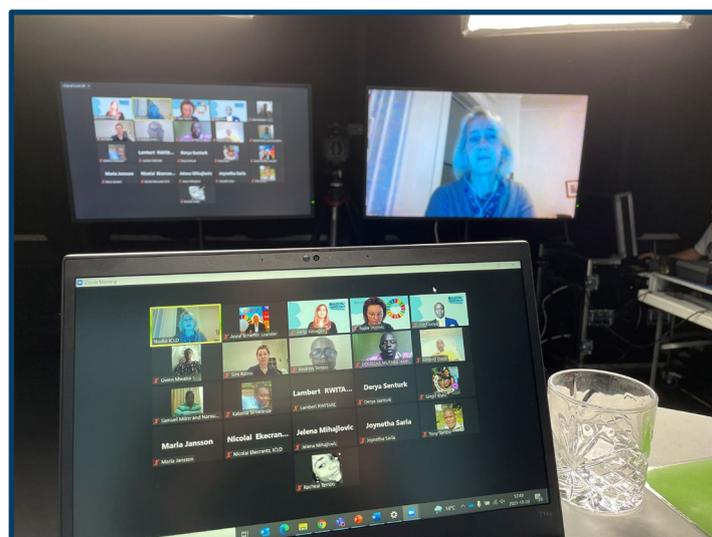


ICLD CROSS-POLLINATION DIGITAL SEMINAR SERIES OCTOBER 20, 2021

COVID-19 EMERGING ISSUES FOR LOCAL DEMOCRACIES

ADVANCING WOMEN'S ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT TO CURB GENDER BASED VIOLENCE
SEMINAR REPORT



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Background

Although there appears to be some light at the end of the tunnel in the global fight against the COVID-19 pandemic, it remains the most challenging public health situation across the world. The mass vaccination effort is delivering encouraging results in slowing the spread and fatality rates of the disease in some of the countries which have been able to vaccinate most of their populations.

On the other hand, many countries that are still facing waves of mounting COVID-19 caseloads have been constrained to adopt, or significantly ramp up, a raft of containment measures, including extensive restrictions on social proximity, which inevitably increase the economic shock and social distress in their populations.

The clear common thread for all countries across the world is the disruption of long-standing norms of daily life and ways of doing things coupled with the emergence of strong social and economic trends that must be boldly and holistically appraised to regain a positive and sustainable socioeconomic trajectory for the good of society.

In May and June 2021, rising unemployment and the correlated spike in genderbased violence (GBV) were identified by ICLD International Training Programme participants and alumni as key emerging realities precipitated by the COVID-19 pandemic. It is therefore urgent and important for all ICLD ITP stakeholders to proactively direct their energies and engage in dialogue towards developing response efforts that adequately address unemployment and GBV across all participating local democracies.

Why women's Economic Empowerment?

Women's economic empowerment is a prerequisite for sustainable development and for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. Across the globe, the combined effect of the pandemic, the mitigation measures, and the widespread economic contraction, compounded by pre-existing gender norms and inequalities, continue to place a disproportionate negative bearing on women and girls.

The most recent ILO estimate is that the employment loss measured in working hours for women worldwide were 5.0 per cent in 2020, versus 3.9 per cent for men.¹ The employment to population ratio fell 2.6 percent for women compared to 1.8 percent for men in low-income countries, and 2.7 percent for women compared for 2.5 percent for men in upper middle-income countries. In lower middle-income countries, the decline was 2.3 for women and 4.1 percent for men.²

This skewed gendered impact on women's paid and unpaid work, entrepreneurship, and earnings need to be specifically addressed in recovery strategies. Investing in women's economic empowerment sets a direct path towards gender equality, poverty eradication and inclusive economic growth. Women make enormous contributions to economies, whether in businesses, on farms, as entrepreneurs or employees, or by doing unpaid care work at home.³ When women have the right skills and opportunities, they can help businesses and markets grow. Women who are economically empowered contribute more to their families, societies, and national economies.⁴

¹ ILO, 2021

² ILO 2021

³ <https://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/economic-empowerment>

⁴ <https://www.icrw.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/Understanding-measuring-womens-economic-empowerment.pdf>

Main objective of the seminar series

The objective of the Cross Pollination seminar series is to facilitate continuous structured learning, knowledge-sharing and exchange of practical experience among ICLD ITP's across the world in a deliberate effort to address key emerging issues and challenges as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

This ICLD seminar was hosted by ITP programme officer **Anne Scheffer Leander**. **Joseph Ossiya** and **Anna Kebabze**, the national mentors of ICLD in Uganda and Georgia, moderated the sessions. 66 participants from 18 countries registered for the seminar in Zoom Event. However, due to technical problems, only 32 participants were able to attend the seminar live.

