



Women's Platform

womensplatform.org

Jonna Monaghan, Director, info@womensplatform.org

Chapeau

As the Universal Declaration of Human Rights marks its 75th anniversary, the world is at a crossroads. Multiple crises are affecting individual nations, as well as the international community. Conflict, climate crisis, cost of living and political uncertainty is affecting global trust in institutions and democracy, while also driving migrant flows and affecting people's livelihoods. Women are disproportionately affected by crises, as the shock absorbers of poverty in families and communities, and as the primary providers of care. In crisis situations, women's burden of unpaid work increases as public services typically become less accessible, while women also are at greater risk of violence, particularly when on the move and in conflict situations.

Multilateral, global action is more important than ever. The Pact for the Future needs to prioritise this, and work towards increased global focus on implementing the agendas identified in the context, from the Universal Declaration of Human Rights to Agenda 2030. As also set out in the context, this requires commitment from UN and UN Member States to rebuild trust, which necessarily involves addressing issues that have affected that trust, including racism, social and gender inequalities, and hate such as homophobia, transphobia and religious prejudices such as Islamophobia and antisemitism. Addressing global poverty, including the debt burden in the Global South is also vital to create a genuinely global Pact for the Future.

Chapter I. Sustainable development and financing for development

Sustainable development must be at the heart of the Pact of the Future and all decision making within the UN, as mandated by the Paris Agreement. The climate crisis is increasingly acute and felt worldwide, with concrete impacts on the everyday lives and livelihoods of people and communities that are contributing to migration and displacement both internally and internationally. Drought is wiping out small scale growing in particular, while driving up poverty and malnutrition for the most disadvantaged groups across the world through food price inflation, and contributing to conflict. Women and girls in many parts of the world spend a significant part of their day sourcing water and fuel, and often experience violence from men while carrying out this vital task. Paradoxically, floods and extreme weather do the same, and leave affected communities traumatized and often destitute, even where aid and support is provided. In the Global North, cost of living increases driven by climate impacts affect women disproportionately and entrench women's poverty.

It is vital that the Pact of the Future emphasizes all three strands of sustainable development equally, as an equitable and sustainable future depends on this. Implementing sustainable development requires investment in education and green technologies, as well as strengthening social protection systems to ensure no one is left behind, and economies are more resilient to shocks. The loss and damage fund announced at COP28 is a welcome start in financing this in the Global South, but action is also required on debt in the Global South, and commitment to sharing wealth in this way is required for the long term. Simultaneously, countries in the Global North must invest in their own societies, and in particular the most disadvantaged groups. The Pact for the Future needs to recognize the global interdependence as well as the global nature of the climate crisis, and seek shared commitment to implementing Agenda 2030.

Chapter II. International peace and security

The global situation is very fragile at present, with political instability and conflict in many regions of the world affecting people's everyday lives and future prospects. For many, acute conflict is creating displacement, destitution and trauma; for women affected by conflict, the risk of violence and exploitation is particularly high. Women who are displaced or on the move are particularly vulnerable, and are also at risk of trafficking. Women remain underrepresented in peace negotiations, and as a result women's needs are not sufficiently taken into account or addressed in post conflict and recovery, often leading to entrenched gender inequalities and women lacking representation and voice in policy and decision making. This is widening global equality gaps,

The Pact of the Future needs to put UNSCR 1325 and related Resolutions at its heart, to recognize the gendered nature of conflict and political instability, and create a more effective basis for women to take their role as leaders in society. Specifically, the needs of women and girls need to be integrated in policy and decision making long term, in all societies, as this constitutes a significant opportunity to sustain peace and enable sustainable economic development by enabling women and girls as well as men and boys to build their skills and meaningfully engage with work, entrepreneurship and training. There needs to be investment in post conflict recovery, including building social infrastructure, in all regions affected by acute conflict, as this is vital to ensure sustainable and equitable peace, and prevent future conflict. Experience from Northern Ireland, among other post conflict regions, shows that building a shared society is a long term process, and requires a focus on all areas of society to ensure all population groups can have trust in their future.

Chapter III. Science, technology and innovation and digital cooperation

Scientific and technological development is a significant opportunity to build a sustainable global future. In particular, health related innovations and digital technologies can help more people access care and support, as well as access education and develop business opportunities. However, it is vital that the Pact of the Future emphasises equitable access to such opportunities, and strengthening access to technology for minoritised and low income groups in particular. Currently, this is characterised by significant inequalities both across and within regions and countries; access is taken for granted by many on higher incomes, while low income, rural and minority women, girls and communities are left behind.

