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Gender mainstreaming in the governance of Global Citizens' Assemblies

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Preface

Citizens' assemblies, no matter how well-designed and well-resourced, remain embedded in the patriarchal structures which shape everyday life. From unconscious biases about men as legitimate bearers of knowledge to female Assembly Members experiencing the 'double shift' of performing both civic and domestic duties, there is no denying that gender inequality shapes the experience of citizen deliberation, for everybody involved.

In this technical paper, Granaz Baloch, Novieta Sari and Melisa Ross put forward actionable recommendations on how the governance of global citizens' assemblies can take steps to realise the principles of gender mainstreaming and improve the conditions for women's participation in deliberation. Their recommendations are grounded on the lived experiences of organisers and participants of the world's first Global Assembly as well as civil society actors, policymakers and journalists based in South Asia – a region known to have sharp gender inequalities.

We hope this technical paper sparks meaningful conversations on how citizens' assemblies can be more courageous in addressing gender inequality in democratic innovations.

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Key Findings

This technical paper aims to begin a conversation about gender mainstreaming in the governance of global citizens' assemblies. Citizens' assemblies aspire to uphold norms of equality and inclusion through deliberation, but everyday realities of patriarchy and hegemonic masculinity distort the experience of global citizen deliberation. In this paper, we offer insights and suggestions on how the governance of global citizens' assemblies can implement gender mainstreaming.

Gender mainstreaming is a concept that encompasses a pluralistic approach towards promoting gender equality and counteracting discrimination, as part of a broader way to improve it through policy level. It entails incorporating an integrated and comprehensive gender perspective through all phases of a deliberative policymaking process and implementation.[1] The goal of gender mainstreaming is to adapt systems and structures to support structurally disadvantaged groups (such as women or children) through the secure underpinning of equal treatment legislation and positive action measures.[2]

Our analysis and recommendations for gender mainstreaming in global citizens' assemblies are based on our systematic review of the world's first Global Citizens' Assembly on the Climate and Ecological Crisis (see https://globalassembly.org/) and on findings from three focus group discussions in South Asia conducted in English, Urdu, Hindi, and Sindhi.

The following table summarizes our findings and recommendations:

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[1] Smith, Ruth, Anna Mdee, and Susannah Sallu. "How gender mainstreaming plays out in Tanzania's climate-smart agricultural policy: Isomorphic mimicry of international discourse." *Development Policy Review* (2023): e12718.

[2] Rees, Teresa. "The politics of 'mainstreaming gender equality." In *The changing politics of gender equality in Britain*, pp. 45-69. London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2002.

Findings	Recommendations
Gender balance was present in the governance of the 2021 Global Assembly, but gender mainstreaming requires more than female representation.	Global Citizens' Assemblies should allow for the direct participation of those most deeply affected by gender-based discrimination in decision-making and process governance. Cluster Facilitators from regions where gender-based discrimination is most pervasive should play that role during the design and planning stage. Community Hosts from countries most affected can be included in decision-making during the implementation stage. Global Citizens' Assemblies should also develop a strategy for gender mainstreaming within the assembly process.
Global deliberation remains embedded in patriarchal societies. Overt and subtle forms of gender-based discrimination prevent female Assembly Members from fully participating in deliberations.	Global Citizens' Assemblies must advance additional measures to facilitate the full participation of Assembly Members most deeply affected by structural constraints and inequalities. These measures include: circulating a gender mainstreaming document, providing gender sensitivity training to process implementers, and empowerment training to Assembly Members (especially those most affected by gender inequality), mapping potential risks for gender-based discrimination, and systematically documenting instances of barriers to participation.
Assembly Members' communities may have existing mechanisms for gender mainstreaming that global citizens' assemblies can build on.	Global citizens' assemblies can build on those mechanisms, for example, through partnerships with local stakeholders. They should also inform Assembly Members about existing protection measures against gender-based discrimination. Global citizens' assemblies can also help inform societal debate about gender equality in Assembly Members' communities, for instance, by co-developing social media and outreach strategies with local stakeholders, implementers, and Assembly Members.

Background

This paper provides recommendations on how gender mainstreaming can be practised in the design and implementation of global citizens' assemblies. Thus far, the scholarly literature on citizens' assemblies offers mixed findings on the extent to which gender equality is upheld in these forums of citizen deliberation. Some studies find that the design of citizens' assemblies enforces equal voice between men and women (though little has been said about LGBTIQA+ populations so far), while others find practices of patriarchy and hegemonic masculinity to continue to affect the deliberative experience[3].