Session I: Introduction and seminar overview

Anne Scheffer Leander greeted everyone welcome to this second Cross-Pollination seminar. The first seminar, on the topic of *Gender responsive budgeting as a response to the economic distress connected to COVID-19*, took place in June 2021.

Welcome remarks by Johan Lilja, Secretary General, ICLD

Johan Lilja introduced himself and expressed his hopes that everyone was in good health during these times of pandemic.

Democracy is in decline around the world and the painful truth is that more people now live in authoritarian states than in countries with democratic progress, Johan stated. To tackle the many global challenges, this trend needs to be reversed and cooperation and cross-border alliances are the only way to make change possible. ICLD are convinced that democracy is the best foundation for sustainable societies.

Johan stressed the importance of addressing the structural problems with domestic violence during this seminar and shared a personal story of when he encountered violent, misogynist norms and practices in Kenya during the 1990's. Furthermore, recent news tells the tragic story of how the Kenyan athlete Agnes Tirop was murdered by her husband, which shall never be reduced to a tragic, standing-alone incident. It is indeed part of a structural problem.

Gender based violence is a global problem that needs to be addressed in Sweden as well as all other parts of the world. Johan concluded by sharing his belief that a change of mindset and support for rules and legislation are core areas for local democracies in mitigating gender violence and inequality.

Presentation of the moderators of the seminar

Anna Kebabze is a national mentor of Georgia in the ICLD Human Rights Based Approach programme. She is also a development expert at UNDP in Georgia, where Anna works with ensuring that local governments have inclusive and accountable institutions and that civil servants are empowered and trained to deliver high quality services. Anna brings over 10 years of experience in the agency.

Joseph Ossiya is a national mentor of Uganda in the ICLD Gender Mainstreaming programme. He is a gender, governance, and communications expert with over 25 years of experience in the field of providing leadership and support to civil society and the development sector. Joseph has been at the forefront of critical private sector support to Uganda's national COVID-19 early response system.

Expectations shared from the participants

The participants shared their expectations using Menti.com and the chat function in Zoom:

What are your expectations from this seminar?

- I want to learn the correlation between GBV and economic empowerment - how each affect the other
- To gain a general perspective about GB violence
- Will be interesting
- Understanding the different views
- To discuss with peers
- To learn more about (experience and instruments) on women's economic empowerment
- How We can work more effectively locally
- I expect to learn how to build women's human capital and capabilities especially in sub-Saharan Africa
- To learn more about Women's economic empowerment at local level
- To learn from others experiences and presentation on how women can empowered in economically
- Learn from other participants about con create actions to break the GBV

- “I want to understand well the role of women to improve the economic situation of a country.”
- “To create community awareness of gender-based violence and to build capacity of community leaders and staff on how to handle and refer cases of Gender based violence through training all relevant procedures and laws. Learning good practices in handling gender-based violence from partnership municipalities.”

Session II – COVID-19, GBV and the Evolution of the labour market

The first speaker of the seminar, Nicole Bläuer, was introduced by Anna Keadze. Nicole is a Swiss social entrepreneur with experience of working closely with vulnerable women communities in Africa, currently in Uganda. During her presentation, Nicole Bläuer discussed different manifestations of Gender-Based violence and the impact the pandemic has had in increased domestic violence against women. The lecture touched upon:

1. Understanding Gender Based Violence

GBV occurs in different forms, both in private and public. The term can be used to describe any harm, suffering, threat, or other deprivation of liberty, being of either physical, sexual, economical, or psychological nature. GBV knows no boundaries and cuts across borders, income, and culture.

2. Root causes to GBV

Gender-related power imbalances, structural gender inequality, discrimination and disregard for human rights were described as accelerators for increased GBV.

