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## **CITIES FOR CEDAW: NOTES ON THE ROAD TO EFFECTIVE INTERVENTION**

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The UN General Assembly adopted the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) on December 18, 1979 after the First World Conference on Women (1975) "witnessed the call for a treaty" (Al Shraideh 2017:18). CEDAW, often called the international bill of rights for women, gives direction to UN Member States that have ratified the treaty.

The treaty was adopted decades ago, but many problems still remain. Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, an Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations (U.N.) and the Executive Director of UN Women, says that "progress for women and girls remains unacceptably slow" (UN Women 2018:3) and Holly Fechner, Chair of the Board of the Institute for Women's Policy Research (2015:7), commenting specifically about the United States (U.S.), writes that women:

...still face a wide wage gap that has not budged much in the last decade, disproportionate poverty rates, and wide disparities in health outcomes and experiences with violence, all of which is even more stark for women of color.

This chapter<sup>1</sup> focuses on a movement - Cities for CEDAW - in the United States (U.S.) that seeks to improve the situation of women and girls in a variety of U.S. communities (e.g., cities, counties, states). Local initiatives, like this one, can provide support for national and international efforts of many kinds and so it might be helpful for researchers, community activists and policymakers - in the U.S. as well as other countries - to discuss some of the lessons that have been learned in putting this particular local initiative in place. To encourage this discussion, the chapter provides basic information about CEDAW, introduces the Cities for CEDAW effort, identifies the levels of intervention that may be involved in a change initiative and discusses some of what has been learned about the road to effective intervention on a local level.

### **CEDAW**

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<sup>1</sup> This chapter is based in part on Fritz 2008, 2014, 2018a, and 2018b.

CEDAW, described as the "pre-eminent legal instrument on women's rights" (Campbell 2018: 5), has "been credited with evolving the concept of substantive equality... that women can be different from men but still equal to them" (Jain 2005). CEDAW defines discrimination against women as "any distinction, exclusion or restriction made on the basis of sex which has the effect or purpose of impairing or nullifying the recognition, enjoyment or exercise by women, irrespective of their marital status, on a basis of equality of men and women, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural, civil or any other field" (UN CEDAW 1979).

The treaty (U.N. CEDAW 1979) covers a wide range of topics. The thirty articles focus on areas such as educational opportunities; sex trafficking; women's rights in political and public life; access to health care; rural women; women's economic and social rights; and equality in marriage and family life. Some topics are not mentioned (e.g., abortion)<sup>2</sup> or are only mentioned in the preamble (e.g., poverty).<sup>3</sup> The expectation is that the specifics in CEDAW should be incorporated into national law in order to fully realize women's rights.

CEDAW was adopted 130 to 0, with 10 abstentions. Of the 193 UN Member States, more than 50 of the countries that ratified the treaty have done so specifying certain reservations and objections. This makes CEDAW one of the most (and possibly the most) heavily reserved human rights treaties (Al Shraideh 2017:18). Only a handful of countries (Iran, Somalia, Sudan, Tonga, Palau and the United States) have not ratified the treaty. U.S. President Jimmy Carter signed the treaty in 1980, but the U.S. Senate never ratified it. And as Al Shraideh (2017:18) has commented, "What is strange to digest... is the fact that the United States is one of (a few) countries that have yet to ratify the Convention." The U.S. is the only economically developed country not to have ratified the treaty.

While Member States are responsible for enforcing the Convention, Article XVII established a monitoring body - the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW Committee). CEDAW expects Member States that have ratified the treaty to provide reports at least every four years<sup>4</sup> about their goals and progress regarding the central inclusion of women and girls in their societies (e.g., Hungary 2006; Hungary 2013). In addition, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) can provide supplementary (shadow) reports that can challenge the government reports (e.g., Hungarian Women's Lobby and the European Roma Rights Centre 2013). The CEDAW Committee then responds to a government (e.g., CEDAW Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, 2013) about its written and oral presentations taking into account any supplementary statements. The CEDAW Committee

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<sup>2</sup> Al Shraideh (2017:22) notes "the convention is viewed by its opponents to promote abortion, as it might consider it as one form of discrimination against women in their access to health services." However, the Convention does not make any reference to abortion and, in fact, "some countries, such as Ireland and Rwanda, have ratified the Convention despite criminalizing abortion in their domestic laws..."

<sup>3</sup> Campbell (2018:5) notes: "Throughout the world, women disproportionately live in poverty... There is no specific obligation in CEDAW on gender-based poverty. There is only a passing reference to women's poverty in the preamble."

<sup>4</sup> Countries that don't meet a deadline – e.g., Hungary, 2013 – may file combined periodic reports.