We take the view that gender-based inequalities in citizens' assemblies are rooted not only in the design and implementation of the assembly but also in the governance of these assemblies. In this technical paper, we underscore the importance of gender mainstreaming when putting together the assembly's governance structure and developing strategies for equal participation and identify concrete steps to address gender-based inequalities in citizens' assemblies, particularly those that operate on the global level. Our definition of gender mainstreaming draws from the United Nations definition, based on the Report of the Economic and Social Council for 1997. Gender mainstreaming refers to:

> The process of assessing the implications for women and men of any planned action, including legislation, policies or programmes, in all areas and at all levels. It is a strategy for making women's as well as men's concerns and experiences an integral dimension of the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes in all political, economic and societal spheres so that women and men benefit equally and inequality is not perpetuated. The ultimate goal is to achieve gender equality.[4]

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[3] Gerber, M., Schaub, H. P., & Mueller, S. (2019). O sister, where art thou? Theory and evidence on female participation at citizen assemblies. *European Journal of Politics and Gender*, 2(2), 173-195.

[4] Gender mainstreaming. Extract from Report of the Economic and Social Council for 1997 (A/52/3, 18 September 1997), see: https://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/csw/GMS.PDF. All links cited in this technical paper were last accessed on September 23, 2023.

We recognise the limitations of and critique this definition of gender mainstreaming and, more generally, of the gender mainstreaming agenda. Nevertheless, we consider it suitable to anchor our definition of gender mainstreaming on the mandates of UN member states, emerging from deliberations in inter-governmental bodies of the United Nations. Given that global citizens' assemblies seek to become legitimate actors or institutions in global governance, it is reasonable to expect them to adhere to globally shared norms, including gender mainstreaming.[5]

Our approach to generating recommendations on gender mainstreaming was twofold: first, we conducted a systematic review of the Global Assembly and identified strategies and challenges with regard to gender mainstreaming; second, we convened focus groups to have semi-structure discussions drawing on findings from that analysis. Each phase of the analysis was structured as follows.

Systematic review of the Global Assembly

We conducted a systematic review of the world's first Global Assembly on the Climate and Ecological Crisis to uncover implicit and explicit mechanisms and practices that can reinforce or help overcome gender inequalities. We examined:

- Publicly accessible reports on the Global Assembly, including the Global Assembly Report[6], the Executive Summary[7], and the Evaluation Report.[8]
- Primary data gathered for the evaluation report and the anonymised interviews conducted by the external evaluation team.

Examining the case of the Global Assembly allows us to uncover the multilayered and intersectional character of gender inequality not only among Assembly Members coming from different linguistic, cultural, political, and

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[5] See: https://gendercoordinationandmainstreaming.unwomen.org/gender-mainstreaming-global

[6] See: https://globalassembly.org/resources/downloads/GlobalAssembly2021-FullReport.pdf

[7] See:https://globalassembly.org/resources/downloads/GlobalAssembly2021-ExecutiveSummary.pdf

[8] See: https://researchsystem.canberra.edu.au/ws/portalfiles/portal/82182314/Global_Assembly_Evaluation_Report.pdf.

religious contexts but also between Assembly Members and the assembly's organisers, experts, and other stakeholders.

Focus Group Discussions

We conducted three focus group discussions in 2023 with former Global Assembly participants and local stakeholders with experience in gender mainstreaming. They sought to uncover the potential for gender mainstreaming in the design and implementation of citizens' assemblies. By blending Global Assembly participants and non-participants, we generated conversations beyond one single case, aimed at identifying practical strategies and lessons from other contexts that can inform future global citizens' assemblies. Focus groups were organized as follows:

- Focus groups were composed, in total, of four former participants from the Global Assembly and fourteen local stakeholders who were not part of the Global Assembly.
- Former Global Assembly participants included two Assembly Members, one Facilitator, and two Community Hosts[9].
- Local stakeholders included journalists, policymakers, and civil society actors who were experts in gender-related issues in their communities.
- All participants were based in South Asia. Focus groups were based on language groups (English, Sindhi, and Urdu/Hindi).
- Each focus group lasted between 90 and 120 minutes, with five to seven participants each, conducted online via Zoom.
- To ensure anonymity, quotes in this paper are cited only with reference to the Focus Group the speaker took part in.
- With participants' consent, focus group discussions were recorded and transcribed. Participants agreed that anonymized data may be used for future research.

