WEBINAR REPORT
30TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE BEIJING PLATFORM FOR ACTION
ADVANCING WOMEN'S POLITICAL PARTICIPATION IN THE NEXT DECADE

INTRODUCTION

The Beijing Declaration in 1995 recognized that gender equality, inclusion and representation is essential to democracy. However, 30 years later, progress remains uneven and at risk, with a backlash against gender equality and democratic values threatening hard-won gains. The Report on Beijing30+ review meeting recognizes that the empowerment of women as leaders and decision-makers remains crucial to sustainable development and the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030. Furthermore, it affirms that Gender-balanced decision-making is integral to justice, effective governance, peace and human rights. Therefore, increasing women's participation in leadership roles within political, public, and economic sectors is essential for inclusive societies, strengthening economies, and enriching the decision-making processes. Yet this recognition must be embedded in systems of change, legislations, social norms, and backed by a strong political will to enhance the role of women in politics.

Building on the above context, this webinar series explored the challenges, opportunities, and future for women in politics, highlighting global trends in women's political participation over the past 30 years. The discussion was conducted in three languages (Arabic, English, and French) and was structured around the following key questions:

- History of the Beijing Platform for Action – Significance of the platform as a key moment in history that guided women's equal representation and participation.
- How have indicators on gender equality changed over the last 30 years?
- How do we as development sector practitioners improve women's political participation in the next decade? What steps must be taken today?

- Transforming Social Norms for sustainable change. Given the backsliding of democracy, the next decade demands a concerted effort by activists and advocates of gender equality – what steps are needed?
- Looking inwards, how can women-led movements organize better to have concrete impact in the next decade?

Speakers:

- Amanda Luz, Program Director, *People Powered* (Brazil)

- Anna Sande, Young Politician, *Citizens Coalition for Change* (Zimbabwe)

- Emma Meche, Youth Activist, *Beijing+30 Youth Steering Committee* (Albania)

The talk was moderated by *Amna Syed, Project Coordinator, iKNOW Politics*

Key Highlights

- Amanda reflected that while the proportion of women in parliaments has more than doubled globally since 1995, representation alone does not guarantee influence or safety. She emphasized that participation must go beyond counting numbers *"We should ask how participation feels, whether it's safe, and whether it leads to meaningful influence."*

- Anna Sande built on this by noting that in many contexts, women still lack access to the *platform* itself especially in restrictive political environments. She underscored that political will and structural change are necessary: *"We cannot measure progress only by how many women sit in parliament but by whether the environment allows them to fully organize, lead, and be heard."*

- Emma Meçaj (Albania) emphasized that despite progress, no country has fully met the commitments of the Beijing Declaration. She highlighted persisting gender gaps in financing, violence against women, and underrepresentation in leadership pointing out that *"only 27 countries have a woman head of state."*

Challenges Identified

- Amanda pointed to the limits of current indicators, explaining that traditional measures of gender equality fail to capture women's actual experience of power and safety in political spaces.

- Anna cited patriarchal political systems and restrictive laws that hinder women's access to public life particularly in authoritarian contexts. She also mentioned that women are often confined to "women's wings" within parties, reinforcing tokenism.

- Emma stressed violence against women in politics both offline and online as a key barrier to young women's participation, especially due to technology-facilitated

gender-based violence and hate speech. She added that democratic backsliding in many regions is eroding previous gains.

- Panelists argued that social norms cannot change through discourse alone, but through institutional reform embedding gender inclusion into laws, policies, and everyday governance practices, highlighting how patriarchal culture and gendered socialization continue to devalue women's leadership from the family to community level, and urged for gender-sensitive cultural change starting within households.

- Emma reinforced that education and behavioral change are key to dismantling stereotypes. She encouraged governments and CSOs to invest in community-level behavior change programs, especially targeting youth.

Recommendations and Way Forward

Strengthen Institutions and Decision-Making Systems

- Mainstream gender inclusion across public institutions, ensuring women meaningfully shape decisions rather than only occupy seats.

- Enforce anti-discrimination and anti-violence laws to protect women—particularly young women—from harassment in political and public spaces.

- Adopt gender-responsive budgeting and temporary special measures to accelerate parity in leadership.

Invest in Grassroots and Local Women's Leadership

- Support women's political organizing and leadership in rural and community settings to connect national commitments with lived realities.

- Prioritize capacity-building for women already in office to enable them to influence, lead effectively, and open pathways for others.

Build Solidarity and Intergenerational Networks

- Strengthen mentorship and leadership pipelines between established women leaders and young women entering politics.

- Promote cross-border collaboration and exchange among women's movements to share strategies and support one another.

- Recognize women-led movements as core political actors shaping democratic life, not as auxiliary community groups.

Address Digital and Structural Barriers

- Develop coordinated frameworks with social media and tech platforms to prevent and respond to technology-facilitated gender-based violence.

- Redefine progress indicators beyond representation to include agency, safety, influence, and the quality of participation.

- Reduce the burden of unpaid care work, which continues to limit women's time, mobility, and ability to lead.

Engage Men and Boys as Allies

- Encourage men and boys to actively challenge patriarchal norms and share responsibilities in both private and public spheres.

- Frame gender equality as a shared democratic value, not a women's issue.

Shift from Token Inclusion to Systemic Transformation

- Fund participation, not just representation—investing in leadership development, care support, and political protection.

- Broaden the definition of political participation to include informal and community-based leadership.

- Move from consultation to co-creation, ensuring women help define priorities and shape policy from the outset.