

Webinar Report – ‘From Words to Action: Reviewing CSW69’



Key Takeaways

1. **Declarations Must Lead to Action:** High-level declarations alone are not enough. There must be **concrete national and multilateral frameworks, budgets, and accountability mechanisms** to drive real change that are cross-cutting to drive grass-root change. The difficult negotiation process at CSW69, particularly considering emerging anti-gender rhetoric and its impact on previously agreed language within the UN frameworks was also highlighted.
2. **Effective Youth Inclusion is Essential:** For sustainable change, the lived experiences and voices of youth must take center stage at events like CSW. Moreover, the intergenerational aspect of the CSW must be expanded to ensure dialogue in all spaces is representative of experience and representation of different generations of stakeholders.
3. **Funding Challenges:** The current wave of political regression concerning gender equality is creating unprecedented funding challenges for women's rights CSOs and forcing many to rethink their future strategies and operational models.
4. **Realigning Power & Responsibility:** The movement must shift from organization-driven mandates to **people-centered responsibility**. Activism should reflect the realities of those most impacted.
5. **Engaging Men and Boys:** Fostering a supportive environment for women's political participation demands a shift in cultural attitudes by engaging men and boys in discussions on gender equality, leadership, and respectful public discourse.

Overview

In 2025, the global community is commemorating the thirtieth anniversary of the [Fourth World Conference on Women](#) and adoption of the [Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action \(1995\)](#). In this vein the sixty-ninth session of the [Commission on the Status of Women](#) took place at United Nations Headquarters in New York from 10 to 21 March 2025.

The main focus of the session was on the review and appraisal of the implementation of the [Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action](#) and the outcomes of the [23rd special session of the General Assembly](#). The review assessed ongoing challenges hindering the realization of gender equality and women's empowerment and examined how these efforts contribute to achieving the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. At CSW69 countries adopted the [Political Declaration](#) recommitting to the global agenda of gender equality and empowerment. In addition, various side events organized by CSOs and partners addressed some of the most critical issues on gender inclusion, empowerment and representation.

In this vein iKNOW Politics held three webinars in Arabic (09/05/2025), English (29/04/2025) and Spanish (25/04/2025) on the topic of 'From Words to Action – Reviewing the CSW69'. These webinars explored the following key questions stemming from the discussions and outcomes of CSW69.

- What were the salient themes discussed during the CSW69 that address some of the most pressing issues for Women in Politics?
- What are the salient features of the Political Declaration that has been adopted?
- Reflections/Impressions on the sessions by speakers of the webinar.
- There is a significant global backlash against democracy and gender equity. Do you think the perspectives/commitments you heard at CSW69 meet the challenges of our time?
- Strategically speaking, what were your key lessons learnt, and how can they be implemented in your context.
- What was missing in the discussions, what direction can future agendas of CSW take?
- What lies ahead for Women's Political Participation based on the commitments at the CSW69?

Speakers





The Spanish-speaking session was held on 25 April 2025 with the following speakers:

			
Cécile Roth Partnerships Officer, Focal point for Equality UCLG World Secretariat Barcelona	Adrià Duarte Head of ODP and Coordinator of UCLG Committee on Social Inclusion, Participatory Democracy and Human Rights	Johana Núñez Prefect of Santo Domingo de los Tsáchilas, Ecuador	Marta Suero Diputación de Barcelona, Spain

The English-speaking session was held on 29 April 2025 with the following speakers:

			
Lamar Zala Gran Afghan activist and founder of the nonprofit organization Empowering Afghan Women	Nyaradzo 'Nyari' Mashayamombe Executive Director – Tag a Life International Trust	Sonakshi Agarwal Lead Programmes and Knowledge Management, Gender at Work, India	Vandita Morarka Co-Founder One Future Collective

The Arabic-speaking session was held on 09 May 2025 with the following speakers:

				
Hedia Belhadj Youssef Gender based Violence Programme coordinator at CAWTAR, Tunisia	Nada Nashat Head of Women's public participation program at CEWLA, Egypt	Samah Krichah Head of Training and Learning at Women's Budget Group, UK	Marwa Jabou Counsellor at the Permanent Mission of Tunisia to the United Nations	Shaimaa Tantaway Executive Director at Barah Aamen, Egypt

