

Questionnaire - Participation and decision-making in global governance spaces

Contribution of the Women 7



24 May 2019

1. Please share your experience in exercising, or seeking to exercise, your right to participate in public affairs in one or several of the following global governance groupings/spaces: G7, G20, G77/G24, NAM, BRICS, WEF and BG in terms of:
 - a. Access;
 - b. Inclusivity; and
 - c. Influencing the decision-making process.

As the Women 7 movement, our role was recognised by the French government, who identified us as one of the “groupes d’engagement” for this year’s G7, together with the Youth 7, the Civil Society 7, the Labour 7, among others.

For what concerns the accessibility to the processes and spaces of global government, for now this has depended on the specific phases of the process. For example, within the different G7 ministerial meetings, our involvement has depended on the specific Ministry in charge. Overall, it is possible to argue that a certain space was given to us at least in terms of consultation. For the gender equality ministerial meeting, the G7 gender equality ministers themselves and/or their representatives attended our civil society summit (Women 7 Summit) and we had the opportunity to effectively handover our recommendations directly to them, our target audience.

In terms of an inclusive approach, the process has not been particular explicit: more precisely, we have been given some space as the Women 7 movement itself, and it was in a way up to us to ensure a certain representation and participation. There was not a specific request, on the part of the French government for example, to specifically pay attention to the needs of the most marginalised groups and groups facing intersecting inequalities. This does not necessarily highlight a lack of interest, but it also does not highlight a specific interest on the specific needs of these groups in terms of gender equality.

Concerning our concrete influence on the decision-making processes, we can argue that our advocacy actions have allowed certain issues to come to light and certain discussions to be had in the public forum on the G7 process. Moreover, arguably the strong advocacy has had an effect on specific commitments taken by some countries of the G7. For example, the French government has declared the establishment of a specific fund, through the Official Development Assistance, for women’s and girls’ rights associations in countries of the Global

South. Funding for feminist associations and organisations has been one of our central recommendations from the beginning of this movement and coalition.

However, at a practical level, political priorities still had their way over certain issues, particularly when it came to the development of a common declaration between G7 countries at the Gender Equality Ministerial Meeting: a clear example is the lack of mention of women's and girls' sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR), whose importance is central to our advocacy. In particular, the United States have clearly opposed the inclusion of SRHR in this final common declaration.

The French government decided to continue having a Gender Equality Advisory Council (GEAC) as created by the Canadian government in 2018. The GEAC has a strong role to play to advocate for gender equality and influence G7 countries decisions. Therefore the Women 7 works closely with some members of the GEAC to provide recommendations and create valuable and constructive exchanges.

Even if GEAC members have been appointed by the French Presidency of the G7, the renewal of the GEAC shows political willingness from the French presidency to include a certain civil society perspective.

Within the framework of the Environment Ministerial Meeting, the French Ministry for the Ecological and Solidary Transition (*Environment*) created a civil society coalition named G.R.E.A.T. and approached some OSC to join the coalition. The Women 7 decided not to join especially because the goals of the aforementioned coalition were unclear.

2. What were the main structural and/or practical obstacles you or your colleagues encountered when participating, or seeking to participate, prior to, during and after decision-making (for instance in terms of shaping the agenda of decision-making processes, participation at an early stage when all options are still open, accreditation, physical and/or online access to forums, issuance of visas, availability of funds, access to information relevant to decision-making processes, etc.)?

At a practical level, the French government has been quite open with us until this stage involving us in the different phases of the process. However, arguably, we have not been included in a direct manner at the negotiation table, for example in the course of the Gender Equality Ministerial Meeting. This was justified also by arguing that the role of the civil society organisations was represented by the Gender Equality Advisory Council. This was true also for the previous Ministerial meetings, where even if some form of consultation was implemented, the Women 7 did not effectively have a seat at the decision-making table.

We are now in the process to request additional involvement in the future Ministerial meetings, to take place between June and July, as well as in the G7 Biarritz Summit itself, which will take place at the end of August. We still do not know the extent of our involvement, whether we will have badges, etc.

