From CSW to HLPF

Five reflections on systemic change and feminist organising.

[Equality Insights](https://equalityinsights.org/)

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# Introduction

Systems change is a global feminist call. It may sound impossible and out of reach. It’s not. And it’s vital if the economic, social, and political structures that shape lives, opportunities, and futures are to deliver equity, justice and a sustainable planet.

We build the future each day, in choices made and actions taken. In the process, systems evolve. Sometimes we can see and feel change as it happens. [The 68th Session of the Commission on the Status of Women](https://www.unwomen.org/en/csw/csw68-2024) (CSW68) at the UN Headquarters in New York from 11-22 March was such a moment.

Across a packed calendar of official sessions and side events, parallel events, and negotiation of the Agreed Conclusions from CSW68, Equality Insights team members, Joanna Pradela (Director of Knowledge Translation and Equality Insights), Joanne Crawford AM (Strategic Advisor), and Dr Gayatri Ramnath (Data Use and Engagement Manager), together with IWDA CEO Nayomi Kannangara, joined participants from UN Member States, civil society organisations, UN entities, global leaders, policymakers and campaigners to advance gender equality.

The relationship between poverty and gender was a central focus of the priority theme; “Accelerating the achievement of gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls by addressing poverty and strengthening institutions and financing with a gender perspective.”

As the Equality Insights team looks ahead to the annual High-level Political Forum (HLPF) in July, when progress on Sustainable Development Goal 1: No Poverty is under review, they share some reflections on multilateral spaces, change and insights that will inform the approach to the HLPF.

# ****Feminist collaboration across contexts is central to change - and to holding the line.****

While CSW is the main intergovernmental forum dedicated to gender equality, official proceedings run alongside a huge parallel civil-society-facilitated multistakeholder program. Some 14,000 people attended the [NGO CSW68 Parallel Forum](https://ngocsw.org/ngocsw68/) of virtual and in-person presentations, dialogues and launches. It is a space for showcasing leadership, innovations and initiatives towards change, and pooling knowledge towards a broader and deeper understanding of challenges and strategies.

Feminist collaboration across contexts reaches a critical intensity during the second week of CSW, as the Agreed Conclusions of the session are negotiated, sometimes late into the night. So when it became clear that the UN’s protracted liquidity crisis meant that meetings in UNHQ during CSW68 needed to conclude at 6pm, there was concern that negotiations would move into spaces that civil society could not access, and that time pressures would see issues of concern not receiving adequate attention.

In time-pressured contexts, trust, collaboration, coordination and division of labour across feminist networks are vital for rapid, informed assessments and problem-solving. Diverse geographies and intersectional perspectives help identify where issues and challenges are shared and where they are distinct, to clarify what is at stake and how best to address them. And collaboration between feminists in government and in civil society helps to ensure that the negotiated language in the Agreed Outcomes maximises what is possible. Collective strength and solidarity are essential, especially in the face of coordinated, well-funded efforts to challenge and roll back established language on gender equality and women’s rights.

Feminist concerns will be less well reflected in globally-agreed outcomes if diverse feminist input is not available and accessed as text is being negotiated.

[*‘Pacific women's voices at the global table are vital’*](https://asiapacific.unwomen.org/en/stories/feature-story/2024/04/pacific-women-share-their-csw68-experiences)

as UN Women Asia and Pacific put it in sharing reflections from four Pacific feminists at CSW68. Participation and embodied knowledge are also key in translating issues and outcomes from multilateral spaces and global feminist conversations into practical action. Feminists from Vanuatu, Tuvalu, Solomon Islands and Fiji share their observations and priorities in their contexts in this UN Women Asia Pacific [blog](https://asiapacific.unwomen.org/en/stories/feature-story/2024/04/pacific-women-share-their-csw68-experiences).

