

# Achieving Gender Equality and Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights - International Advocacy Challenges and Opportunities in 2020 & 2021

## INTRODUCTION

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On the 19<sup>th</sup> of January 2021, Share-Net Netherlands and WO=MEN, in partnership with Rutgers, Dance4Life, Simavi and CHOICE for Youth and Sexuality organised an online event titled “Achieving Gender Equality and Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights - International Advocacy challenges and opportunities in 2020 & 2021”. This event was moderated by [Yvonne Bogaarts](#) (Manager Advocacy, Rutgers) and [Nadia van der Linde](#) (Programme Manager International Processes, WO=MEN) and created a space to discuss recent developments and expectations related to specific UN advocacy processes. The outbreak of COVID-19 in 2020 required us to adapt to a changing advocacy landscape, with different challenges and opportunities for civil society engagement. In this meeting we aimed to bring together our lessons learned and to strategise around our engagements for gender equality and sexual and reproductive health and rights in 2021. Speakers from CSO’s and the Ministries of Education, Culture and Science (OCW) and Foreign Affairs (BZ) inspired participants to kick-start knowledge sharing and effective collaborations for (remote) advocacy.

## SETTING THE SCENE

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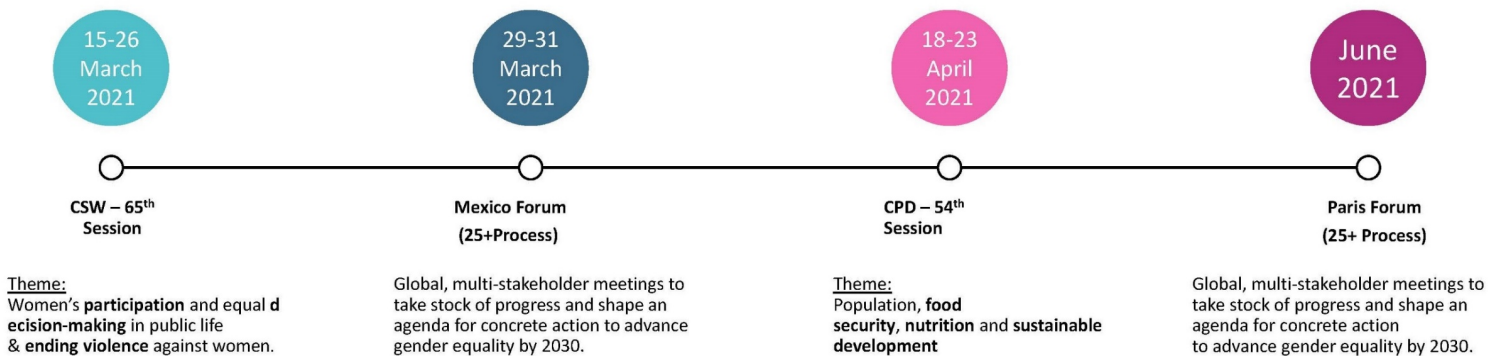
In a short conversation, the most important advocacy moments and developments of 2020 in relation to CSW, CPD, HLPF and Beijing+25, including the impact of COVID-19 (measures) on civil society participation, were discussed by [Evi van den Dungen](#) (Senior Advisor Advocacy, Rutgers) and [Poppy Stanbury](#) (Advocacy Coordinator, CHOICE for Youth & Sexuality)

- [Commission on the Status of Women](#) (CSW) was the first UN event which was impacted by COVID-19. The CSW was reduced from two weeks to one day, in which the pre-negotiated political declaration was adopted. The CSW NGO Forum was cancelled. There was lack of clarity on the processes and very limited space for CSO to participate and this unfortunately gave way for conservative states to push their agenda. Regardless, the political declaration was approved with some strong points, such as 13 references to “all women and girls” and reference to Universal Health Coverage (UHC). Dutch CSOs and the Dutch delegation had advocated for a postponement of the CSW to ensure meaningful participation of civil society could be safeguarded, but to no avail.
- [Commission on Population and Development](#) (CPD) started with a very progressive zero draft resolution in February of 2020 on food security, nutrition and sustainable development. Soon after, the CPD was postponed and it was unclear what would happen and when. The chair of the CPD decided to proceed with a political declaration on the topic of Covid-19 and food security. In June and July, negotiations happened for this political declaration. The negotiations were virtual which created a very different dynamic compared to the traditional live negotiations. CSOs had less information about these negotiations and it was therefore more difficult to provide inputs. The CPD failed to come to a

conclusion as some conservative governments used the strange negotiation modalities this year to push back on certain language. There was no outcome for the CPD in 2020. Hopefully there will be a better result this year with the Biden administration.

