NCRB 2022)**
- Patriarchal attitudes persist, discouraging reporting and legal follow-through

3. Economic Exclusion

- **Female labor force participation** fell from **35% (2005) to 23% (2023)**
- Informal sector employment dominates, lacking social security or benefits

4. Intersectional Discrimination

- Dalit, tribal, Muslim, LGBTQ+, and disabled women face **compounded discrimination**
- Caste-based sexual violence cases — **Hathras, Unnao** — **expose systemic failures**

Civil Society and Judicial Activism

- **Women's rights NGOs** (SEWA, Jagori, Breakthrough) drive social change and legal awareness
- **Indian Supreme Court activism** has led to:
 - **Decriminalizing homosexuality (2018)**
 - Recognizing **transgender rights**
 - Upholding **women's entry into temples**

Global Engagement

- India submits regular reports to **CEDAW**
- Active participant in **UNCSW sessions**
- Aligns major programs with **SDG 5 targets**

Case Study 5: Nigeria — National Gender Policy and Implementation Challenges

Background and Context

Nigeria, Africa's largest economy and most populous country, is home to **over 220 million people** — half of whom are women. With **over 250 ethnic groups, diverse religions, and a federal system**, Nigeria's gender landscape is complex. Women face structural barriers in politics, education, health, and economic empowerment due to **patriarchy, religious conservatism, cultural norms, and systemic corruption**.

Nigeria ratified **CEDAW in 1985** but has **struggled to domesticate it fully**. Despite adopting the **National Gender Policy (NGP) in 2006** and updating it in 2021, gender inequalities persist across all sectors, making Nigeria a case study in the challenges of operationalizing gender policies.

National Mechanisms and Legal Frameworks

1. National Gender Policy (NGP) — 2006, Reviewed 2021

- Provides a framework for promoting gender equity, equality, and women's empowerment
- Calls for **35% affirmative action for women in political and decision-making positions**
- Covers key sectors: education, health, environment, labor, and politics
- Aims to address gender-based violence (GBV) and harmful traditional practices

2. Federal Ministry of Women Affairs

- Serves as the **lead agency** for coordinating gender policies
- Engages with stakeholders including civil society, international partners, and other government ministries
- Responsible for monitoring SDG 5 and reporting progress to the UN

3. Gender Units/Focal Points in Line Ministries

- Designed to mainstream gender across health, education, agriculture, and justice sectors
- Often **under-resourced and lack influence**, leading to limited integration of gender concerns in national policies

4. Violence Against Persons (Prohibition) Act (VAPP) — 2015

- Comprehensive law criminalizing domestic violence, harmful practices (FGM, widowhood rites), and sexual violence
- Applies **only in the Federal Capital Territory (FCT)** — states must adopt it separately

5. Gender and Equal Opportunities Bill

- Aimed at domesticating CEDAW fully
- Seeks to promote equality in education, employment, marriage, inheritance, and political participation
- **Rejected multiple times** in Nigeria's National Assembly due to opposition from religious and cultural blocs

Key Gender-Specific Programs and Initiatives

1. Women Economic Empowerment Programmes

- Initiatives like **G-WIN (Girls and Women Initiative in Nigeria)**
- Skills acquisition, micro-credit loans, and capacity-building for women entrepreneurs
- Limited reach due to poor funding and bureaucratic inefficiencies

2. National Strategy to End Child Marriage (2016–2021)

- Nigeria has one of the highest rates of child marriage globally — **43% of girls married before 18**
- The strategy aimed to reduce child marriage by **20% in five years**
- Implementation remains weak due to resistance in northern states

3. Safe Schools Initiative

- Launched post-Chibok schoolgirls kidnapping (2014)
- Focus on protecting girls' right to education in conflict zones affected by Boko Haram

Key Impacts and Achievements

1. Political Participation

- Women's representation in **National Assembly dropped to 3.8% in 2023** — among the lowest globally
- No Nigerian woman has ever been elected Governor
- Cultural, religious, and financial barriers discourage female political participation

2. Education and Health

- Major gender gaps persist:
 - **10 million children out of school** — majority girls in northern Nigeria
 - High rates of **female illiteracy, especially in rural and northern states**
- Nigeria ranks **2nd globally for maternal mortality** — **512 deaths per 100,000 live births**
- Poor reproductive health services access, compounded by stigma and weak healthcare systems

3. Economic Empowerment

- Women dominate the **informal economy (70%)** — petty trading, subsistence farming, and domestic work
- Minimal access to land ownership, credit, and corporate leadership
- Gender wage gap remains wide and unaddressed

Challenges and Gaps

1. Cultural and Religious Resistance

- **Sharia law systems in northern Nigeria** conflict with national gender policies
- Early marriage, FGM, polygamy, and male preference persist as cultural norms
- VAPP Act faces **partial adoption — 14 out of 36 states yet to implement**

2. Institutional Weakness

- Gender desks and focal points lack power, technical capacity, and funding
- **No centralized database** on gender-based violence or gendered economic data
- Corruption and political patronage systems hinder implementation

