



UK NGO CSW Alliance Young Women's Statement

We, young women of the United Kingdom have come together to reflect on the status of women's rights and gender equality both in communities around the world and in those closer to home. In September 2015, world leaders united in their commitment to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). In our statement, we want to highlight the importance of acknowledging all people, especially young women, in the next steps to be taken for the implementation and monitoring of these goals. We acknowledge and respect how far young people have come in terms of having their voices heard on a global scale. However, there is still much to be done and we want to encourage our governments to be more ambitious in its stance for the participation of young women, especially in the field of women's and girl's rights, violence against women and girls and women and girl empowerment.

Goal 5 is a stand-alone and vital goal but the remaining SDGs have gender elements in their targets that must be equally upheld. Fundamentally, many targets under these goals will have an impact on gender equality. Therefore, we believe that no goal should be viewed in isolation but regarded as an interconnecting whole. All 17 goals affect women in one way or another. Goal 1 is "end poverty in all its forms everywhere" and studies have shown that 70% of those living on \$2 a day are women. Goal 6 seeks to ensure "available and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all." It is proven that in the African region, 1 in 10 girls will drop out of school once menstruation starts due to a distinct lack of sanitation. Under Goal 4 for "inclusive and quality education", we know that two-thirds of the world's illiterate adults are women. These examples highlight some of the ways in which women are marginalised by patriarchal society. This reiterates the significance of Goal 5, its harmonious relationship with the other 16 goals and why it must be at the forefront of every country's national agenda. By 2030, in accordance with the running themes evident throughout the SDGs, we aim to eradicate poverty, enhance opportunity, increase equal representation and provide primary and secondary education for all children until the ages of 18.

Because at least 70% of people around the world that are living in poverty are women, it is women who are the most vulnerable to its emerging consequences. When young girls live in poverty, have no recourse to education or rights to ownership, they are valued only for their biological capabilities. Perceived as weaker than her male counterparts in her physical ability to engage in hard labour, a young woman is viewed as a financial burden. Often she will be forced to marry young, traded quickly not only for her "protection" and to preserve her "purity" but also as a quick way for her family to earn the additional income that they desperately need. Denied of the basic right to sanitation, she is bound to the home, doing chores and looking after her children. In many poverty-ridden countries, this is a reality for many girls under the ages of 15. Punished for her

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gender by society, she is vulnerable to all sorts of evils – FGM, rape, torture and depression just to name a few. Many of these girls face violent abuse by their often much older husbands and will suffer permanent injuries throughout their life courses due to their initial physical and mental unpreparedness for matrimonial expectations and early pregnancy. Many of them are denied access to justice, proper medical care and as a consequence, a third of these girls will probably die in childbirth. The most horrifying aspect of all this, however, is that she is told and believes that she deserves this - that this is the norm - that this is expected and that this is the only value that she, as a girl, can offer.

As representatives of young women of the United Kingdom, we urge our Government to take this agonising reality personally. We would like the government to initiate active measures to cease this vicious cycle because we believe in fulfilling our obligations to promote a dignified life for all, especially women and girls, based on our commitment to uphold international human rights laws. We ask that our governments give primacy to our obligations under CEDAW, to work even closer and harder with UNICEF, UN Women and NGOs to provide support for more young women at the grassroots level and enable a further reach into areas where the suffering of these girls and women remain unheard. Ailing countries worldwide are affected now more than ever by our political stance ranging from the wars of the Middle East to Europe's involvement in the largest refugee crisis since WW2. Essentially, our suffering is inherently interconnected. Closing the gap between the well-being of both genders and empowering girls and women is as much about social development as it is about reducing global poverty.

Based on a 2011 study by Cuberes and Teignier-Baque, it is suggested that the opportunity for women to work in different sectors can increase outputs in some countries by as much as 25%. Increasing women's participation through education can also lead to better allocation of skills and talents that can further improve the world's economy. In 2011, the World Bank evidenced that in countries such as India, China and the United Kingdom, when women are given more control over their household income, earnings tend to benefit children overall as a result of increased investment in food and education. This kind of investment could break the cycle so that girls can lead a life with dignity. It could mean that women and girls have control over their bodies, have a voice in their communities, can lead a life free of violence, get an education, a job and rights to ownership – especially of land – and acquire higher social status. Finally, empowering women and girls as economic, political and social actors changes policy, which produces a platform for a range of voices to be heard. This is particularly important for the provision of infrastructure such as those required for clean water and sanitation.

We, the young women of the United Kingdom, fundamentally believe that in order for the SDGs – especially Goal 5 – and other goals and targets to be achieved successfully, efficient indicators must be attached and thereafter reviewed by the UN and relevant bodies every 5 years, beginning in 2020. This will ensure the implementation of these targets is upheld and progress is monitored

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at a measurable pace. Furthermore, regular reviewing of these indicators will maintain the priority of the end goal of gender equality while allowing for flexibility and possible future adjustments in accordance with progress and necessity. It is our view that these indicators should be written nationally by independent, impartial experts such as academics because we believe this will allow the indicators to be set at a realistic but challenging level, allowing for maximum outreach and outcomes and ensuring as many women as possible can benefit from them.

Undermining such efforts to advance sustainable development is a key cause of gender inequality. Therefore, we reiterate that the progress of Goal 5 must be given full consideration in measuring the success of all other goals. However, it remains vital that these indicators respect and are implemented proportionately to the social circumstances and economic ability of different states as a blanket global success indicator may potentially cause more harm than good. While we acknowledge this, we also believe that it must be a long-term worldwide endeavour to close the gap between these differences, especially where the empowerment of women and girls is involved. We hope that by 2030 we can witness tangible and successful evidence of these initiatives in quantitative measures to draw upon a more accurate portrayal of these global issues. It is essential also that the indicators are developed with the participation of civil society, including us, the young women of the world, and that civil society is involved in the monitoring process as well. Having transparency and the ability to monitor the progress of any implementation will allow for better execution of these and any future plans to produce real and concrete results.

Michelle Bachelet, the former Chilean president and the first executive director of UN Women once said, “The strength, industry and wisdom of women remain humanity’s greatest untapped resource. We simply cannot afford to wait another 100 years to unlock this potential.” We ask that our government and the governments of the world uphold their promise to leave a better world for women and girls, to include the betterment of our future in your list of priorities and to take the suffering of our global sisters to heart. We call upon our government and the governments of the world, the United Nations and fellow NGOs to prioritise the elimination of gender inequality when planning the implementation of all the SDGs. We urge you to provide youth participation avenues, especially for young women, in the monitoring of these goals and to support them in making sure they are able to hold their governments to account. This will ensure that progress and development both here in the UK and worldwide is achieved in a balanced manner, inevitably leading towards global prosperity and advancement for all humanity.

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