3. Tracking the spike in GBV

As seen historically even before COVID-19, GBV increases in times of crises. In any type of emergency, whether it is due to war, conflict or disease outbreaks, there is a spike in GBV. With regards to the confinement and isolation measures, the COVID-19 pandemic is a

perfect storm for domestic gender-based violence. Women faced increased vulnerability and dependence due to lockdowns, which also resulted in the loss of income and financial stability increasing the risk for sexual exploitation of women and girls.

4. Recommendation: Quick wins for local constituencies

It is imperative that central and local governments include GBV prevention as a key element in national and local response plans for COVID-19. Facilitating women's participation in economic decision making and equitable access to political opportunities were proposed as areas of focus for local democracies when striving for ameliorating the situation regarding GBV.

Break out room session I:

Two questions were addressed for further discussion in the breakout rooms:

- **Which quick wins can your municipality focus on to change the GBV situation in your municipality?**
- **How useful is it in your municipality for policy makers to conduct regular analyses on the root causes and contributing factors of GBV?**

Discussions were initiated in five break out rooms and afterwards, some of the participants shared their stories and personal experiences within the plenary:

- The most important thing is to have institutional support, for example from a gender focal person. Collaboration with other social services such as health care and police are also important.
- In Tanzania, there is an existing system at council level with a department for community development and responsible community development coordinators in charge of gender issues. There is also a national action plan for violence against women. It is important to capitalize on those opportunities, but also engage with partners working with gender-based violence.
- In our group, we stressed the importance of engaging local people in social media about the problems with GBV and talked about the possibilities for local municipalities to organize public dialogs so that citizens can listen to local speakers and politicians on this subject. It is also important to engage men and boys even further; to create change men needs to be addressed, for example by discussing the problems with gender-based violence directly in elementary schools. This will be crucial when trying to raise a new generation that supports women's equal rights. Knowledge and information need to be shared with the local municipality more often.
- There is not enough done to change the scenario. There is a lack of resources, both human and financial, to tackle the issues of gender-based violence. Local officers need to be better in helping policy makers to make decisions regarding gender issues, and therefore good data collection is crucial.
- As said, the structure is there in Tanzania. We have a good system with a Police gender desk, police officers working against GBV. The problem for applicability is coordination of all the partners and stakeholders so that they are functional. Also stressed the importance of having

gender focal persons addressing the issues and strengthening coordination between stakeholders.

Session III – Adopting innovative responses to GBV and redundancy

Joseph Ossiya introduced the second expert, Sini Ramo, a global gender expert and CEO of *Global Equality Matters* originally from Finland. Sini has vast experience from technical implementation of gender issues in global development. During her lecture on Advancing Women’s Economic Empowerment to curb GBV, the following themes were addressed:

5. Factors for women’s economic vulnerability in crises

Women are disproportionately more engaged in the informal economy, especially high in Sub-Saharan Africa and Asia. They are also overrepresented in retail, textile and hospitality which has been the most affected of the pandemic. Even in normal condition, women are more vulnerable and marginalized causing a bigger impact of crises such as COVID-19.

6. The links between GBV and economic empowerment

Lack of economic opportunities for women increases their vulnerability to experience different kinds of GBV. Economic empowerment and participation are also affected negatively by GBV. Thus, it is a link from two ways and therefore a root cause approach is necessary. Disempowerment can exist due to many different factors.

7. Different aspects of Women’s Economic Empowerment:

- Direct Income support to women – Short term actions, addressing immediate needs of women.
- Supporting women owned businesses – Providing loans, stimulus funding, grants or easing the tax burden for women. A targeted focus on advancing women’s empowerment and participation in procurement processes, for example by buying from women-owned businesses.
- Supporting women workers (The informal sector) – Investing in gender-responsive social protection systems, increase access to childcare services and crisis centers for women. Sini mentioned [WEP Toolkit \(Women’s Empowerment principles\)](#). Public awareness campaigns about gender stereotypes, GBV and equal caretaking services are also important.

8. The digital gender gap and examples of technical gender mainstreaming

The digital divide, regarding access to and use of the internet between men and women, is often even bigger in developing countries. Technical support is needed, to increase the use of mobile money, digital banking and digital platforms that can enable women to continue their operations. The digital platform **buyfromwomen** used in Mali is an example of how women produced goods became accessible online during the pandemic.