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[9] The person or organisation in charge of the following in the Global Assembly: 'recruitment of potential Assembly Members for the Core Assembly, contextualization and translation of information materials, promotion of the Global Assembly, enabling participation of Assembly Members (including transportation, internet connectivity and computer access, live translation during sessions or provision thereof, technical support, payment). While often present during deliberations, they served only as a conduit for Assembly Member participation and were instructed not to influence them in any way' (Global Assembly Full Report, 2021, p.33)
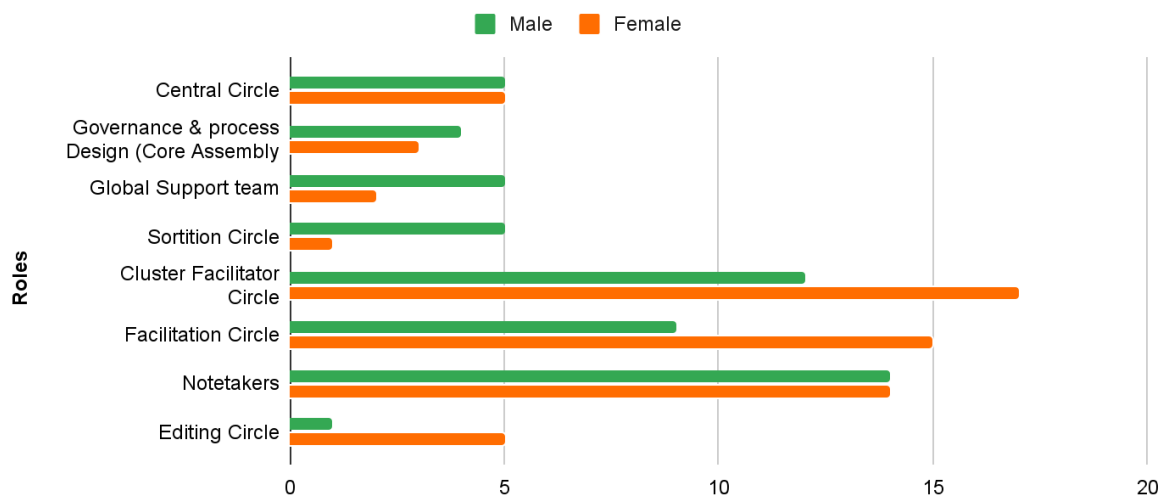
Findings

Our systematic review of the Global Assembly and focus group discussions generated four key findings on gender mainstreaming and global citizens' assemblies.

1. **Gender balance was present in the governance of the Global Assembly, but gender mainstreaming requires more than female representation.**

Based on publicly available documents from the Global Assembly, we observed that gender balance is a prominent feature in its governance structure. The composition of the Central Circle, the group responsible for the overall design and coordination of the Global Assembly, included five men and five women. Half the group was based in Europe, while the rest were across Africa and Asia. This formation was based on demographics rather than a gendered balance perspective, and it was coincidental rather than intentional (Global Assembly Full Report, 2021, pp. 252-266).

Gendered Division of Labour

Source: Global Assembly Full Report (2022, pp. 252- 266)

We also observed a gendered division of labour from the initial stage of designing the assembly to the moment of deliberation. The numbers from the Global Assembly team's report evidence a gendered distribution of roles and responsibilities. Only Central Circle and note-taking roles were effectively

gender-balanced. Design functions were mostly male-led, while delivery and implementation were female-led. Leading implementation tasks required a higher time commitment and more practical responsibilities, from the recruitment through the deliberation process.

The composition of the Central Circle was the starting point for our focus group discussions. Our respondents, however, did not grant this finding as the most relevant. Instead, they proposed that women's lived experience was the most important starting point, rather than gender balance in the governance structure. As one of our respondents put it:

> Be it in the governmental processes or non-governmental processes, the representation at the highest decision-making level is often skewed, and therefore, I think, for all of us, the most necessary step is to put deliberate efforts into identifying who is the most affected by the challenges that we are going to address (Focus Group 2, October 2023).

From a gender-sensitive perspective, those 'most affected' by gender-based challenges can be identified as people coming from societies with stark levels of gender inequality. One of our focus group participants highlighted how important it is to 'intentionally recognise, document, and map out [the most] affected groups' when it comes to gender inequality and invite them or their representatives to participate in the highest-level decision-making process. Critical decisions over the design and implementation of global citizens' assemblies can be informed by the diverse lived experiences of most disadvantaged participants, particularly when it comes to gender-based discrimination.

