



30.01.17 – On 25 January, at the international seminar on "Sustainable Development and social empowerment of women" in Brussels, a number of experts in gender, transition and sustainable development from the North and the South gathered to develop proposals on the implementation of the Agenda 2030.

In the last decade, a great deal of progress has been made in the quest to achieve gender equality. More girls are now in school compared to 15 years ago and today there are more women in public office than ever before.

Yet enormous challenges still lie ahead. Violence against women and girls remains one of the world's most pervasive human rights abuses. WHO numbers show that about 1 in 3 (35%) women worldwide have experienced either physical and/or sexual intimate partner violence or non-partner sexual violence in their lifetime. In many parts of the world, women still don't enjoy full economic inclusion.

Gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls are of paramount importance for the implementation of Agenda 2030 and Secretary-General António Guterres has called gender equality a “cornerstone of his tenure”.



The international seminar taking place in Brussels explored the different relationships between gender and sustainable development and in which way gender equality can contribute to the success of the other SDG's.

One of the speakers was the Belgian minister of Development Cooperation Alexander De Croo, who stated achieving gender equality was one of the focal points of his development strategy. “Through our human rights approach, we want to focus on the most vulnerable groups, often including women and children, and strengthen their capacity to claim their rights”.

One of the ways Mr. De Croo plans to achieve this is through the use of digital technology. Belgium has recently financed a new UN-Habitat-UN Women joint programme that aims to advance women's and youth's rights to participate in reconstruction and recovery efforts in Gaza. Using digital tools and videogames such as Minecraft and SaftiPin, the programme

promotes the engagement of communities in the design of public spaces.

The programme selects female architects from Gaza and provides them with training on the use of digital technologies. These are then used to create gender inclusive, safe and accessible public spaces free from violence against women.

Zeyad Elshakra, UN-Habitat Officer in Charge in Palestine said: “The provision of safe and inclusive public spaces results in improved standards of living for all, and become a key enabler for the fulfillment of human rights.”

Mr. De Croo warned not to see women only as victims, but as smart and able consumers, as well as entrepreneurs who have the potential to stimulate market innovation.