Break out room session II and plenary discussions:

This break-out room session focused on two questions related to Sini Ramo’s lecture:

- 9. What would be the most effective measures you could implement in your municipality to advance women’s economic empowerment?**
- 10. What challenges do you see in the way of advancing women’s economic empowerment and curbing GBV in your context?**

When returning to the main session, participants were able to ask questions directly to the expert:

- The session really speaks to the intersection between GBV and WE. In the situation now with Covid, what are some of the key strategies that we can take on, also on the vulnerability of young girls? We have young girls being exploited into child labor and exploited sexually. How can we express this?

Reply from Sini Ramo: One of the key issues is that we need to think of GBV Prevention and response in the pandemic crisis and preparedness plans, and in the response and recovery. It's a central part of the package of interventions. Gender based violence was a pandemic already before the actual pandemic, it is a widespread human rights violation, but it often comes up as an afterthought. A holistic and multisectoral approach is important; it must bring together all key sectors and strengthen coordination between different actors since there is no quick fix. Coordinated work with gender equality and empowerment of women needs to be a key thinking.

- How do we mainstream women into financial systems?

Reply from Sini Ramo: There are two ways to think of it: One is to mainstream gender into financial processes, organizations, and systems. Increasing women's participation, agency and empowerment are also important, made by targeted interventions. For example, by legislative measures and targeted schemes for financial inclusion. We also must break the old stereotypes. There is often a tendency to reproduce stereotypes, which needs to be counteracted.

- Decentralization is the way to go, full engagement and empowerment of women support groups at local level will promote inclusiveness of the vulnerable and marginalized.
- We discussed the challenges in the way of advancing women's economic empowerment: Limited technical capacity to handle GBV issues, weakness in the regulatory framework, corruption among the implementing agencies, inadequate resources, and lack of political will.

Re-skilling and pivoting for relevance in the new normal

This section consisted of a lecture on the theme *Re-skilling and pivoting for relevance in the new normal* by Cleopatra Mugenyi, a Kenyan researcher and public health, policy, and gender expert of ICRW. Cleopatra reflected on whether we really face a "new normal" due to the global pandemic. The main take away points of the lecture included:

11. The reality: No change

The debates about a "new normal" is not relatable for the majority of people. Life during and after the pandemic is the same for billions of people. For many, especially women, life has become harder.

12. Women's precarious situation has gotten even worse

In Africa, the informal economy provides the majority of employment opportunities and women make up more than 80% of the informal economy workforce. These jobs are less stable, low paying and lack social protections. Unpaid care work for women did also increase during the pandemic and governments responses to aid recovery often left out many female workers and business.

13. African responses to urgent needs

PPE (Personal Protective Equipment) got priority in shipping and transportation. Manufacturing has become increasingly important in the debate about the future of the African work sector since it diversifies the previous agriculture dominant economy. The need

for PPE's created a step towards manufacturing. The labor force pivoted towards creating masks, sanitizers etc, which has opened possibilities in a sector where women previously did not have access.

14. Reskilling women: Challenges and opportunities

Women face many challenges; policy factors, business-related factors, and intrapersonal factors (gender norms and roles). We need to think of the opportunities that can bridge the gap and make women **attractive to/attracted of** the manufacturing industry. Strengthening multi-sectoral stakeholder advocacy engagement on gender issues is important, but there is also needed to tackle the business-related and intrapersonal challenges with interventions, such as developing innovative women-specific financial products and unlearn traditional cultural norms that hinders women.

15. Building back better in the era of COVID-19

The diversity of women must be taken into consideration: Women will have different needs at different times in different geographical locations. We need to build resilience in the informal sector through innovative approaches to better cope with crises in the future.

Survey on pivoting in local democracies

Cleopatra's lecture was followed by a Menti survey on pivoting in local democracies:

Is there a "New Normal" that women are facing in the local municipality labour landscape?

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Why did you answer YES, NO or Maybe?

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Yes because the way of work is heavily reliant on technology	There is no new normal, things has actually getting worse	In my municipality most the businesses have closed and women have to look for new jobs requiring them to have new skill
No- There is really nothing 'new' for the women- as the pandemic has just excarcebated and brought to fore the challenges women have continued to experience in their relationships,labour force participation, decision making,etc	Yes because the space for illiterate business people is shrinking daily. The internet is the future.	I answered mybe, bucause in my municipality we were advised to follow all the covid measures but the protocols were not that tight to lock the women inside their homes
I'm not sure if Covid really have changed women's life in real, but they did lost their jobs. that's true. but it	After Covid 19, all business require PPEs or protocols to follow which are either expensive or not within reach	I answered Maybe because in Tanzania women are not forced to the new normal we are still continue
	With a number of challenges	

The second question; *What would your priorities be for building back better in your local constituency?* was raised in the plenary discussion along with the participants:

- How can we promote gender aware social protection in these increasingly insecure markets in Sub-Saharan Africa?