The Political Declaration adopted at CSW69

[Political declaration](#) on the occasion of the thirtieth anniversary of the Fourth World Conference on Women was adopted at the 69th Session of the Commission on the Status of Women. The political declaration features more comprehensive language on violence against women, including explicit references to both sexual and gender-based violence, as well as sexual violence in conflict. However, conflict-related language often faces resistance from conservative member states, who believe such issues should be addressed exclusively by the UN Security Council. The declaration also emphasizes the importance of ensuring that all survivors of violence against women have access to social and healthcare services. It includes stronger commitments to addressing violence facilitated or intensified by digital technologies such as social media and artificial intelligence. These developments represent significant progress in advancing women's rights and gender equality, largely driven by the persistent efforts of women's civil society groups, feminist activists, and supportive member states engaged in the negotiation process.

"We have to ask—are governments even interested in addressing backlash, especially when they are often the ones perpetuating it? It can't just be a few NGOs holding states accountable; it has to be a collective effort by citizens. That's why it's critical to think about what spaces exist outside of the UN and multilateral systems for civil society to come together, organize, and take action."

Vandita Morarka, One Futures Collective.

However, some gaps were notable particularly as the Political Declaration omitted references to LGBTQ rights, women human rights defenders, and sexual and reproductive health rights (SRHR). According to member-state representatives involved in the negotiations, there was significant caution around the potential inclusion of "family rights language"—a term often championed by conservative governments to promote traditional, patriarchal views of family roles, which can undermine women's autonomy by reinforcing their roles primarily as mothers and wives. Although framed as a benign concept, this language is frequently used to push back against gender equality. In response, progressive countries chose to compromise by dropping SRHR language to block the inclusion of these regressive "family rights" provisions, ultimately settling on a version of the declaration that both sides could accept.

"The political declaration, while limited in its legal power, serves as a foundational document that can drive national advocacy and influence global discourse. Its recognition of emerging challenges such as technology-enabled gender-based violence, digital inclusion, and the gendered impacts of climate change signals the evolving priorities of our time. The text also draws meaningful connections to binding instruments like CEDAW and the SDGs, reinforcing its relevance. Yet, the absence of language on LGBTQIA+ rights is a stark reminder of the political regression we're witnessing, especially given prior progress in regional UN processes." **Sonakshi Agarwal**, Gender at Work.

Panelists in the Arabic speaking webinar expressed concern over the vague and generic language used in the declaration, particularly regarding gender-based violence (GBV) and technology-facilitated gender-based violence (TFGBV). They emphasized that the wording failed to reflect the diverse realities of women, especially those facing intersectional forms of violence—such as women with disabilities, women in conflict zones, and those targeted due to their race, religion, or color. This lack of specificity risks excluding the protection needs of many survivors and victims.

Marwa Jabou reflected on her participation in the negotiations surrounding the political declaration, noting that it lacked several fundamental themes. “These included multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination, economic violence, strengthened accountability and funding mechanisms, support for women in decision-making roles and women-led organizations, and the empowerment of women in rural areas,” she stated.

CSW69 and Enhancing Women’s Political Participation

In the Spanish webinar, Hon. **Johanna Núñez** shared insights from nearly two decades in politics, highlighting how the past six years have become increasingly difficult for women leaders due to political persecution and GBV. She pointed to the deeply rooted machismo in Ecuador’s political scene, which undermines women’s credibility and safety. Despite these challenges, Núñez emphasized the importance of initiatives like the School of Women Leaders, which build women’s skills and confidence to challenge patriarchal norms from within.

As a participant at CSW69, she noted that many discussions focused on local and grassroots initiatives, highlighting feminist municipal efforts by UCLG that promote women’s leadership in local governance through measures such as gender quotas. Moreover, the CSW69 discussions emphasized the importance of strong community ties, effective public policies, digital literacy, and international cooperation to create safe, equitable spaces for women. Gender-responsive policies were underscored as essential for protecting rights, advancing economic justice, and addressing climate change. Male leaders’ involvement in feminist alliances was encouraged to build inclusive democracies.

A major concern raised was the lack of adequate national funding, which limits local governments’ ability to advance gender equality. The CSW69 declaration prioritized increasing women’s political participation and securing necessary financing.

“It is important for women to recognize that they are capable and to have self-love. Academic preparation is also key to developing a responsible political career, equipped with the knowledge necessary to comply with the legal framework of each country.”