"does not have an authority to carry out any action against self-reported non-complying Members other than submitting an annual report to the United Nations' General Assembly" (Al Shraideh 2017:19). However, some reports - those submitted by the country, the shadow reports and the Committee's response - are publicly available on a website usually connected to the U.N. or an interested organization.<sup>5</sup>

### **Cities for CEDAW**

In addition to CEDAW's formal review process, there have been other CEDAW-related activities. For instance, Taiwan, although it is not a UN Member State, has accepted CEDAW standards, developed CEDAW reports and put a review process in place that involves outside experts assessing Taiwan's plans and progress<sup>6</sup> (Zeldin 2011, Taiwan Today 2017).

Also, the Global Network of Women Peacebuilders (GNWP, 2018)) has a localization process in place that "is a bottom-up approach to policymaking... to ensure local ownership, participation and links among communities, civil society organizations and government" that support their UN Security Council Resolution 1325 National Action Plans (for women and girls). GNWP (2018) says the main points of its localization program are (1) "convening local authorities and other key local actors... to formulate local legislation and integrate UNSCR 1325... into community development plans" and (2) developing "Localization Guidelines (as a practical guide that assists local authorities." GNWP (2018) says this is being implemented in a number of countries including Burundi Columbia, Serbia, South Sudan, Liberia, Philippines and Sierra Leone. Countries' National Action Plans as well as information about localization efforts can be included with countries' CEDAW reports.

In the United States, there has been a campaign, since 2013, that initially hoped to have 100 cities declare themselves as CEDAW cities by the end of 2015.<sup>7</sup> This initiative received the support of the United States Conference of Mayors in 2014. This kind of effort raises awareness about CEDAW, provides a framework for community action<sup>8</sup> and calls attention to the fact that

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<sup>5</sup> See, for example, <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/reports.htm>; <http://hrlibrary.umn.edu/iwraw/proceduralguide-08.html> and <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/CEDAW/Pages/CEDAWIndex.aspx>.

<sup>6</sup> "Following the signing of a presidential order in 2007, a law implementing the CEDAW was promulgated Jan. 1, 2012, requiring the government to deliver a national report every four years and revise all relevant laws and administrative measures that contravene the convention within three years... Although Taiwan is not a signatory to the convention, the passage of the enforcement act makes its regulations effective as domestic law" (Taiwan Today 2017).

<sup>7</sup> The Cities for CEDAW "campaign is spearheaded by the Women's Intercultural Network (WIN), the NGO Committee on the Status of Women (NGO/CSWNY), the San Francisco Department on the Status of Women, and the Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights." (Och 2018a).

<sup>8</sup> Some actions are taken within the community and others within city administration. For instance, Eric Garcetti (2015), the mayor of Los Angeles, California, "issued a directive for each city department or office to have a Gender Equity Liaison, established a Gender Equity Coalition

the United States is one of a very small number of nations that has not ratified the treaty. Disappointed and/or angry that the US Senate has not ratified CEDAW, advocates hope this initiative will help lead to U.S. ratification.

As of May, 2018, twenty-five communities have passed a resolution<sup>9</sup> and eight cities have passed an ordinance or two.<sup>10</sup> Over 30 communities (e.g., cities, counties, states) "are making serious progress towards ordinances and resolutions" (Och 2018b:6).<sup>11</sup> While the national campaign is to get governments "to effectively implement CEDAW within their city, county and/or state to address barriers to full equality for women and girls" (Och 2018b:6) the cities' efforts can look quite different. They could, for instance, focus on what is going on in city administration and/or the broader community; they can discuss and prioritize different topics; they may have – or not - a women's department/commission as part of the city government; they may have a lot of government support or just enough to put this initiative in place; they may have varying degrees of grassroots support for this effort; they may – or may not – want CEDAW or the U.N. to be mentioned; and the local governments may see this as a continuing effort or one that would last for a rather short period (e.g., one or two years).

### **Levels of Intervention**

Intervention refers to the creation of new systems as well as to the change of existing systems and this can include prevention or promotion (such as health promotion) activities.<sup>12</sup> Intervention can occur on one or more levels. Intervention levels (from individual through global)<sup>13</sup> are depicted in Figure 1 as circles and without a hierarchy.<sup>14</sup> While this chapter is about intervention at the local level (e.g., neighborhood, city, county, state), no intervention level (e.g., individual, small group, organization, local community, region, nation, international and/or world<sup>15</sup>) is assumed to be inevitably the most important one. Each situation needs to be viewed to determine the importance of each level and the interventions that are needed. Groups and individuals (usually in combination) can be the drivers of change at each level.

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and required each head of a city department/office to submit a Gender Equity Action Plan for the central inclusion of women and girls as part of the city's CEDAW initiative" (Fritz 2018b).

<sup>9</sup> Nugent (2002) provided the following definitions of a municipal ordinance and resolution: "A municipal ordinance is a rule, law or statute adopted by a municipal legislative body. A municipal ordinance generally means that a municipal act is adopted that has the force and effect of a law... Ordinances go into effect 30 days after adoption, unless they are enacted as an emergency ordinance. A resolution is a formal expression of the opinion or will of an official municipal body adopted by a vote... Resolutions go into effect immediately upon adoption.