- [High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development](#) (HLPF) happened in July. It included virtual meetings and negotiations on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). CSO could follow discussions through the UN web TV. In the end, the negotiations failed as the US could not agree to language on climate change and Russia could not agree to language on gender equality, although on both issues just previously agreed language was used.
- [Beijing+25 Generation Equality Forum](#) meetings were postponed. The six Action Coalitions did start their work virtually through selected lead members. In late 2020, a Compact on Women, Peace and Security and Humanitarian Action was added to the Action Coalition. It has been difficult to get clarity about the process and plans during the last year but the two meetings in Mexico and Paris are expected to take place in 2021. There are still a lot of questions around how CSOs can participate if they are not an Action Coalition lead member. The role of CSOs in the Generation Equality Forum processes has been confusing from the beginning. Meaningful Youth Participation (MYP) has also been lacking from the beginning although it is regularly highlighted as an important part of this process. There weren't enough youth leaders included in the Action Coalitions. Now a dedicated Youth taskforce has been set up, which however still faces a lack of funding.

## TIMELINE OF UN PROCESSES IN 2021



## KEY TAKEAWAYS

The following key takeaways arose from break out room and panel discussions which took place during the online meeting. Guest speakers for these sections included: [Lisanne Post](#) (Policy Officer, Gender Equality Unit, Ministry of Education, Culture and Science), [Cornelieke Keizer](#) (Senior Policy Officer Taskforce Women's Rights & Gender Equality, Ministry of Foreign Affairs), [Quirine Lengkeek](#), NGO representative to CSW and [Rineke van Dam](#) (Senior Policy Officer SRHR, Ministry of Foreign Affairs).

**Shifting to working within a digital space certainly has its many challenges but it also contains some opportunities:**

- We can't replace the hallways at the UN but we must make use of and create digital ones.
- Digital spaces can increase access for more and more diverse civil society actors from more countries (e.g. no visa issues): let's leverage on that!
- It is important to create safe digital spaces for connecting with others working on similar important topics.

**UN actors need to do more to meaningfully engage civil society organisations:**

- Civil society is again side-lined in these advocacy processes, despite so much effort and many promises over the years.
- There has been a huge amount of confusion around the different processes and unequal information flows which makes involvement of CSOs with these different processes difficult.

**The change of administration in the US has the potential to bring about positive change in areas of gender equality and sexual and reproductive health and rights**

- There is a lot of polarisation between countries when it comes to SRHR and gender issues.
- There are currently discussions on having a vote in the CPD commission instead of a consensus document as the CPD has failed to reach an outcome for the past few years.

**Quirine Lengkeek is this year's NGO representative in the Dutch delegation for CSW.**

- Quirine is the bridge between CSO and the government. This year's CSW theme is on participation and decision-making in public life and Quirine is looking into how different marginalised groups are involved in decision making and the level of participation certain groups have in these processes.
- If you have the time, please fill out [this survey](#) to share your experiences on this topic or share your experiences with Quirine via email at: [quirine@choiceforyouth.org](mailto:quirine@choiceforyouth.org)

**The Generation Equality Forum in Mexico in March (and likely also the Paris Forum in June) will take place virtually.**

- The Dutch government is part of the leadership of the Action Coalition on Feminist Movements and Leadership, as well as the Count Me In consortium.
- The Dutch government really pushed for this theme to be included as an Action Coalition as funding on feminist movements and women's rights organisations has been below 1% for decades. The Dutch government is looking into how to improve these figures and to have more strategic resourcing on women's rights organisations and feminist movements.
- There is no concept note yet for the Mexico Forum though it seems to be planned for March (however, after the meeting, UN Women launched a [new portal with information and opportunity for online discussion](#)).
- The first part of the forum will focus on broadening the themes of the Beijing process.

### **There is a lot of conservative push back within the different advocacy processes**

- In 2020, we saw a lot of transphobia and aggression against sex workers.
- The Dutch government saw the regression and the push back at both UN and EU level which, notably the Geneva consensus declaration proposed by the US.
- In response to the Geneva consensus declaration, the Dutch government wrote an internal strategy, solidifying strategies with like-minded countries. 82 countries were part of a [joint statement during the High Level meeting of the General Assembly for Beijing+25](#) on 1 October 2020.
- It is important to raise awareness with conservative countries about how destructive their actions are.
- Countries on the far right are becoming better organised, stronger and more strategic. They are driven by national agendas and ideas. They oppose SRHR and gender (countries such as Poland and Hungary).
- The Netherlands has a very firm position on fighting for women's rights. Women's rights are human rights.

### **We need to be proactive and creative in order to advocate when we are in a virtual space**

- WO=MEN and Atria have collected input from CSOs in the Netherlands to develop joint [recommendations](#) from civil society to present to the Dutch delegation to the CSW. Reach out to Nadia ([n.vanderlinde@wo-men.nl](mailto:n.vanderlinde@wo-men.nl)) to get more information or get involved in the CSW or Generation Equality processes.
- For those that would like to get involved with the Commission on Population and Development process, there will be a CPD email group. Please email Evi to join: [e.vandendungen@rutgers.nl](mailto:e.vandendungen@rutgers.nl).

