Engage scientists, politicians, and grassroots women in the W20 framework to face global challenges

Sveva Avveduto, Emerita Research Director, CNR-IRPPS, Women 20 Delegate, President Italian Women in Science Association, Chair GETA (Gender and Talent Observatory -CNR), Italy
Gianna Avellis, Leader Researcher in ICT, InnovaPuglia SpA, Chair Italian Research Staff Association, Women 20 Delegate, Member Italian Women in Science Association, External Expert GETA (Gender and Talent Observatory -CNR), Italy
Giuliana Rubbia, Senior Technologist, INGV, Women20 Engagement Group Member, Advisory Board Member Italian Women in Science Association, External Expert GETA (Gender and Talent Observatory -CNR),Italy (corresponding author)
giuliana.rubbia@ingv.it
(+39) 333 – 6604060
Via Alfonso Corti, 12
20133 Milano, Italy

1. Introduction

Women 20, the G20 Engagement Group on Gender Equality, has been created in 2015 under Turkey's Presidency of G20, with the objective of focusing on gender equity. The primary objective of W20 is women's empowerment and advocating for women's rights, raising women's voices in society. Since its creation, W20 continues its work to develop policy proposals for the leaders of the G20 member countries on gender issues. After the Italian Presidency of G20 in 2021 and the Indonesian one in 2022 - presented at ICSD 2022 https://bit.ly/3FGlfBJ -, this year the presidency of the G20 is held by India. India has made a huge effort in ensuring an enabling environment for women: major Indian stakeholders are grassroots women, women in tribal, rural, urban areas, women in agriculture, women artisans and women in handloom and handicrafts, in informal sectors, and businesswomen. The claim chosen this year for W20 activities has been '*One earth, one family, one future'* to underline the uniqueness of problems and opportunities that link all the world and all women in the world even of course at a different pace linked to the level reached by each Country and anyway affecting all of us.

This contribution intends to reflect on the commitments made by the G20 leaders after the Bali 2022 Summit of Indonesia Presidency of G20. It presents the gender proposals on the themes identified for this year to "remove all barriers to women-led development and guarantee an environment and ecosystem that enable women to thrive, transcend and transform their lives as well as the lives of others". In particular, the paper illustrates some solutions to tackle global issues such as environmental crises and the gender digital divide.

The Gender Digital Divide Task Force of W20 India highlighted the importance of empowering women, especially grassroot women, and identified the difficulties they face in accessing and using digital technologies and tools. It also made suggestions to the G20 to take a series of coordinated and effective actions toward empowering women and ensuring their equal participation in the digital future. Digital inclusion of women provides them with access to information, services and opportunities that can improve their lives, benefit their communities, and contribute to the economy [4]. However, the participation of women in the information society is limited by two factors. First, many women face the problem of accessing and using digital technologies and, second, only a

few women are involved in the design, development, production, and governance of digital technologies.

Furthermore, climate change and gender are closely linked. Addressing gender inequalities is essential for effective climate action. Women and girls are underutilized resources that could help G20 countries meet their Green House Gases (GHG) reduction targets: new approaches should be implemented that tap the untapped potential of women and some girls. The impact of climate change becomes more evident every year.

Women and girls around the world face a disproportionate burden of the impact of climate crises as they remain socially, politically and economically marginalized. Women and girls are particularly at risk in low-income countries, and countries that lack the necessary infrastructure and capacities to adapt and mitigate the negative effects of climate crises, environmental degradation, biodiversity loss, extreme weather events, natural disasters, and other environmental problems.

The theme of this year's summit has been 'Women-Led Development- Transform, Thrive and Transcend' to emphasize the role of women in being not the objects but the leaders of change, being able to transform reality towards better and more distributed wellness objectives for all.

The W20 underlines how requiring and delivering gender equality, inclusion and empowerment of women and girls[1] in diverse situations and conditions will result in increased economic and social growth that strengthens resiliency for G20 countries [see the Communiqué 2023 available at https://w20india.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/W20-Communique-2023.pdf]. To this end, W20 addresses and recommends implementing some action plans across five priority areas:

1. Climate Change

*Climate change and gender are inextricably linked to each other, and women should be at the heart of climate justice. All climate-related policies **must** take an inclusive, equal and equitable gender approach.*

2. Entrepreneurship

Women entrepreneurs play a crucial role in driving national economies by boosting GDP growth, creating jobs, and providing essential goods and services. Women, particularly in rural and indigenous areas, continue to face multiple legal, policy, procedural, regulatory, social, and societal barriers, as well as a lack of access to capital and financial services.

3. Gender Digital Divide

The digital gender gap in access, skills, leadership, and research is driven by complex social, economic and cultural factors, resulting in women and girls experiencing barriers to accessing and using digital technologies [1]. Closing this gap will result in significant social and economic gains and increase in livelihoods and GDP, both now and for future generations. G20 leaders must commit to women's full participation as key actors and decision-makers in the digital economy.

