



G20 Conference on Women's Empowerment
(August 26, 2021), Santa Margherita Ligure

Speech of Maria Grazia Panunzi, president of Aidos, at Thematic Plenary Session 1 - STEM, Financial and Digital Literacy, Environment and Sustainability.

Thanks for inviting me to join the Women's Empowerment Meeting and giving me the opportunity to bring to your attention a civil society perspective in dialogue with the G20. I'm here as coordinator of the C20 Gender Working Group, which I represent today, and also as the president of Aidos, the Italian association for women in development that, since its foundation, works for women and girl's rights.

Since the beginning of Italy's G20 Presidency, the Gender working group has produced documents on several specific issues, as the one on digitalisation. A common thread in our work has been, in a feminist approach, to reaffirm the centrality of women and girls' agency and the importance of letting them have a seat at the table of decision-making processes, at every level.

Given this premise, I would like to stress that the agency of women and girls I just mentioned is crucial if we want an effective digital transformation without no one left behind. The Covid pandemic has shown us how also access to digitalization could be discriminatory. The digital transformation can be converted into a valuable tool to promote gender equality and women's empowerment if used as a way to enable a level playing field, but only if gender stereotypes and unconscious biases are tackled and eliminated at every level, starting from the educational sector. We know that gender stereotypes fuel the exclusion of women and girls from technology and STEM disciplines, as they perpetuate the idea that they are not suitable for them, and can hamper the acquisition of digital financial skills, that are increasingly important nowadays.

By tackling and eliminating gender stereotypes we also avoid a silent "pervasive human rights violation", as stated by the High Commissioner for Human Rights. The Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW Committee) has increasingly shed light on the serious and systemic harms of gender stereotypes. But of course, we cannot forget that, in order to achieve gender equality, we have to guarantee bodily autonomy for women and girls, starting from the promotion of sexual and reproductive health and rights, the elimination of harmful practices and of any forms of gender based violence.

Deconstructing rigid gender roles is also functional to the full participation of women to the labour market, including STEM professions, that are presently a sector dominated by men. This is often advocated for by highlighting the potential of women as contributors to gross domestic product growth, consequently making states more prosperous. However, we want to remind that the role of the public sector is fundamental, for its function of administering common goods to ensure the well-being of the community, creating an inclusive economy for all and ensuring a proper social

infrastructure that leaves no one behind. On the other side, the private sector is driven by private interests and functional to its own growth: for instance, this is particularly evident with the TRIPS waivers that civil society has been clamouring for to end the COVID-19 pandemic.

It is essential that we move on from rhetoric to concrete policies and I hope that, thanks to this meeting, a road map to increase women's participation in STEM disciplines will be drawn up to be monitored at the next G20 meetings. Italy has a great opportunity that must not be missed. Some systemic actions: 1) to include women and girls in political processes and therefore 2) to support the establishment of a political class composed by women who are gender sensitive and feminist and then 3) to implement policies aimed at removing gender stereotypes. This would release the transformative potential of girls, in all their diversity, in all areas of life. 4) In the educational sphere: encouraging educational policies to promote the enrolment of girls in STEM disciplines; producing gender stereotype-free textbooks and school curricula; and implementing trainings and courses on stereotypes for students in education-related faculties and teachers.