Viewed this way, it is not enough to use gender balance in core decision-making bodies as a sufficient indicator of gender mainstreaming in the governance of global citizens' assemblies. Instead, it is crucial to comprehend how communities most profoundly impacted by gender-based inequalities influence stakeholders and participants, their involvement in the deliberative process and access to the public sphere.

Gender mainstreaming is also key to the production and dissemination of expert knowledge that serves as the basis for deliberations. The Global Assembly's Knowledge and Wisdom Committee – whose role was 'to ensure the learning

journey of all participants ... were rooted in the best evidence available at that time'[10] – had six male and three female members. Six members were based in Europe and North America, while four were in South Asia, Africa, or Latin America. There were also relevant contributions by witnesses who presented the Assembly members with specific perspectives about the climate crisis based on their lived experiences. They talked about a diverse range of topics, including gender. For example, witness Vaine Wichman from the Cook Islands' Council of Women mentioned the role of women in food security, water scarcity, and sustaining cultural identity through handicrafts in Cook Island[11]. Witness Saad Alfarargi, UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Development, emphasised the equal participation of women in the decision-making process and their contribution to climate-related planning, policy-making, and its implementation. He stated that women are the most vulnerable group affected by extreme weather and bear a greater burden of it under conditions of poverty[12].

2. **Global citizens' assemblies remain embedded in patriarchal societies. Overt and subtle forms of gender-based discrimination prevent female Assembly Members from fully participating in deliberations.**

The Global Assembly provided support for all Assembly Members to overcome certain barriers to participation. These measures included:

- Financial compensation amounting to USD$600. The Global Assembly operated on the principle of 'equal compensation' – that 'everyone who participates will be compensated and valued equally.'[13]
- Community Hosts were local organisations commissioned to support Assembly Members, for example, with the translation of information materials into their first language, organising transportation, securing connectivity and access to digital technologies, and organising physical spaces where Assembly Members can join the Zoom sessions.
- Live translators were available during plenaries and breakout sessions.
- Plenary and Breakout sessions planned in time slots presumed to be more compatible with adults' regular working schedules, i.e., in the evening.

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[10] Global Assembly Full Report, 2021, p.89.
[11] See: https://youtu.be/Hsf1u5NElec
[12] See: https://youtu.be/GZpK-SmbFA8
[13] Global Assembly Full Report, 2021, p. 50.

While these forms of support did lessen barriers to participation, especially among Assembly Members from disadvantaged backgrounds, Assembly Members and our focus group revealed different ways their participation was affected by gender-based discrimination and structural inequalities informing their context. The multiple demands of everyday life conflicted with the engagement needed for the Global Assembly and had a greater impact on women still expected to carry out domestic labour, including managing the home, child-rearing, and/or preparing for cultural festivals and religious celebrations. Due to financial difficulties or culturally assigned gender roles, some female Assembly Members were unable to assign their domestic responsibilities to other family members tasks or rely on someone else for support[14].

Most of these challenges are experienced 'behind the scenes,' meaning outside the visible space of deliberations taking place online and are often implicit and normalised in contexts where women disproportionately carry out domestic labour. These barriers have been documented to some extent in the Global Assembly evaluation report. The following direct quotes from our focus group discussions illustrate some additional difficulties faced by women participants:

Physical vulnerability and exposure to violence

> I travelled to the Community Host's office or other venue where infrastructure for online deliberation was available. For the transportation, I preferred public transport (Auto Rickshaw). Sometimes, it was hard for me to travel at nighttime because of risk of sexual harassment. The timing of deliberation wasn't fixed. In my society, without accompanying men, it was hard to travel late in the evening (Focus Group 3, October 2023).

Incompatibility of deliberation with everyday responsibilities

When I was attending the deliberation, my daughter was responsible for the household tasks at home (Focus Group 3, October 2023).

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[14] See: Global Assembly Full Report, 2021, p. 153-6

Patriarchal power dynamics

> My community, male family members do not like female family members to participate in a citizen assembly run by men. I was interrogated by my male family members. 'What would be the content of the meeting? What type of conversation is going on between me [and Assembly Members around the world] on the laptop?' Sometimes, my male family members would like to accompany me in participatory events or discussions (Focus Group 3, October 2023).