---

[1] "Women" and "girls" is an inclusive term - in all their diversity regarding person and geography- including those in local/rural areas, indigenous women, grassroots and those with disabilities - according to the UN definition.

4. Grassroots Leadership
It is critical for women to become leaders, to lead development, and act as agents of change, including at the grassroots level, and for society to embrace that mindset and the systemic change necessary for women to exercise that leadership. As such, governments, organizations, and individuals must promote grassroots leadership of women.

5. Education, Skill Development, & Labour Market Participation
Education is a <u>human right issue</u>. For peaceful, equitable, and prosperous societies, it is necessary to educate girls and women. The economic contributions of women must be appropriately recognized, rewarded, and supported through measures that promote decent work, gender-equitable sharing of care responsibilities, strengthening public social infrastructures, and a guarantee of freedom from gender-based violence everywhere.

In the following, we give more details of the recommendations in the areas related to Gender Digital Divide and Climate Change and leave in the conclusions some more details we developed for the other key areas, which impacts women's grassroots leadership, entrepreneurship, and education.

2. Bridging the Gender Digital Divide

This section highlights the significance of promoting digital inclusion and empowerment for women and identifies the hurdles they face in accessing and using digital tools and technologies. Additionally, it reports the suggestions of W20 for the G20 to take coordinated and effective action towards empowering women and ensuring their equal participation in the digital future.

In order to address the Gender Digital Divide (GDD) and the related digital gap, W20 calls to implement actions to tackle the following issues:

<u>Gender Sensitive and Gender-Disaggregated Data on digital inclusion [6]</u>, including internet access and use and participation in the digital sector. Gender-disaggregated data is currently limited, despite such data being critical to understanding and measuring the digital gender gap and informing policy and business choices that can help bridge this gap.

- It is essential to focus on <u>addressing the barriers</u> that prevent women from accessing and using the internet and digital services and participating in the digital sector. This requires addressing issues of gender equality and social norms, as well as improving accessibility, affordability, safety, usability, and training of digital skills. Furthermore, ensuring the availability of relevant content, applications, and services is also crucial in closing the gender digital divide.

- To effectively address the GDD, it is crucial to integrate a <u>focused gender perspective</u> into relevant policies and strategies. Governments, businesses, and other stakeholders must develop strategies, policies, plans, and budgets that explicitly consider women's needs, circumstances, capabilities, and preferences.

This approach is essential to ensure that women are adequately represented and can benefit from digital advancements.

- Bridging the GDD requires <u>coordinated action by multiple stakeholders</u> working together. The barriers that prevent women from accessing and using the internet are multifaceted, diverse, and interconnected, making it necessary to address them collectively rather than in isolation. Achieving this goal necessitates collaboration and cooperation between all stakeholders, recognizing that each has a unique role to play in bridging the GDD [7].

- Constitute a Mission made project for women's rights in Digital World, **<u>A Project: Mission Digital Women</u>** to prioritize meaningful, gender-inclusive access to promote women's socio-economic and political empowerment. This requires creating direct pathways that can uplift women and address the barriers they face. To achieve this, it is important to focus on policies, regulations, and initiatives that support women's digital literacy and connectivity, foster partnerships between stakeholders, promote women's participation in the tech sector, and support research and data collection on the GDD.

- The commitment of the presidency to <u>promoting financial health for women and recognize the importance of financial health for overall well-being and economic growth for Women in all aspects.</u> Shifting focus towards financial health is an opportunity and absolute necessity to build resilient and prosperous societies. Digital Financial inclusion is undeniably a key enabler to economic growth and development. But to reap the full benefits of financial inclusion, policy and financial service providers need to look beyond number of accounts and financial transactions and shift their focus towards building people's financial health.

To conclude Section 2 we report the final W20 recommendations for bridging Gender Digital Divide are follows:

- G20 Member States must publish an annual **national G20 Digital Gender Equality Report** to demonstrate progress.
- By 2030, **halve the digital gender gap (including mobile)** by addressing barriers around accessibility, affordability, literacy and digital skills, online safety, and lack of relevant content in usage and adoption of digital technologies [5].
- Guarantee and put in place policies and procedures to correct and prevent digital technology/AI from creating, perpetuating, and amplifying **gender biases in data and algorithms.**
- **Provide a minimum 15% tax break, or other equivalent incentives** for women-led technology and tech-enabled start-ups; and relevant incentives/subsidies for women entrepreneurs.
- Strengthen institutional capacity and mechanisms to protect, monitor, investigate, and prosecute reports of **online abuse and violence against women and girls.**

3. **Fostering gender approaches to climate change**

Regarding climate change, the Communiqué 2023 contains the following W20 recommendations:

- **Guarantee equal representation and meaningful participation of women in climate decision-making mechanisms**, e.g., COP 28 et seq., and a gender-responsive approach in all climate change policies, including Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs).