Johana Núñez, Prefect of Santo Domingo de los Tsáchilas, Ecuador

Feminist Municipalism

The Spanish webinar, organized with support from United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG), provided an opportunity to hear perspectives from Latin America, particularly at the local government level. The event spotlighted feminist municipalism as a transformative strategy for advancing gender equality in local governance.

The concept of feminist municipalism¹ emerged as a critical framework for transforming local governance through gender equality. Panellists discussed how integrating feminist principles into municipal structures can foster more inclusive, equitable, and participatory political systems. This approach involves gender mainstreaming in policy design and implementation, intergenerational

¹ “The Feminist Municipal Movement is about groundbreaking constructions around public power, its administrations and policies that are led on the one hand by women politicians, and on the other, through bottom-up processes in local territories, by women’s and feminist networks and organizations.” *TOWARDS A GLOBAL FEMINIST MUNICIPAL MOVEMENT*, UCLG 2021 https://women.uclg.org/sites/default/files/2021-03/Report_%20Towards%20a%20global%20feminist%20municipal%20movement.pdf

dialogue, and a commitment to cultural transformation within governance institutions. Feminist municipalism advocates for reshaping power dynamics by centring women's voices in local decision-making processes and ensuring that public services respond to the specific needs of women and marginalized communities. The discussion also highlighted the value of international cooperation in advancing these goals and the importance of sustained political will at both the local and global levels.

“As a collective in the feminist municipal movement, we aim to connect local and international levels, renew political will, and create joint strategies to advance equality. We work from individual leadership to transforming social norms, with alliances including men, youth, and civil society, to build more horizontal and inclusive democracies.” **Cécile Roth**, UCLG World Secretariat Barcelona

Commitments from Beijing+30

Prefect Núñez shared key highlights from her participation in the UN Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) and reiterated seven major commitments reaffirmed during the Beijing+30 process. These included the implementation of gender-sensitive and sustainable budgeting, increased representation of women in decision-making roles, and the expansion of care systems and gender-responsive public services. Additional priorities included promoting technological inclusion and digital literacy for women, the disaggregation of data to inform and evaluate gender policies, fostering environmental governance with a gender perspective, and ensuring economic justice and entrepreneurship opportunities for women. These commitments serve as a roadmap for both national and local governments seeking to create enabling environments for women's empowerment and gender equality.

Collaboration for Gender Equality

The discussion emphasized the importance of collaborative efforts between platforms like iKNOW Politics, networks such as UCLG, and local government entities. Participants highlighted that sustainable gender equality cannot be achieved in isolation and requires the active participation of a wide range of stakeholders, including civil society organizations, men as allies, and international partners. Addressing resistance to gender equality, particularly around cultural norms and masculinities, was recognized as an essential step in building inclusive societies. Speakers also pointed to the interconnectedness of digital safety, economic empowerment, and local leadership, noting that progress in one area often supports advancement in others. A multisectoral and intersectional approach was deemed critical to dismantling structural barriers and driving systemic change.

Political Negotiations: Funding Opportunities and Hard Won Gains

This year's CSW discussions were marked by significant challenges, largely due to a noticeable rollback in the position of an increasing number of states on women's rights. Ms. **Marwa Jabou**, noted during the Arabic webinar that consensus on the political declaration was reached at the last minute, preserving previously politically “agreed language” and hard-won gains for women. During the negotiations, the African Group—including Tunisia—opposed the anti-gender, regressive stance. This position was the result of intense intra-group negotiations “that continued into the early morning hours to reach a balanced African consensus acceptable to all members,” said Marwa.

CSOs were actively involved in the preparatory process for the political declaration, which began several months in advance. Their engagement included participation in consultations, advocacy, and

side events. Certain thematic areas received more attention in CSOs discussions, such as care work, Technology Facilitated Gender based Violence (TFGBV), financing for civil society, and the status of women in conflict and peacebuilding agendas.

A point of concern that was echoed by panelists across webinars was the mechanism through which civil society is represented in CSW discussions—primarily through selection by national delegations. Panelists questioned the representativeness of participating CSOs, particularly whether they were independent or aligned with government positions. This dynamic potentially leads to an emphasis on national achievements rather than addressing systemic and unresolved issues. However, Ms. **Nyaradzo 'Nyari' Mashayamombe**, highlighted during the English webinar that in her experience as a civil society activist and practitioner, the Civil Society is more dynamic in their role at the CSW which means that CSW has been provided the CSOs with tools and benchmarks to hold their governments accountable. ‘Even in this time of backlash against gender and democracy, the discussion during the CSW was anchored in the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. The CSW is a will always be a global platform to bring forward a joint agenda for gender empowerment, build transnational solidarity, get an understanding of the global funding tracks, and a key space policy support.