Cultural pressures and constraints

> I felt offended by the comments from my neighbourhood community who questioned my qualifications for being selected in the Global Assembly, which made me consider quitting participation in the assembly (Focus Group 3, October 2023).

These experiences show the need for gender mainstreaming in the governance, design, and implementation of citizens' assemblies. Through the lens of intersectionality, specific practical solutions could have been adopted for specific cases, such as allocating more resources for childcare or considering changing the timing of breakout sessions in concrete cases, which would have improved opportunities for digital interaction for those female Assembly Members affected by gender-based inequalities.

3. Assembly Members' communities may have existing mechanisms for gender mainstreaming that global citizens' assemblies can build on.

Documentation from the 2021 Global Assembly does not specify any particular person or mechanism dedicated to reporting gender-based discrimination during the Assembly. Nevertheless, deeply entrenched patriarchal practices have long existed, and communities and activists around the world have developed mechanisms for gender mainstreaming in response to them. The governance of global citizens' assemblies can build on these existing mechanisms by connecting with Assembly Members' communities.

> In Pakistan, there are different laws that enable the active participation of women for example institutional politics where laws exist but there is no mechanism to implement it. Unfortunately, these mechanisms are often limited

to delivered by international non-governmental organisations [INGOs] in workshops or seminars (Focus Group 1, October 2023)

Existing legal and institutional frameworks for women's empowerment may actually reproduce barriers for their political participation, and sometimes fail to enact gender equality. Still, these tools are in place, and global citizens' assemblies can draw from those experiences. As cited by one respondent, a National Gender Policy Framework is in place in Pakistan[15]. It states that governance is the first priority of gender mainstreaming in order to create an inclusive environment for women.

Assemblies can integrate gender protection tools from existing policy frameworks and draw on existing established gender-responsive infrastructure. For instance, in the Global Assembly, Community Hosts play a crucial role in ensuring that women Assembly Members participate in a meaningful and inclusive way. These stakeholders could develop their support measures building on those frameworks. There is a strong relationship between Assembly members and their communities because they are socially and culturally bonded to each other, particularly in communitarian societies like Pakistan or India. However, patriarchy and gender-biased behaviour also constrain women from participating in political activities or contributing to them. With the support of community hosts, initial conversations could start within the community through local events in cafes or community centres to motivate other women to become more politically engaged.

Moreover, drawing on this kind of policy framework could further help start the conversation about gender-based discrimination and safe environments in Assembly Members' contexts with the support of global citizen assemblies.

> There are various laws in both countries [India and Pakistan] which could increase the [political] participation of Female Assembly members which need to be implemented by the Government and local stakeholders. Also the Human Rights Department and Women Development can create more awareness,

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[15] The National Gender Policy Framework was launched on 8th March 2022 on International Women's day to provide a structured mechanism with defined objectives to support equal opportunities for the lives of Women. The policy is based on six key features, including the "Governance" feature, which talks about developing a gender-transformative governance structure under which the women can play an equal and vital role in governance and making state policies. See: https://www.pc.gov.pk/uploads/report/NGPF.pdf

inclusive and equal participation of females through the Government level (Focus Group 3, October 2023).

Our respondents also felt that the Global Assembly could have done more to maximise social media campaigns, channels, and strategies that could have helped spread the word about the process and promote gender mainstreaming in Assembly Members' communities. Social media has a strong influence in India and Pakistan, for example, especially services like TikTok and Whatsapp where users easily access and share short videos. These stories could play a critical role in explaining Assembly Members' participation, motivating other women to be part of these processes, and helping further gender mainstreaming in Assembly Members' communities.

> I feel that engaging local media or community was needed to spotlight the stories of female Assembly Members including myself where I felt more empowered and confident in participation in the citizens' assembly (Focus Group 3, October 2023).

> Everyone in my village knew about my participation in the Global Assembly even though I spoke in Sindhi. Women of communities communicated with me about how they could be part of the next assembly. I know they want to be involved in climate discussions however they don't get the opportunities to share their opinions (Focus Group 3, October 2023).

Recommendations

We offer three sets of recommendations based on our findings.