Innovation, and access to the results of innovative practices, also vary significantly. There is a major opportunity to strengthen women's and girls' life opportunities through technological change, but it is critical that access to basic modern technology is improved for all women and girls, so that women and girls can meaningfully and increasingly engage in shaping development of the digital world and digital platforms, providers and developers prioritise services that meet women's and girls' needs. Online safety is a critical prerequisite for ensuring innovation and technological change can truly empower women and girls.

Education must be a cornerstone of the Pact, as equitable access to education for all children and young people, regardless of gender, income or social or ethnic background is essential for their future skills and opportunities. Girls have not returned to education to the same extent as before Covid-19, which is associated with poverty, and risks cutting back progress over decades; education for girls is a major factor in development and in reducing maternal and child mortality. Girls also need to have the same access to education in science and technology as boys; current evidence indicates major gaps, and also shows that women find it particularly difficult to enter and progress within technology industries, due to prejudice and inflexible practices. In addition, it is vital that the Pact maintains a focus on care as both a major economic activity and a key area for innovation, and focuses on ensuring investment in science and technology does not come at the expense of healthcare. Lack of access to care places a major unpaid work burden on women, which not only hampers their ability to join the workforce, but also reduces opportunities to deal with global megatrends such as population ageing.

Chapter IV. Youth and future generations

Protecting and sustaining the Earth for future generations is a core tenet of the original definition of sustainable development, and remains as vital as ever. Young people have their own perspective on the future, and also bring valuable insights into the impacts of the current global situation on their lives. The recent focus within the UN on integrating a youth perspective is very welcome, and the Pact offers an important mechanism for further embedding young people in global policy and decision making. However, it is important to strengthen opportunities for young people of all backgrounds to participate, and avoid focusing solely on those youth leaders who have access to resources their peers do not.

Education remains vital to secure the future of our current and future generations of young people. Education for all, wherever possible without a cost to parents, needs to be at the heart of the Pact, to ensure that the background of parents does not determine young people's access to education in the future. There needs to be specific focus and investment in girls' education, as progress has dropped back since Covid-19, which in practice confines many girls to lives of poverty and marginalization, with impacts felt across generations. Education has time and again been confirmed as the best mechanism to tackle poverty, and can also contribute to freeing the skills and talents of girls to contribute to the global future. It is also an issue of hearts and minds, and contributes to changing mindsets, which is vital for a more sustainable and inclusive future.

It is, finally, vital to stress that minoritized young people as well as disabled young people need to have their voices heard. Prejudice and discrimination remains rife, with growing signs of racism, homophobia, transphobia and hate based on religion or culture, and without direct action to implement human rights provisions, there is a clear risk that the backlash on rights will become permanent.

Chapter V. Transforming global governance

Multilateralism is more important than ever in today's increasingly complex and fractured world. Solidarity and joint action are also vital; recent events have demonstrated the breaches of human rights and challenges to democracy that can occur where there is a lack of united action by the international community. The impacts of this are also clear to see, and highlight how all the issues identified as priorities

for the Pact are interlinked. The uniting factor is that joint global, multilateral action is key to identifying sustainable and meaningful solutions, while lack of such commitment is likely to strengthen backlash.

It is vital that the Pact is based on a strong foundation within the UN human rights and international law frameworks, as the minimum standards that must be upheld at all times. The mechanisms, resolutions and agreements set out in the initial context also provide a framework for creating change, and focus of the Pact process should be on cementing support for this. The Pact should also recognize that the process must be inclusive of all sectors in society, including civil society and grassroots communities, as this is vital to build the overarching global commitment required to sustain change. This is also essential to ensure accountability for governments and private sector actors, while engaging civil society contributes to ensuring access to the widest possible evidence base to support decision making.

Finally, funding is essential to match commitments and make the Pact more than an aspirational document. The Pact should at a minimum recognize this, while the process agreeing a Pact should include exploring options to strengthen international aid commitments and flows on the priorities agreed. Priorities for action, supported by critical core funding within these areas, create a major force for change, and together, can develop a Pact that future generations can hold up as a turning point. This, ultimately, should be the aim of the Pact, as it is focused on the future, and the future is not ours alone, but also belongs to future generations, whose life opportunities are directly shaped by our decisions today. The time is now.