“CSW remains to be a critical space to seek our opportunities to support youth, feminist leadership, building and engagement in policy spaces.” **Sonakshi Agarwal**, Gender at Work India.

The complexity of funding channels—both globally and within South-South cooperation frameworks—requires greater attention in ongoing discussions around women’s rights and sustainable civil society support. This point was addressed in detail during the Arabic webinar, where it was highlighted that certain national and regional political contexts pose significant obstacles to initiating constructive discussions around new funding approaches. At the national level, **Nada Nashat** from CEWLA, Egypt observed that national funding mechanisms are often restricted to areas such as culture, charitable initiatives, and environmental development projects. Many women’s rights CSOs in North Africa avoid engaging with topics that intersect with any political discourse.

"Some regional funding mechanisms do exist—for example, the Arab Gulf Program for Development (AGFUND), which supports a variety of programs and sectors. However, these mechanisms remain insufficient." **Hedia Belhadj Youssef**, CAWTAR Tunisia.

“Gender equality, inclusion, and women's issues have historically been treated as secondary priorities by decision-makers in the Arab region and across much of the Global South,” **Samah Krichah**, Women Budget Group UK stated.

Moreover, **Hedia** proposed the creation of a new support fund dedicated to civil society, particularly within the framework of the Arab League, expressing hope that such an initiative might come to fruition in the future.

The Role of Multilateral UN bodies and Grass Root Communities

“The people I work with don’t know what CSW is—and not because of ignorance, but because it has no tangible impact on their daily lives. Declarations and funding decisions may happen, but by the time anything trickles down, it barely means anything. Communities survive by supporting each other. The real question isn’t how to bring grassroots organizations into CSW—it’s how to make CSW relevant to them.”

Vandita Morarka, One Future Collective

At CSW69, discussions revealed a widening disconnect between global multilateral processes and grassroots realities. Vandita (One Future Collective) highlighted that many community members are not only unfamiliar with the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW)—they also don't see it as relevant. While declarations and global commitments are made, they rarely trickle down to have real impact. They emphasized that the focus should not just be on integrating grassroots voices into CSW spaces, but on structurally rethinking how CSW can become relevant and accessible to the communities it aims to represent. Furthermore, the funding crisis, especially after major cuts like those from USAID, has pushed many feminist organizations into survival mode, reducing their capacity to collectively advocate and organize during such key international moments.

“We need people-powered accountability—not just five NGOs holding states to account. Citizens and collectives must have the tools and platforms to organize.” **Vandita Morarka**, One Future Collective

Nyari Mashayamombe (Tag a Life, Zimbabwe) reinforced this perspective by pointing out the weak enforcement mechanisms at CSW. Governments often report progress that is disconnected from on-the-ground realities, while shadow reports from civil society—though crucial—are submitted only weeks before CSW and often receive limited attention. Nyari also made a critical intervention on the value of CSW as a political space, especially in times of backlash. She noted that while it's easy to become disillusioned, feminist spaces like CSW remain essential for defending hard-won gains.

Youth and Intergenerational Inclusion

During the English webinar, panelists underscored the critical need to create intentional space for young people—particularly young feminist leaders—in global and national advocacy platforms. **Lamar Zala Gran** highlighted the lack of visible youth voices, particularly Afghan youth, in key CSW69 conversations. Reflecting on her experience as a young activist, she noted that while Afghan women are deeply impacted by the ongoing gender apartheid, youth perspectives were largely missing from the CSW dialogue. She emphasized that young women bring unique experiences and energy to feminist movements and must be part of the decision-making tables shaping their future.

“I wanted to hear youth perspectives in every part of CSW, especially on Afghanistan. We are the generation most affected, yet we were not fully included.” **Lamar Zala Gran**, Empowering Afghan Women.

Similarly, **Sonakshi Agarwal** shared her experience leading youth engagement efforts through Gender at Work India, including anchoring the India CSO Beijing+30 Review process and collaborating with UN Women to amplify young voices in policy spaces. She reflected on the importance of CSW69 acknowledging the interconnectedness of youth leadership, digital inclusion, and feminist organizing.