Reply from Cleopatra Mugenyi: There is so many things that we need to think about. Different innovations will work in different settings. But we need to understand that not one single innovation will work, or one specific social protection method. All things need to be in place and needs to be multi-sectoral and cutting across different levels.

Session IV – Next steps: Increased resilience through shared experiences and cross-pollination of best practices

Anna Kabadze introduced the last lecturer Joseph Ossiya, who held a session about fostering sharing and learning teams:

16. Continuous improvement requires a commitment to learning

Joseph discussed the meaning of a learning organization and the importance of supportive leaders, a culture of continuous improvements, intuitive knowledge processes and a defined learning structure to achieve continuous improvement at organizational level.

17. A learning organization:

- employs a holistic approach, decentralizes the role of leadership, and puts emphasis on informal and social networks.
- is skilled at 5 main learning activities:
 1. Systematic problem solving
 2. Experimentation with new approaches
 3. Learning from past experience
 4. Learning from best practices of others
 5. Transferring knowledge quickly and efficiently throughout the organization

Team learning is about harnessing the knowledge and intelligence of multiple individuals.

18. How do you become a learning organization?

Joseph explained how the evolution towards becoming a learning organization takes place step by step:

- At first, support from relevant senior staff is of great importance.
- Change the systems of work.
- Enable working practices so that employees can move freely between hierarchies and make networking possible. It's all about opening the organization.
- Look further, outside the own organization. By welcoming and inviting other organizations to network, you will receive valuable feedback and gain new perspectives of your own workplace.
- Support learning as much as possible!
- Embrace innovation in learning. Provide different kinds of learning opportunities.

Joseph finished his lecture by stating that good strategy is not enough. The dominant culture within your organization will define the organization regardless of strategies and goals. If culture and strategy are not in harmony, the strategy will be overruled by the prevailing culture.

Open question and plenary discussions

Call for action: **What can you do and what will you do to combat GBV going forward?**

Responses from participants:

- I will continue to advocate for women in the parliament. I will also try to organize public discussion that can include all members of community. That is something that can benefit for all. Also, I'm planning to help women's NGO's. We need to involve NGOs in this process, they are poorly informed in our community about these issues. I will share what I've learned here today in our community. Thank you all!
- The presentations have been very provocative, in a way that we already have systems in place. From what we have heard today, there is a lot more to be done in our respective municipalities to make sure that we handle GBV in a proper way.
- GBV is real in the times we are living in and in the municipalities that we represent. My takes from the sessions were that we also need to think about the psychological and economical aspects of GBV. Sometimes, we may concentrate on the physical violence and the other ones are not easily seen but needs our attention. Another take away is that we need to do more. We have got structure, we have policies, but the way we talk about GBV is that it is something "out there". We need to put it in every programme in our municipalities. It shouldn't be a programme on its own but incorporated whenever possible.
- I will continue being an advocate for knowledge among women, even for career women like myself. I will speak for them; I'm attending a conference this weekend for women. I'll bring forward that GBV is more than just physical violence.

Closing remarks by Ulrika Modéer, UNDP

Anne Scheffer Leander proudly introduced Ulrika Modéer as the closing speaker of the seminar. Ulrika Modéer is the director of the Bureau of External Relations and Advocacy at UNDP.

Ulrika stated that Women's Economic Empowerment to curb GBV is a very important topic in a global perspective, since it is a prerequisite for sustainable development and for achieving the goals of Agenda 2030. However, the pandemic persists across the globe also because of the vaccine inequity. Women's contribution as healthcare professionals and decision makers is a key for an effective response to COVID-19.

Women's economic security is at stake and the large group of women working in the informal sector do not have access to financial safety nets. Furthermore, women are also 24% more likely than men to leave the workforce as they take over unpaid care work. The pandemic has also increased the risk of girls dropping out of school in developing countries due to school shutdowns.

