

Outsiders at the G20 Table: How Ivanka Trump and the W20 Are Shaping the Future of Women

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Executive Summary

Women constitute almost half of the world's population but are discriminated against everyday solely due to their gender. Despite the promises of politicians to bring about an equal society and eliminate any sort of discrimination, gender-related issues have been neglected from the heart of national and international agendas. In recent years, with the rise of Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) and women's organisations, gender inequality is now being referred to by politicians and there are some policies underway that are trying to combat gender-related issues. Women20 (W20) is one of those organizations and is working closely with the G20 to address gender issues; however, there are many obstacles that could slow down any progress, such as a lack of resources or interest by G20 member countries. Further, the policies presented by G20 countries are lacking any accountability and no concrete methodology is offered to track these programmes and help achieve targets.

Introduction

It was at the end of German Chancellor Angela Merkel's welcome speech at the G20 Hamburg Summit that she mentioned women's empowerment and the elimination of gender inequality as issues to be discussed on the agenda. Simply this brief mention was enough for women's organisations, the W20 group and any journalist passionate about gender equality to get excited and hopeful. The G20 summit is an inclusive platform to discuss ongoing global and domestic issues, reach a consensus on responses and plan for the world's future. Further, it has the power to give legitimacy to organisations and initiatives as well as influence the economic and social aspects of people's lives. Gender equality has been a heated topic for the past few years among developed countries and human rights' activists. Nevertheless, there has been little discussion about the issue on a stage with a similarly high profile, such as the G20. However, since the [establishment of the W20 group in 2015](#), gender-related discrimination has only this year been given its own dedicated section in the Leaders' Declaration, whereas in the past it was only mentioned

alongside other minorities' issues. So, two years after the first W20 summit and its presence within the G20, there is still room to be sceptical about whether the group has managed to change this reality or whether the G20 remains ignorant towards gender inequality.

The Birth of the W20

In response to the Turkish Presidency's proposal to establish the W20 as a G20 engagement and civil society group, all members reached a consensus in 2015 to establish the W20 in order to raise the profile of gender issues and bring the discussions around gender equality to the G20 table. The first meeting of the W20 group was held just a few weeks before the Antalya Summit in 2015. A list of recommendations was then proposed to the G20 leaders, which mostly focused on economic empowerment, increasing the number of women in both the public and private sectors as well as the elimination of gender discrimination and improving social care for women. Nevertheless, NGOs and women's organisations did not have enough time between the W20 and G20 Summits to lobby and push their agenda, and as a result not much was achieved in terms of policy implementation. The main outcome was the recognition of the W20 during the summit as a newly established civil society group. However, the main agreement was the commitment of the G20 to work towards the ["25 by 25" goal](#), which had been presented at the 2014 Brisbane

Summit and refers to the goal of reducing the gender pay gap by 25 per cent by the year 2025.

After the G20 Antalya Summit and acknowledgment of the W20's existence by member countries, the second W20 summit took place the following year, a couple of months before the 2016 G20 Hangzhou Summit in China. Despite the fact that the W20 was still a new group, it managed to spend more time lobbying and dialoguing with officials and ultimately received more recognition among G20 leaders. Subsequently the W20's recommendations became part of the agenda of the G20 in China and were discussed by the leaders during the summit. In the final communiqué, the G20 welcomed the establishment of the W20 group and reaffirmed that gender inclusivity and women's issues had been considered during their summit. Although, once again, there was neither data on progress towards the "25 by 25" goal nor any other concrete policies to end gender-related discrimination and promote women's empowerment. However, the W20 summit in China called upon other countries to join the group to achieve gender equality and bring the discussion around women and their neglected work in society to the heart of national as well as international dialogues. One of the issues that was briefly discussed at the Hangzhou Summit was the role of women in the digital economy and the associated benefits. This issue was intended to be

part of the main agenda for the W20 at the 2017 G20 Summit in Hamburg.

“Optimistic but Hesitant”

During her statement at the press briefing for civil society groups at the 2017 G20 Hamburg Summit prior to the publication of the Leaders’ Declaration, Claudia Grosse-Leege, General Manager of the Association of German Women Entrepreneurs, expressed her feelings towards the future of the W20 group as optimistic and emphasized that the influence of the W20 has increased among G20 members and could bring about positive outcomes. The German NGOs that worked with the W20 prior to the summit were divided into four working groups and each dedicated its efforts towards a specific target. The first group was focused on the gender pay gap and the “25 by 25” goal, as well as labour inclusion. After two years of implementing the plan, there has only been a 0.6 per cent decrease in the gender pay gap. Therefore, if G20 member countries are committed to achieving the goal of reducing the gap by 25 per cent, considerably more discussion and effort will clearly be necessary.