1. **Global citizens' assemblies should aim to support and ensure direct participation of those most deeply affected by gender inequality. They should do so in both decision-making processes and governance bodies.**

Representation of people most deeply affected by gender inequality is needed in bodies that decide on the design and implementation of global citizens' assemblies, particularly of those from the Global South and experiencing multidimensional forms of inequality. This form of representation should be implemented already during the recruitment and community building stage, with the support of Cluster Facilitators[16] (or equivalent regional implementation partners) in the selection of Community Hosts (or equivalent local implementation partners) and during potential Assembly Member recruitment[17].

This would mean including Cluster Facilitators into decision-making bodies during the planning and recruitment stage, to voice the specific needs and concerns regarding the participation of groups most affected by gender-based discrimination. During the implementation stage, once Community Hosts have been selected, those working in/from countries where women face more discrimination and other structural barriers to participation can also take part in decision-making bodies.

Finally, promoting and collaboratively developing a comprehensive strategy for gender mainstreaming within the global citizens' assembly is crucial for challenging deeply rooted biases and outdated stereotypes and supporting Assembly Members potentially subject to gender-based discrimination. If global citizens' assemblies aim to bring about societal and cultural changes that foster women's autonomy, participation, and empowerment in social politics,

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[16] See: Global Assembly Full Report, 2021, p. 261-262
[17] See: Global Assembly Full Report, 2021, p. 59-61

their process must be informed by those values. A gender mainstreaming strategy can be developed in consultation with Cluster Facilitators, Community Hosts, and local stakeholders (e.g. community practitioners, see also point 3 below).

2. **Global citizens' assemblies must advance additional measures to facilitate the full participation of Assembly Members most deeply affected by structural constraints and inequalities.**

Future global citizens' assemblies must ensure that no additional harm comes to Assembly Members based on their gender. The governance body should provide all involved in the process with a document that outlines basic principles of gender equality and how they must inform global deliberation. A general document can be drafted with support of all global assembly stakeholders to reflect the scope, complexity, interconnection, and context of the global assembly's approach to equality and, particularly, to gender equality. The document should be written in plain language and also consider social, community and familial norms and dynamics, as well as socio-political conditions in different contexts where Assembly Members are based.

In addition, process implementers of future global citizens' assemblies must be trained to recognise and avoid the (unintentional) reinforcement of outdated gender norms. Gender sensitivity training and empowerment training can be also developed for Assembly Members to enhance their understanding of gender-based discrimination and of the values of equality informing deliberation. This training can be built into participants' onboarding stage.

Moreover, global citizens' assemblies should anticipate supporting individuals identifying with diverse gender identities or experiencing gender-based discrimination in their communities in advance of the deliberation. For example, they can conduct a mapping exercise of the physical, social, and psychological risks of Assembly Members to understand their conditions, contextualised challenges, and preferences, and develop support strategies tailored to their needs. The mapping could also include former participants of (global) deliberation to account for previous experiences and learnings, and local organisations dedicated to gender mainstreaming, to draw on contextualised experiences and learnings. This role could primarily be assigned

to Cluster Facilitators (or equivalent, e.g. regional coordinators). Cluster Facilitators have the advantage of familiarity with their 'clusters' or country groups, their culture and norms, and could thus better adapt gender-sensitive practices. They should also systematically document risks for gender-based discrimination in global deliberation, both from input in the mapping exercise, and from their own experience and observation during the deliberation.

3. **Global citizens' assemblies can build on existing gender mainstreaming mechanisms, and in turn help inform societal debate in Assembly Members' communities.**

Implementers of global citizens' assemblies that are tasked with supporting Assembly Members' participation (such as Community Hosts) can further develop contacts with existing groups, organisations, and institutions advancing gender mainstreaming in their contexts. They can do so through informal or formal partnerships with both civil society organizations, social movements, and dedicated government agencies.

Moreover, implementers can also draw on existing frameworks and mechanisms to ensure the protection of Assembly Members against gender-based discrimination. For example, if concrete cases of discrimination are identified during the mapping exercise (recommended above), implementers can inform Assembly Members – and eventually, their support networks – about those frameworks and indicate existing protection measures. If partnerships are in place with local stakeholders, implementers can further direct Assembly Members towards them for support.

Future global citizens' assemblies could further use their communications infrastructure to disseminate not only the existence of the deliberative process and the participation of Assembly Members, but also to inform about how they promote gender equality. Assembly Members could be invited to record short videos where they share their deliberative experience, speaking in their native languages. These videos could be disseminated in their communities and contexts, supporting a broader gender mainstreaming agenda and cultural change about understandings of women's' political participation.

Acknowledgements