Ulrika declared that this setback for women stands in the way of a more prosperous and sustainable global future for all people. Gender equality is not only a goal for itself, but also an accelerator needed to achieve the other global goals as well. Estimates from UNDP shows that if women participated identically to men globally, this would add up 26% of the global GDP in a decade. This shows the kind of power that women bring to our economies.

Gender inequality is also visible in terms of economic vulnerability. Women are 25% more likely than men to fall into poverty, and extreme poverty. **The global competitiveness index** shows that the more gender equality we have in a country, the higher is the degree of competitiveness. This is something to look at for those who do not invest in women's economic empowerment or for those who do not gender mainstream through their actions.

Perceptions and bias also have an impact on the development. **UNDP's Gender Social Norm Index** suggests that 50% of men globally thinks that in times of crisis jobs should be prioritized for men, that men have more rights to jobs than women. The same index shows also that 30% of men consider that it is justifiable to for a husband to beat his wife. Even in countries where gender equality has had a lot of progress, it is still not something that should be taken for granted as we see how gender bias is increasing in society.

Ulrika stressed the importance of working together to curb the fallout of this pandemic. Advancing women's economic empowerment is a priority for UNDP and the organization look forward to support local governance, municipalities, and regions since local governments play a crucial role in the recovery and the support to local economies. Whoever you are and wherever you work, do not hesitate to get in contact with UNDP colleagues to get access to data, instruments but also to get support in coordination with other financial institutions at country level.

Anne Scheffer Leander, Joseph Ossiya & Anna Keadze thanked the speakers and participants for taking part in the seminar and for being active in fruitful discussions and knowledge-sharing.

Key conclusions from the seminar

- **GBV: A global structural problem**
Gender based violence is a global structural problem which demonstrate gender inequality in more than actions of physical violence. It was a pandemic already before the pandemic but was further accelerated by COVID-19. Due to their large participation in the informal work sector, women are more vulnerable in crises. COVID-19 has not resulted in a "New normal" for most people and the situation has rather become worse for women. Participants have identified challenges for handling GBV and increasing empowerment in terms of limited technical capacity to handle GBV issues, weakness in the regulatory framework, corruption, and inadequate resources. The digital divide and the perception that GBV is something that is "out there" tells us that there is a lot more to be done.
- **The correlations of GBV and Women's disempowerment**
Loss of income and economic stability during times of crises such as the COVID pandemic increases the risk of GBV. Thus, increasing the economic possibilities of women can in turn help curb GBV. A root cause approach is needed to understand the relationship between GBV and Women's Economic Empowerment.
- **Measures and actions to tackle GBV and support Women's Economic Empowerment**
Several speakers and participants emphasized the importance of including GBV prevention in response plans for COVID-19. Direct income support and supporting women owned business and workers in the informal sector, mainstreaming of women into financial processes, organizations, systems and increasing women's participation and agency by targeted interventions are potential strategies for women's empowerment. The pandemic did also bring some new possibilities for women in the labor market. In Africa, the labor market pivoted towards manufacturing PPEs and women have started to gain access in a previously

male dominated sector. Furthermore, building resilience in the informal sector by innovative approaches is an important aspect for future strategies.

- **There is need for engagement and collaboration**

Institutional support and collaboration between stakeholders are important when working with the issues of GBV and women's economic empowerment. Participants stressed the importance of engaging the civil society and especially men and boys to turn outdated norms and perceptions. Several experts underlined coordination and collaboration as a key when working with gender issues, through multi-sectoral stakeholder advocacy and holistic approaches cutting across different levels. Gender policy and GBV strategies needs to be integrated whenever possible and the local governments play a crucial role in the recovery of local economies in crises.

- **Cultures, norms, and perceptions plays an important role**

Perceptions, stereotypes, and gender bias clearly hinders development. Both experts and participants mentioned how it is important to break old stereotypes and unlearn traditional cultural norms that hinders women's advancement, which can be done through public awareness campaigns. Culture within an organization will define the organization regardless of strategy. Therefore, it is important to work with the culture to be able to reach strategy goals.

- **Most importantly: the power of women in the global economy**

Women's Economic empowerment is prerequisite for sustainable development and for achieving agenda 2030. Gender equality is more than a standing-alone goal, it is an accelerator for achieving the other goals. The GDP and competitiveness are higher in societies with greater economic equality.