The second group aimed at providing policies to enhance the financial inclusion of women. The third group dedicated its work to bridge the gender gap in the digital economy and recommended policies to include and educate women in

the field. Finally, the last group focused on women’s empowerment and aimed at making women part of the G20 negotiation process, as well as going beyond the borders of G20 member countries to include women in both developed and developing countries. The efforts of these working groups in outlining comprehensive policies and recommendations for G20 countries is a positive development towards changing the status quo on issues related to women. Nevertheless, members of civil society are sceptical and to some extent hesitant regarding the effectiveness of the recommendations and the chances of their implementation by the G20. One of the issues mentioned by Grosse-Leege was the lack of quantitative data to follow the implementation of targets and their progress. This counts as one of the main obstacles in achieving gender equality.

Hoping for a Merkel Miracle

Juliane Rosin, the Executive Manager of the W20 in Germany, expressed optimism with a hint of concern regarding the treatment of women’s empowerment in the Leaders’ Declaration prior to its release. She illustrated how two years after the establishment of the W20, official G20 summit statements have made no actual mention of any plans for women’s empowerment and bridging the gender inequality gap. Considering the position of Angela Merkel and her strong stance on women’s issues, Rosin was expecting G20 leaders to negotiate and

agree on issues that need to be addressed. She believed that since G20 countries are representing two-thirds of the population of the world, any decisions made by the G20 could change women's lives tremendously. Further, she explained how it is even harder among the W20 and women's organisations to achieve consensus over an effective and appropriate plan that can be implemented not only by G20 countries but all around the world. Therefore, it is an accomplishment that the W20 in Berlin achieved a comprehensive plan that was recommended to the G20. Although Rosin is aware of how challenging it is to create a consensus on how to impact the issue of gender inequality, she was very pleased with the fact that the work of women's organisations and the W20 Summit have managed to open the discussion of feminism and women's empowerment among world leaders. Finally, Rosin expressed her concerns around the future of the W20 group because G20 members' stances on women's issues are different. Moreover, in the following years non-Western countries, such as [Argentina and Saudi Arabia are hosting the G20 summit](#), therefore it is highly unlikely that they will bring the discussion around women and gender inequality to the summit table. This could be due to a lack of interest or a preoccupation with more international and direct economic conflicts that might distract the hosts from placing gender-related issues at the top of the agenda. This could eventually undermine the work that has already been done by the W20.

Further, her concern about Argentina was mostly around the lack of resources and funding, which could directly and negatively affect the lobbying power of women NGOs and the W20.

The Rise of Ivanka

After two days of discussion, the G20 Leaders' Declaration was published following Merkel's final press conference. For the first time, there is a dedicated section to "women's empowerment", which proposes actions that will be taken by G20 members to achieve gender equality. Firstly, members have reinstated their commitment to the "25 by 25" target as well as elimination of employment discrimination. Furthermore, they have discussed education and access to STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) subjects as key elements to achieve equality. One of the major steps that was taken by the G20 Summit in line with women's empowerment was the launch of the [Women Entrepreneurs Finance Initiative \(We-Fi\) housed at the World Bank](#) group. There have been a lot of controversies around the programme since it was initiated by Ivanka Trump with a donation of US\$50 million by President Trump to give opportunities to women entrepreneurs. Despite any reputational issues, the initiative could bring about changes and enhance the presence of women in the business world and initiate a path towards gender equality. In her final press conference, Chancellor Merkel announced the agreement made by G20

members regarding women's empowerment and eliminating gender inequality and proved that she stayed committed to the promise she gave at the beginning of the summit.

Towards a "gender-equal" world?

Following the publication of the Leaders' Declaration, the W20 group as well as other civil society groups were very pleased about the appearance of the section "women empowerment" for the first time. Although they were satisfied with the result, there is still a long way to go. It is reasonable to be sceptical about the Declaration and the suggested programmes and initiatives by the G20. While bringing gender inequality and women's issues back to the table of summitry could potentially spark the relevant discussions, and inform officials as well as the public about discriminatory behaviours, the targets that are suggested by the G20 at Hamburg lack any clear path as how to achieve them and how to measure the progress towards them. The lack of transparency and actual data by all members of the G20 could potentially weaken the programmes and plans to reach the initial targets. Further, there is no leverage that would hold members of the G20 accountable for their actions or their failure in achieving these goals. If by 2025, the gender pay gap does not lower by 25 per cent, there is no quantitative or

even qualitative method to analyse this failure and demand answers from the member states for their failure. Although the G20 prides itself on representing different countries with a range of cultures, this in itself could be an obstacle towards achieving mutual goals when the situation is different in each country. Lowering the gender pay gap has to be tackled and measured in different ways whether in Saudi Arabia or the United Kingdom for instance. Therefore, it could be more practical if issues such as gender inequality and women's education, which are very closely linked to the domestic situation of each country, are dealt with case by case and targets are set individually. However, it is important for the international community to monitor the progress and make sure that all countries are on the right path towards gender equality. Merkel may have been successful in embedding gender-related issues into the main summit agenda and achieving some sort of agreement. Nevertheless, the lack of enthusiasm of future G20 hosts to address these issues could damage any progress that has been made and therefore take us back to the time before the establishment of the W20.

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