3. Gender-Based Violence (GBV)

- Nigeria recorded **3,500 rape cases in the first half of 2022 alone**
- Low conviction rates, victim-blaming, and societal stigma discourage reporting
- Conflict zones in the northeast witness sexual violence used as a weapon of war

4. Failure to Domesticize CEDAW

- Repeated rejection of the **Gender and Equal Opportunities Bill** shows limited political will
- Nigeria continues to operate under discriminatory customary and religious laws

Role of Civil Society and International Partnerships

- Strong NGO presence: **WARDC, Women's Rights Advancement and Protection Alternative (WRAPA), BAOBAB**
- UN Women, USAID, World Bank fund gender-related projects on health, education, and economic inclusion
- Regional bodies like **ECOWAS and the African Union** push Nigeria on compliance with gender protocols

Case Study 6: Afghanistan — Collapse of National Gender Mechanisms Under Taliban Rule

Background and Context

Afghanistan's gender landscape is one of the most tragic and volatile globally. From progressive reforms in the early 2000s to a total rollback post-2021, the country serves as a stark example of how fragile gender rights are without sustained political will and cultural transformation.

After the fall of the Taliban in **2001**, Afghanistan — with international support — attempted to **rebuild national gender mechanisms**, integrate women into politics, education, and the economy, and align with international frameworks like **CEDAW** and **UNSCR 1325**. By 2020, Afghanistan had:

- **27% female parliamentary representation**
- Women in ministries, judiciary, police, and army
- Over **3.5 million girls enrolled in school**

However, the **Taliban's return to power in August 2021** destroyed two decades of progress, dismantling every national mechanism protecting women's rights.

National Gender Mechanisms Pre-2021

1. Ministry of Women's Affairs (MoWA)

- Established in **2001** as the lead national gender mechanism
- Oversaw women's participation in governance, legal reforms, and development programs
- Coordinated with international donors and UN agencies on gender projects

2. Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC)

- Monitored human rights violations, with a special focus on **women's rights and GBV**
- Played a key role in data collection, advocacy, and providing legal aid to women

3. National Action Plan for Women of Afghanistan (NAPWA)

- 10-year plan (2008–2018) to implement gender equity in education, health, governance, and the economy
- Developed in line with **BPfA, CEDAW, and SDG 5**

4. Elimination of Violence Against Women (EVAW) Law — 2009

- Criminalized **domestic violence, forced marriage, child marriage, honor killings, and rape**
- Created special EVAW prosecution units and family courts
- Although unevenly enforced, it became a critical legal tool for Afghan women

Key Achievements (2001–2021)

1. Political Participation

- Reserved **27% of parliamentary seats** for women
- Women appointed as ministers, ambassadors, judges, and governors
- Participation in peace talks — though limited — was historic

2. Education and Health

- Female literacy improved from **17% (2001) to 37% (2018)**
- **3.5 million girls enrolled in schools**
- Access to maternal healthcare expanded, reducing maternal mortality from **1,100 to 638 deaths per 100,000 live births**

3. Economic Empowerment

- Growth of women-led businesses, NGOs, and cooperatives
- Increased female participation in the workforce, media, and civil society

Collapse Post-2021 Taliban Takeover

The Taliban systematically **dismantled every national gender mechanism:**

1. MoWA Dissolved

- Replaced with the **Ministry for the Propagation of Virtue and Prevention of Vice**
- Mandated to enforce Taliban's interpretation of Sharia, policing women's dress, behavior, and movement

2. Repeal of EAW Law and Legal Protections

- EAW units disbanded
- Female judges, prosecutors, and lawyers **fled or were removed**
- Taliban declared **Sharia as the only law**, eliminating women's legal recourse

3. Closure of AIHRC

- One of the few independent bodies monitoring women's rights was **abolished**
- All GBV data, reports, and legal cases frozen or destroyed

Current Impact on Afghan Women

1. Education and Employment Ban

- **Girls barred from secondary and university education**
- Women prohibited from most jobs except healthcare or select humanitarian work under strict segregation

- Aid-dependent sectors for women like NGOs face severe restrictions

2. Elimination from Public Space

- Women banned from parks, gyms, sports, and traveling without a male guardian
- Mandatory **full-body burqa or niqab**
- Public floggings for “immoral behavior” reported

3. Surge in GBV and Forced Marriages

- Taliban commanders forcibly marrying young girls
- **Child marriages rising sharply** due to poverty and fear
- Zero access to legal protection, shelters, or support services

International Response

- **UN, EU, and human rights organizations condemn Taliban policies**
- Afghanistan’s seat in **UNCSW remains controversial**
- Humanitarian aid tied to human rights conditionality
- Creation of **Afghan women’s advocacy networks in exile**

Challenges

- **De-facto international isolation** weakens leverage over Taliban
- Local women’s NGOs **dismantled or operating underground**
- Humanitarian aid unable to reach women due to Taliban-imposed barriers

Lessons and Global Implications

Afghanistan’s reversal demonstrates:

- **Fragility of national gender mechanisms** in conflict and authoritarian settings
- Importance of **embedding women’s rights into deep cultural, legal, and social systems**
- Need for **global accountability mechanisms** to protect women when governments fail