“We work to create safe spaces for feminist youth leadership—to ensure that their voices are mainstreamed in policymaking and not tokenized.” **Sonakshi Agarwal**, Gender at Work India

The discussion called for greater intergenerational dialogue, not only on advocacy platforms but also in institutional decision-making. It reinforced the idea that transformational leadership must be co-created across generations, with youth seen not just as beneficiaries but as equal partners in shaping feminist futures. It also identified the significance of CSW as a space for intergenerational dialogue, as the global community converges to renegotiate the terms for gender inclusion, representation and participation

Panelists in the Arabic speaking webinar highlighted the critical role of online activism in the region, especially for women in vulnerable contexts. They cited successful regional campaigns against honor killings and national efforts in Egypt that led to the enactment of a sexual harassment law and amendments to family law. However, they questioned how such digital activism is being integrated with on-the-ground efforts within CSW's follow-up mechanisms and future strategies.

Digital Rights and Gender Justice

During the English webinar, **Sonakshi Agarwal** emphasized the growing urgency of addressing technology-facilitated gender-based violence (TFGBV) and the digital divide through feminist policy and advocacy. Reflecting on the CSW69 political declaration and side event discussions, she welcomed the inclusion of TFGBV in the formal text, noting it as an important recognition of an evolving and pervasive form of harm.

“It was encouraging to see TFGBV formally recognized in the political declaration, but recognition must now translate into actionable digital rights policies that are gender-sensitive and inclusive.”

Sonakshi Agarwal, Gender at Work India

Sonakshi also pointed to the broader digital economy, calling for gender-responsive approaches to artificial intelligence, data governance, and online safety. As digital platforms increasingly shape civic space, economic participation, and political discourse, feminist movements must not only respond to harms but also shape the future of digital governance.

She noted that young women, LGBTQIA+ persons, and other marginalized groups are often disproportionately targeted online, while simultaneously being excluded from the development of digital policy. CSW69 side events provided critical space to explore how global cooperation can ensure that digital transformation supports instead of undermining gender justice.

Conclusion

The webinar brought spotlighted some of the key achievements, critical gaps and opportunities that were present at CSW69. It noted how CSW69 offered a critical opportunity to assess progress, confront setbacks, and reaffirm collective commitments to gender equality in a rapidly changing global context. While the political declaration made notable advances especially in recognizing digital harms and reinforcing links to binding frameworks, gaps remain in addressing intersecting identities, LGBTQIA+ rights, and the role of grassroots and youth-led movements. Speakers across webinars emphasized that meaningful change requires more than symbolic inclusion; it calls for redistributing power, ensuring sustained funding for feminist movements, and centering the lived realities of women and marginalized communities. As backlash intensifies globally, CSW must evolve into a space that not only reflects feminist priorities but also enables accountability, solidarity, and transformative action. Strengthening intergenerational leadership, investing in feminist digital strategies, and reclaiming civic space must be core pillars of this evolution both within CSW and beyond.

Next Steps and Action Points

- Provide ongoing support for initiatives that build the skills, confidence, and capacity of aspiring women and young leaders, including training in political participation, policymaking, digital literacy, and public speaking, as well as mentorship from experienced public figures.

- Encourage local authorities to support women's political engagement by implementing policies and programs that foster participation, provide technical and financial support, and ensure women's perspectives are integrated into political decision-making processes.
- Use education and dialogue to shift cultural attitudes by engaging men and boys in discussions on gender equality, leadership, and respectful public discourse, fostering a more supportive environment for women's political participation.
- Expand access to childcare, healthcare, and support services, especially for victims of violence, to eliminate structural barriers that restrict women's involvement in political and civic life.
- Ensure women have access to financing, business development support, and market opportunities to build independence and create pathways to leadership roles in both public and private sectors.
- Promote ongoing cooperation among local governments, civil society, and international networks through forums, best practice exchanges, and joint strategies to build collective momentum and coordinate efforts for gender equality in politics.
- The panelists also shared examples of their work aligned with CSW political frameworks, particularly in areas such as gender-responsive budgeting, social norms, and GBV.
- The panelists underscored critical gaps in the CSW69 outcomes, particularly the use of generalized language in some critical issues relevant to violence, and in reflecting the intersecting identities of women and girls in all their diversity.