

The gender perspective

By **SUSANA BALBO**

CHAIR OF WOMEN'S 20 (W20)



SUSANA BALBO is the first female winemaker to graduate in Argentina with a Master's Degree in Winemaking (awarded with distinction) by the Universidad Juan Agustín Maza (Mendoza). She runs Susana Balbo Wines, a major business which exports globally. In 1997 she was elected Women Entrepreneur of the Year by the Argentine Organization of Businesswomen (Asociación Argentina de Mujeres de Empresa, OAME) and between 2006 and 2016 was President of Wines of Argentina (WofA). In December 2015 she was appointed National Deputy for the province of Mendoza at the Honorable Chamber of Deputies of Argentina's National Congress.

For the fourth consecutive year W20 passed the baton, this time from Germany to Argentina, and I had the honour to lead this process as Chair of this engagement group. The experience turned out to be an interesting combination of trying to keep up the good work already done, while also facing new challenges.

One of our first major challenges was to strengthen our delegates' network. W20 is a group which takes decisions only by consensus and has to represent the opinion of civil society of all member countries. This meant increasing the number of representatives per country to ensure a plurality of voices, which is a guiding principle for us, and the representation of all countries. Today we are proud to say that we have 155 delegates representing a balanced proportion of academia, NGOs, international organisations and the business community.

We have also worked hard to achieve greater interaction between delegates through our online platform, delivering webinars, surveys and forums and, of course, through the Roundtables we held in Paris, New York, Riyadh and Salta.

A strategic aspect of leading W20 was working closely with the other engagement and government groups and mainstream gender. As a result we have produced three Joint Declarations with engagement groups: One advocating for the implementation of the 25x25 commitment urging states to implement plans and monitor accordingly; another declaration highlighting the fundamental importance of education with a gender perspective, and a third statement linking gender inequality and corruption. In addition we have articulated outlines with government groups as we have been invited to present the W20 agenda at the Sherpas' meetings in Ushuaia on the Future of Work, in Geneva, Buenos Aires and Mendoza with the Education and Employment Group and in Tucumán with the Development Group. Perhaps this articulation was one of the most challenging aspects but of course, completely linked to our success.

A major decision W20 took this year was related to the main topics of discussion. So far W20 had been working on the Digital, Financial and Labour inclusion of women, all of which remain necessary and with un-met demands for women in all G20 countries. Though these topics would remain the

axis of W20 Argentina, the Development of Rural Women became a new priority for this presidency. In a context where G20 countries account for around 60 percent of the world's agricultural land, and around 80 percent of global agricultural trade, the issue of how women fit into this scenario became of relevance. It should be noted that not all women living in rural areas work in agro-business, W20 worked hard to include all their diversity into our work.

Rural women play important roles in the production of food, keeping culture and traditions alive, sustaining families and strengthening rural communities. However they are at a disadvantage compared to rural men and urban women and face multiple and interrelated structural and cultural barriers that limit the realisation of their human rights and their economic empowerment. Implementing policies to improve the living conditions of rural women and girls, fulfil their human rights and promote their economic and political empowerment are essential to the achievement of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Sustainable Development Goals.

W20 Argentina approached the issues of women living in rural areas by recommending leaders to secure women's access to comprehensive and gender responsive social services, including education, health and legal services in rural areas, where they usually are less accessible and of lower quality and culturally insensitive. In terms of access to infrastructure, a major request by rural women, W20 demands governments to invest in infrastructure for rural development and ensure the participation of women of all stages of the process, taking into account their specific needs and work opportunities. Infrastructure projects should also incorporate gender violence protocols. Finally, due to the lack of funds and technical assistance we urge leaders to increase fund allocation for women living in rural areas to strengthen their cooperatives, entrepreneurship, organisations and value chains, promoting access to credit and training, enabling women's economic participation and inclusion in decision making and governance.