- Commit that the UN Loss and Damage Fund (COP27) and adaptation finance have a **stronger gender focus to provide fiscal space for gender-just climate action and infrastructure**, including climate disaster risk reduction management.

- Leverage the Green Climate Fund and **commit direct funding to women-led projects**, such as investing in climate entrepreneurship and technologies supporting net zero goals.

- **Protect and support women and children affected by climate change and climate change-induced migration** and the consequences on their human rights; and track impact.

- **Mandate gender strategies for energy infrastructure planning** and decision-making to guarantee access to renewable energy for all to enable a just energy transition.

Conclusions – How to Support women Entrepreneurship and Grassroot leadership

Women entrepreneurs contribute significantly to the expansion of the GDP, the creation of jobs, and the provision of necessary goods and services, which is what propels national economies. Nonetheless, women continue to face numerous impediments and a lack of access to finance and financial services, especially in rural and indigenous communities.

Therefore, W20 recommendations are the following:

- Facilitate, promote, and incentivize **access to markets** (domestic and international) including: public and corporate procurement, national and international trade, e-commerce, access to corporate value and supply chains, and new technologies; with particular attention to sustainable and emerging sectors (space, blue, green, circular, digital technologies) [3].
- Increase **access to finance, collateral, and capital,** for women entrepreneurs, and incentivize private, institutional, and public investors to invest in opportunities through a gender lens [2].
- **Promote women entrepreneurial policy frameworks and ecosystems** that will accelerate women-owned and led MSMEs' growth through all stages, encourage every country to create and fund **Women's Business Centres,** facilitate women entrepreneurs to move from informal to formal sectors in order to unleash growth and increase tax revenues.

- Encourage **Gender-Responsive Public Procurement (GRPP)** programs in G20 countries and establish their own national targets for procurement for women-owned and led MSMEs; increase gender procurements by minimum one percentage point a year with a goal of 20% by 2030.
- **Allocate a minimum of 5% of the new Global Minimum Corporate Tax**, endorsed by OECD and G20 in 2021, to fund women-owned and led MSMEs in growth sectors.
- Implement **We-Fi**'s Women Entrepreneurs Finance Code; create and leverage blended finance mechanisms for women such as the **Global Blended Finance Alliance**; continue to provide the remaining funding for the $350 million USD commitment in 2022 to We-Fi.

It is critical for women to become leaders, to lead development, and act as agents of change, including at the grassroots level, and for society to embrace that mindset and the systemic change necessary for women to exercise that leadership. Women20 suggest the following actions:

- Promote women's leadership by applying **a minimum quota** for one-third of women representation <u>at all levels</u> of governance and decision-making in leadership, with an emphasis at the grassroots levels and sustained career progression.
- Guarantee that all **recommendations/benefits for women extend and are tailored to the remote, rural and indigenous areas**, particularly important areas are: education, healthcare, gender-based violence (including online) infrastructure, climate change, agriculture, financial and digital literacy.
- Ensure the **G20 Annual Reporting and Review Mechanism** for women's leadership includes women at *grassroots level* **especially from rural areas** from each country.

References

1. ITU. "The gender digital divide". Accessed Jul 29, 2023. https://www.itu.int/itu-d/reports/statistics/2022/11/24/ff22-the-gender-digital-divide/
2. UNCDF. "Delivering Financial Health Globally: A collection of insights, approaches and recommendations". Accessed Jul 29, 2023. https://www.uncdf.org/article/7008/delivering-financial-health-globally-a-collection-of-insights-approaches-and-recommendations
3. The World Bank. "The Global Findex Database 2021". Accessed Jul 29, 2023. https://www.worldbank.org/en/publication/globalfindex
4. Ahmed, A. (2007). Open access towards bridging the digital divide - Policies and strategies for developing countries. Information Technology for Development, 13(4), 337-361. https://doi.org/10.1002/itdj.20067
5. UNWomen. "Revolutionizing STEM to bridge access gaps and uphold digital rights". Accessed Jul 29, 2023. https://www.unwomen.org/en/news-stories/feature-story/2023/03/revolutionizing-stem-to-bridge-access-gaps-and-uphold-digital-rights
6. ILO. "Breaking the bias for better gender data". Accessed Jul 29, 2023. https://ilostat.ilo.org/breaking-the-bias-for-better-gender-data/
7. UNICEF. "What we know about the gender digital divide for girls: A literature review". https://www.unicef.org/eap/media/8311/file/What%20we%20know%20about%20the%20gender%20digital%20divide%20for%20girls:%20A%20literature%20review.pdf