# ****Feminist leadership on data and evidence is enabling change.****

Feminist change is more difficult without data and evidence. This applies to tackling the [long-standing and acknowledged](https://iwda.org.au/assets/files/AFFPC_Issues_Paper_February_2023_Gender-and-Poverty-as-a-Feminist-Foreign-Policy-priority.pdf) challenge of poverty measurement that assesses the poverty of households, limiting insights into the ways in which gender (and age and disability and other individual factors) shape poverty.

Pacific leadership and innovation in tackling this issue was centre stage at Equality Insights’ high-level CSW panel, “Innovating Poverty Measurement for Inclusion: Leading from the Pacific.” The panel included collaborators from Tonga and Solomon Islands, Dr. Cedric Alependava, Permanent Secretary, [Ministry of Women, Youth, Children and Family Affairs](http://www.mwycfa.gov.sb/), Solomon Islands Government; Ms. Akanesi Polotu Paunga, then Acting Director and now CEO, [Ministry of Internal Affairs, Government of the Kingdom of Tonga](https://mia.gov.to/); Ms. Nauna Revo, Women’s Economic Empowerment Officer, [Women’s Rights Action Movement, Solomon Islands](https://iwda.org.au/womens-rights-action-movement/); as well as Ms. Krista Jones Baptista, Executive Director, [Data2X](https://data2x.org/).

The session showcased Pacific leadership in developing and implementing an innovative individual-level gender-sensitive measure of multidimensional poverty and inequality. Joanne Crawford AM , Strategic Advisor with Equality Insights, moderated the panel, introducing IWDA’s leadership in developing a feasible individual-level, gender-sensitive measure of multidimensional poverty, to generate data that can reveal the relationship between inequality and poverty. Dr. Gayatri Ramnath, Equality Insights’ Data Use and Engagement Manager, briefly outlined the measure’s key features and innovations, and how these show up in data, including insights within the household.

Other speakers highlighted the importance of partnership between differently located stakeholders to extend the value of leadership and innovation, and move beyond shared commitments, to action that closes data gaps and supports greater insight into lived realities.

On uptake and use of data once it is available, Dr. Alependava spoke about the importance of enabling legislation, mechanisms to connect across government, and engaging with constituencies important in the local context, such as faith-based organisations.

Ms. Akanesi Polotu Paunga underlined the importance of data use that is timely and intentional, including for national, regional and global reporting. You can read more on Tonga’s gender equality consultations ahead of reporting on implementation of commitments [here](https://www.facebook.com/ministryofinternalaffairstonga/posts/pfbid02P5xEJKZ1bsWUTSFXXCFRN24ZC1ZcUWn1FTseXWNmALbRmCNEyVPtgP5G4Wv7Crnrl).

Nauna Revo spoke about the value of data for advocacy and wider buy-in on addressing inequality and disadvantage, underlining that having relevant data helps be upfront and direct with governments and donors about what support is required.

Krista Jones Baptista located the discussion in the global landscape, underlining the importance of gender data, commitments to strengthen availability and use, and the substantial resourcing gaps that continue to constrain (watch out for a new Data2X report coming soon!)

# ****Feminists are strongest together.****

CSW is an opportunity to connect to feminists from every region in one place. Convening and collaborating can motivate, inspire collective action and propel change. Especially when it is effectively facilitated. This is the power of the Women’s Rights Caucus.

The Women’s Rights Caucus (WRC) is a global, intersectional and inclusive coalition of more than 200 feminist organisations, networks and collectives that advocates for gender equality within CSW. With commitment to core feminist principles required as a condition of joining, plus nomination by an existing coalition member, and elected co-convenors from every geographic region, the WRC provides a context of substantive alignment on core priorities and high trust. This enables collective analysis and action informed by diverse strengths and experiences. It is inspiring to be part of co-creating in real time impactful collective feminist organising and influencing.

Being part of the WRC also amplifies the impact, influence and voice of participating organisations and networks, by pooling resources and ideas, communicating some common messages, and focusing advocacy efforts around shared priorities.