In terms of the labour inclusion of women, our first priority was to increase women's presence in the labour market and hold states accountable

for prior commitments. That is why we ask to accelerate the pace of implementation of the 2014 Brisbane commitment to reduce the gender gap in labour force participation by 25 per cent by 2025, by developing and funding National Plans and reporting the progress on an annual basis.

Another major issue is violence against women in the workforce. Thirty per cent of women in G20 countries report having been victims of harassment at work. We ask leaders to strengthen and enforce regulations, ensure equal access to justice, as well as support international processes leading to setting standards on “ending violence and harassment in the world of work” in order to protect women from all forms of violence, including online violence.

Another barrier for women’s labour inclusion relates to the difficulties and prohibition to access productive resources. We need to remember that almost half of the world’s women do not have an income of their own. It is important that countries eliminate all forms of discrimination against women, particularly in laws and regulations on access to and control of land, assets and resources and promoting mechanisms to guarantee equal pay for work of equal value.

Another major challenge for women’s labour inclusion relates to the time devoted to care and domestic unpaid activities. In most countries the lack of care services places a heavy burden on women, affecting their participation in the labour market. That is why, it is of utmost importance that G20 members invest public funds to ensure affordable, quality and professionalised universal care services for people with dependents, including those in the informal sector. They should also implement policies for mandatory paid parental leave schemes by 2025 that include nontransferable entitlements for a second caregiver to promote shared responsibility of care work and a better work-life balance.

Failing to tap the participation of all women in all their diversity not only implies a violation of their human rights but also reflects a waste of talent, skills and abilities that inevitably impact on national development and poses a demand for social justice. In a “full potential” scenario in which women play an identical role in labour markets to that of men, as much as US\$28 trillion, or 26 per cent, could be added to global annual GDP by 2025 (McKinsey, 2015).

Many things have been stated about the future of work and the promise it holds for younger generations. However, W20 believes that analysing the Future of Work from a gender perspective and design policies to ensure equitable impact is a matter of justice. Major trends such as the gig economy, automation and machine learning should be addressed in terms of their gender-specific impact, focusing on

social protection and labour rights of women workers.

To ensure that women can reap from the benefits of technology and become digitally included, holistic and cross-sectoral policies that abolish the barriers to women’s access and use of digital technologies and the internet should be developed, especially in rural and remote areas. Governments should improve access, affordability, safety and security of digital services, broadband and connectivity plans, and the availability of relevant content and services, while taking into consideration women in all their diversity. More importantly, leaders should work together to guarantee inclusive educational programs through the promotion and investment in initiatives that boost the equal participation of women and girls in STEAM studies and support women’s digital rights and citizenship. Training programs should promote women’s life-long learning and provide frequent updating of digital skills to increase opportunities for both employment and entrepreneurship. G20 countries must also foster the equitable participation of women in the development and governance of STEAM-related industries, while ensuring women’s participation in the development and modification of algorithms in artificial intelligence in order to avoid gender bias.

Another important aspect of women’s development relies on their financial inclusion. Women in G20 countries own 30 per cent of SMES and receive less than 10 per cent of the loans. Ensuring equal access to credit, financial services, equity and markets for women, and designing initiatives to improve women’s financial and legal literacy and entrepreneurial capacity is a priority. As traditional scoring systems tend to leave women behind, countries should also use and promote alternative forms of credit scoring, including alternative data to evaluate MSMEs credit worthiness in order to increase women’s access to financial services. Enhancing transparency and supporting measures for public procurement contracts awarded to women-owned and women-led businesses and increasing their share by a minimum of 10 percent taking into consideration the situation of each G20 country is also a way of creating new opportunities for women-owned business, that otherwise, are left behind in public bidding processes.

Finally, in order to ensure that policies are based on real evidence on the needs and demands of women, the G20 should support gender budgeting and together with international partner organisations and relevant national partners develop statistical systems based on indicators that are gender disaggregated and consider women in all their diversity. E

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