

WOMEN'S CONTRIBUTIONS TO NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS LEGAL FRAMEWORKS

FIRST PART

Women contribute to the construction of laws, standards, protocols and various mechanisms for advancing human rights. While our governments often fail to respect our rights or comply with the laws that protect them, it is important to remember that no law supporting women's rights has been passed without a previous struggle, without women who have raised their voices, organized and challenged power and traditional norms. For example, we need to remember the decades of struggle carried out by millions of women around the globe to obtain the right to vote, country by country, each victory inspiring the efforts of others.



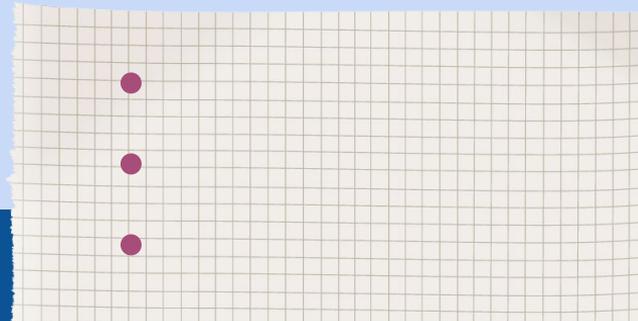
QUESTIONS TO THE GROUP:

Do you remember how women struggled to get the vote here in this country? Do you remember the names of some of the women who participated in that struggle? If so, say them out loud so we can honor them.



In this country, women, their communities and organizations have pushed for the enactment of important laws for the full recognition of our human rights. Despite the resistance and obstacles that we face in their implementation, these are achievements that we must acknowledge and use in our strategies for change.

In addition to the laws that the group mentioned in the earlier exercise, other important laws are:



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The facilitator adds additional information she has researched about country-specific laws to which women have contributed over the years. Write each of these laws on a card and add them to those that the group mentioned in the previous activity.

SECOND PART

Now let's learn about experiences from other places, where women's efforts made it possible to establish laws and policies supporting their rights. These experiences are inspiring!



- In **Colombia**, after the 2016 Peace Agreements between the guerillas and the government were signed, women were able to get the Gender Subcommittee established as a mechanism to incorporate women's rights, demands and needs.
- In **Indonesia**, a country where female heads of household are not allowed the same rights as males, the organization PEKKA succeeded in getting women granted legal status as recognized as heads of household. Obtaining this legal documentation is a prerequisite to accessing social services¹.



1 Zulminarni, Nani, Valerie Miller, Alexa Bradley, Angela Bailey, and Jonathan Fox. 2018. "Movement-building for Accountability: Learning from Indonesian Women's Organizing." Accountability Research Center, Accountability Working Paper 3 https://accountabilityresearch.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/WP3-Indonesia_Oct18_web-1.pdf



- In South Africa, because of the colonization and racist apartheid regime, women lost their right and access to land. When apartheid was eradicated, legal changes in land tenure did not guarantee that women would gain access to homes and land. Thanks to women's organizing, the law allowing this inequality was changed. Traditional authorities often refuse to recognize this legislation, however, so women continue to struggle.

- In Syrian Kurdistan, despite living in a context of war and violence, women were able to get child marriage and polygamy banned in their communities. In addition they established a system in which each leadership position must be jointly held by a man and a woman.



QUESTIONS TO THE GROUP:

What do you think of these examples? Do you know of any laws from other countries that women's struggles have made possible and that have advanced the rights of women and those of their people? What are some?

THIRD PART

Women's struggles for the recognition and expansion of their rights have also led to international achievements. One of the most important was the enactment of the **Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)**.

QUESTIONS TO THE GROUP: Who is familiar with the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women? Please raise your hand.

Perhaps you wonder why it is so important. Let's look at some of the reasons:

- Approved by the United Nations in 1979, CEDAW has been signed and ratified by 187 countries, which is 96% of those in existence! It is a binding instrument, which means that ratifying States have a legal obligation to comply with it.

- It establishes the obligation of the States to eliminate "...any distinction, exclusion or restriction made on the basis of sex ...in the political, economic, social, cultural, civil or any other field...", i.e., [and] to eliminate all forms of discrimination against women.

- Its aim is to achieve equality, -- that men, women and all persons are born with equal dignity and rights. Equality also means that the diversity of people's identities and needs cannot be grounds for discrimination.

- In each of the 187 countries, many women and feminist collectives and organizations have used CEDAW not only to advance laws supporting their rights but also to legitimize equal rights and conditions between men and women, and to demand effective governmental policies and actions.

QUESTIONS TO THE GROUP: Do you know if your country has ratified CEDAW?

Additional relevant aspects of CEDAW in Spanish can be found at: Alda Facio. CEDAW en 10 minutos. UNIFEM

<http://americalatinagenera.org>