These combined efforts saw some important priorities reflected in the official [Agreed Conclusions](https://undocs.org/E/CN.6/2024/L.3), the outcomes document adopted by consensus at the end of a CSW session. This included recognising the need for “individual-level data” in addressing multidimensional poverty (see language matters too chapter below).

There were also disappointments, underlining that gender equality and human rights cannot be taken for granted. They are realised in practice, in dynamic and evolving contexts, and require continuous attention and action. Read the [WRC statement on the CSW68 Agreed Conclusions](https://fosfeminista.org/media/wrc-statement-on-the-csw68-agreed-conclusions/) for more on collective feminist priorities and concerns.

As our Strategic Advisor, Joanne Crawford, reflected on LinkedIn at the end of CSW68,

“We need to build from the extraordinary and inspiring collective feminist organising and exchange that happens at key moments and fora, to establish ongoing mechanisms for exchange and strategising. And listen to additional voices and draw in additional expertise.

‘Anti-rights efforts are accelerating and broadening. The risks are real and the need for action is urgent.”

“Collective feminist organising is a truly awesome, inspiring, energising and impactful phenomenon. The commitment, smarts, respect, solidarity, trust, energy, sustained focus, sharing of knowledge and expertise, inter-generational and cross-regional collaboration and exchange is truly extraordinary. And at the core of change. So let's act like this is so.”

# ****The 5 Ms matter.****

Director of Knowledge Translation and Equality Insights, Joanna Pradela, moderated an event, “Connecting the Dots: Investing in Gender Data for Gender Equality,” that focused on financing gender data systems as a pivotal catalyst for gender equality. The event was co-hosted by [PARIS21](https://www.paris21.org/), Equality Insights, [Data2X](https://data2x.org/), [UN Women](https://unwomen.org/en) and [Open Data Watch](https://opendatawatch.com/) – [you can read Open Data Watch’s wrap-up of the event here](https://opendatawatch.com/blog/open-data-watch-at-the-commission-on-the-status-of-women/).

Speakers included Vaela Devesi, Supervising Director for the Women’s Development Division, the Solomon Islands Ministry of Women, Youth, Children and Family Affairs, and Mary Wooldridge, CEO of the Workplace Gender Equality Agency, Government of Australia.

On the day, Joanna summarised her key takeaways from the speakers in 5 Ms:

* **Measurement:** not everything that matters is currently measured. To shift systemic and structural barriers to gender equality we need to think beyond legacy systems. If we don't do that now, we will keep carrying forward a gender-unaware/insensitive past into the present AND future.
* **Methods:** we need information that gets us beyond the size of the problem. If we want actionable insights then how matters as much as what we measure.
* **Money:** Finite resources need to be invested smartly. Investing in a finely tuned understanding of the problem will save us money in the end. When measures and methods are producing actionable insights, our programs, policies, regulations and investments will be more effective and efficient.
* **Movements:** Data will not use itself. We need to build and engage with constituencies who are motivated and activated and who both create and take up political space to drive uptake and use. If duty-bearers are the supply of action then movements are the demand – and movement actors can exist both inside and outside government.
* **Mandates:** in every interaction between data producers and users, there is likely a gap between where the mandate of one ends and the mandate of another begins. We need to invest in the people, capacities, mechanisms and processes that bridge those gaps. Movements will help. Money will help. Invest in bridge builders.

# ****Language matters too.****

The [Agreed Conclusions](https://undocs.org/E/CN.6/2024/L.3) from CSW are the primary session outcomes, negotiated by all Member States, considering the year’s priority theme, and approved by consensus rather than a vote.

The Agreed Conclusions represent the commitments made by each Member State to empower women and girls and to take forward into their policies and is used to hold Member States to account for their actions.

Here ‘negotiated’ is a key term – for language to be included in the Agreed Conclusions, it must be agreed, or at least not opposed, by all Member States. Essentially, hundreds of negotiators go through the document, paragraph by paragraph, informed by their various world views and priorities, and try to come to a consensus on each paragraph, and on the document as a whole.