These difficulties are due, sometimes, to a lack of political will, but it is more likely that decision-makers have not quite understood the added-value of involving civil society in policy and

decision-making yet. In most cases, the involvement of civil society is seen as a constraint, or merely as a box that governments must “tick” to ensure an “inclusive” process, rather than a strategic step to improve policies. There is a need to advocate for a better integration of civil society actors, and especially feminist advocates, not only for the sake of it, but also because they are experts on gender equality, on the frontline, and they are in the best position to identify and promote the specific needs of women and girls.

3. Which improvements do you see as key to secure genuine and meaningful participation in decision-making processes of the aforementioned groupings/spaces, including by the underrepresented parts of society as mentioned above, victims of discrimination and marginalization because of their sexual orientation and gender identity, as well as social movements?

Improvements could be made by effectively integrating civil society not only in side consultations but in the course of negotiations, to ensure that the different recommendations and perspectives of activists and organisations working “on the field” are really taken into account. Moreover, specific efforts should be made to identify and involving the organisations and associations led by and working for the most marginalised groups. Improvement could be made by ensuring a full and effective participation of the W7 at each ministerial meeting and during the Biarritz Summit: it includes to consult the W7 before each ministerial meeting and to ensure we have a seat at the negotiation table.

One of the main gaps of the G7 process is that it is an exclusive “club of the wealthiest” and that it focuses mainly on trade, security and diplomacy, excluding civil society actors from the Global South and marginalized groups, despite the fact that they are the first affected by its decisions. Recently, the Canadian and French Presidency showed that there was a will to open up the process and to tackle broader issues such as gender equality, ecology or youth. This year’s G7 more particularly is a window of opportunity to open up the process to States and stakeholders outside of traditional G7 members and to enshrine gender equality in the agenda. Youth feminist advocates outside of G7 - especially from West Africa - were able to participate in high-level political meetings with G7 sherpas and ministers, as well as with the President himself. The Women 7 advocated and pushed for this at every step of the process. This is a big “win” of this G7 and it must be safeguarded. The effective participation of youth feminist advocates should be systematic in all policy and decision-making processes.

4. What has been your experience exercising, or seeking to exercise, your rights to freedom of expression, peaceful assembly and association in the holding of meetings of one or several of the aforementioned groupings/spaces and in the margins thereof?

As the Women 7 movement, we have felt that our right to freedom of expression and our right to freedom of association has been respected.

The Women 7 had access to the media. It published various press releases, articles in national newspapers as well as posts on social networks to state its position.

5. Have you or your colleagues been the subject of reprisal because of your participation, or attempt to participate, in a meeting or activity of one or several of the aforementioned groupings/spaces? If so, please provide information on the type of reprisal, the perpetrator(s), whether you reported the case to the organizers and the relevant authorities, and which action they took to address the situation and prevent reoccurrences (if any).

We have not been victims of reprisals/ retaliation due to our participation to any meeting within the G7 process.

6. In your view, what is the overall impact of the economic and financial policies of the aforementioned groupings/spaces on a democratic and equitable international order?

The G7 decisions and commitments can have a direct impact on the establishment and protection of a democratic and equitable international order, for example if explicit commitments are taken for the protection and promotion of values and rights such as cultural diversity, inclusion, gender equality. In particular, G7 decisions have an impact not only on the G7 countries themselves, but also in countries of the Global South targeted by specific actions and initiatives. For example, this year the focus has been placed on the Sahel region.

7. More broadly, in what way(s) do you see a lack of genuine and meaningful participation and lack of influencing of decision-making process by the public in global governance grouping/spaces in general hampering the realization of a democratic and equitable international order?

It is absolutely fundamental to ensure a full and effective participations of the most marginalised groups in decision-making processes, within the G7 as well as any other international fora : in fact, they are the ones to be most likely the most affected by policy implementation within the G7 countries and beyond, as well as the most vulnerable. Failing to ensure decision-making processes that include these groups as well as civil society organisations operating at local, national and international level translate into policies that ultimately do not effectively respond to inequalities and to the specific needs of populations across the world.