It is a lengthy, political, nuanced, and sometimes transactional process that reaches beyond the room where negotiators sit to draw in wider expertise and experience, information about where relevant language has been agreed before, the relative priority of particular words, and identify red lines.

With each Member State bringing their political, social, economic, ideological and geopolitical contexts to the negotiations, there is often disagreement about what language should be included and excluded.

The inclusion of language on “individual-level data” in the [Agreed Conclusions](https://undocs.org/E/CN.6/2024/L.3) was an important development. The 1995 [Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action](https://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/beijing/pdf/BDPfA%20E.pdf) from the Fourth World Conference on Women identified "Women and poverty" as the first of 12 Critical Areas of Concern, and called on national and international statistical organisations to "Collect gender and age-disaggregated data on poverty..." The agreed outcome from CSW68 confirmed the role of “individual-level data” as a foundation for understanding, and better responding to, the relationship between multidimensional poverty and individual characteristics, such as gender, age or disability.

## The next opportunity**.**

Change in norms and systems takes time. The process is often incremental, building on and reinforcing positive developments and improvements. CSW68 recognised the importance of individual-level data and measurement of multidimensional poverty for accelerating action on ending poverty. The [High Level Political Forum (HLPF) on Sustainable Development](https://hlpf.un.org/2024/other-events), being held from 8-17 July at the UN in New York, is an opportunity to build on this, towards making individual-level, gender-sensitive measurement of multidimensional poverty a standard option.

In 2024 this annual review of progress on the globally-agreed Sustainable Development Goals will have a specific focus on Sustainable Development Goal 1: No Poverty. The Equality Insights team will be in New York, working with government and civil society advocates for more inclusive measurement and data, so we have the evidence of lived realities that can inform and accelerate change. Individual-level data is vital for understanding the scope and scale of poverty and who experiences it.

The latest [Asia Pacific profile on Goal 1](https://www.unescap.org/kp/2024/sdg-1-no-poverty), which consolidated evidence on poverty and inequality in the region to inform the Asia Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development (APFSD) in February, recognised that “Gender inequalities remain deeply rooted in the Asia-Pacific region, which recently experienced its worst gender equality decline in two decades.” It acknowledged that “household-level data does not allow individual-level disaggregation” and that “The collection of individual-level, sex-disaggregated, multidimensional poverty data is crucial”, to inform “accelerated action on issues that prevent women and girls from realizing their full potential.”

The Asia Pacific Regional CSO Engagement Mechanism (APRCEM) Position Paper for the APFSD and HLPF 2024, “[Change the System, Shift the Power: Advancing People’s Demand for Development Justice!](https://docs.google.com/document/d/15Ug4LeAdR8PAbg8AAB2wtDDt1lImDNghudqEAcg5RZI/edit)” identifies household-level measurement of poverty as a barrier to understanding who is most affected by the continuing socio-economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. “The resulting multidimensional challenges and pressures have mostly affected people with the least resources and opportunities. An estimated 47 million people in the region have been pushed into extreme poverty (Ecker et al. 2023), although it is impossible to identify the most severely affected social groups because the data on poverty is collected about households, not individuals, and limiting disaggregation.”

We look forward to working with collaborators and advocates to normalise individual-level gender-sensitive measurement of multidimensional poverty as a foundation for more comprehensive and inclusive evidence that drives more focused and effective action on poverty and inequality. As the Solomon Islands Government will present its Voluntary National Review of progress on the sustainable development goals at HLPF this year, we also look forward to spotlighting their leadership as one of the first countries to pioneer use of the [Equality Insights Rapid](https://equalityinsights.org/resources/eir-report-solomon-islands-survey-2022/) survey, and demonstrate the feasibility and relevance of individual-level, gender-sensitive measurement of multidimensional poverty.

Equality Insights is the flagship program of the [International Women’s Development Agency (IWDA)](https://iwda.org.au/) to redefine how poverty is understood and measured and to inspire inclusive, social change for gender equality.

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