<sup>10</sup> Ordinances vary in length and complexity. Cincinnati, Ohio, for instance, passed two short ordinances; the first establishes a Mayor's Task Force on Gender Equality and the second calls for a gender analysis.

<sup>11</sup> Current information about the resolutions and ordinances can be found at [www.citiesforcedaw.org/resources](http://www.citiesforcedaw.org/resources)

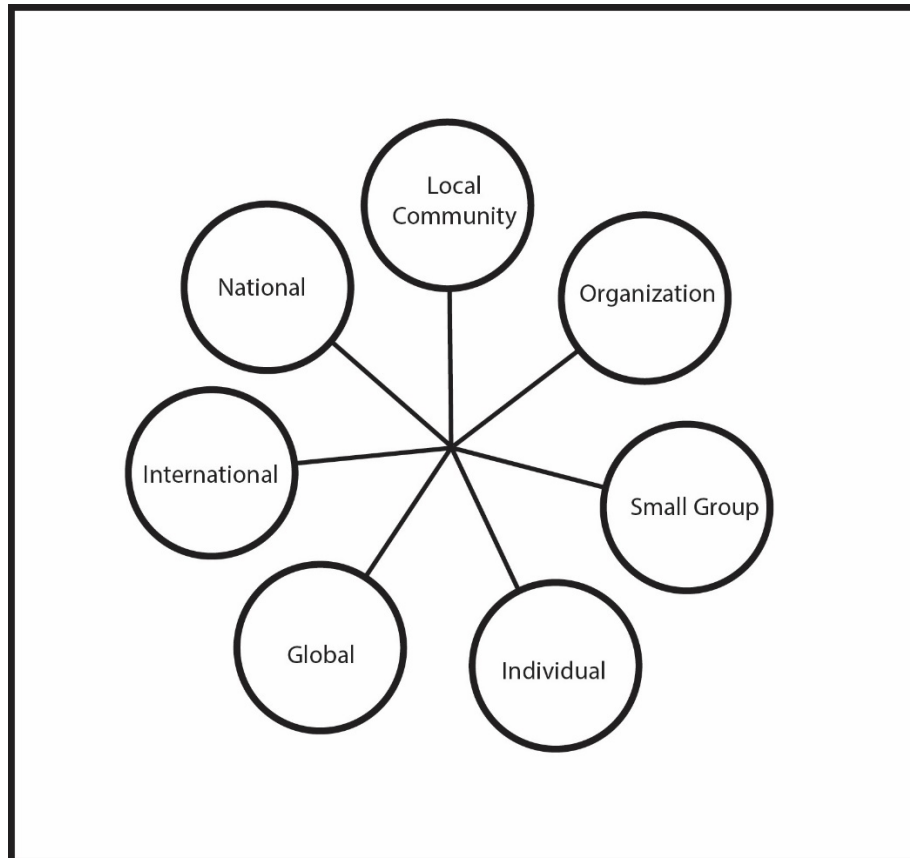
<sup>12</sup> This section is based on information found in three chapters by Jan Marie Fritz (2008, 2018a and 2018b).

<sup>13</sup> Depending on the situation, more (e.g., regional) or fewer levels could be designated.

<sup>14</sup> See Fritz "The Basics," (2008:9-10).

<sup>15</sup> The global (world) level refers to work done on a worldwide basis as well as to a time when other worlds may be involved with this world (Fritz 2014:5).

Local intervention, in a structurally conducive setting,<sup>16</sup> usually will be more effective if it involves a number of levels. It is difficult for change to occur if the political-economic-social



**Figure 1. Levels of Intervention**

setting is not open to that change and political will is not there to support action.

The UN Secretary-General (2012:8) stressed the importance of national action, but indicated this must be done in conjunction with work on other levels:

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<sup>16</sup> *Structural conduciveness*, in this instance, would be when a local community has the necessary authority, a good communication network and open administration which sets the stage for changes to be considered and implemented in the local community and in its subdivisions and/or its organizations (Fritz 2014:18).

Governments retain the primary role for ensuring the survival, livelihood and dignity of their populations. At the same time, the crises of recent years have sharpened the focus of the international community on those threats that are beyond the control of any individual Government or Governments. These threats have highlighted the need for greater collaboration among Governments, international and regional organizations and civil society and community-based actors.

Becoming a Community for CEDAW can open doors for greater collaboration and could increase the effectiveness and speed of change in a community.

### **The Road to Effective Intervention**

The process of improving the situation of women and girls does not end with passing a resolution or ordinance; saying nice things about women and girls; agreeing to conduct a gender analysis; or establishing a gender equality committee or task force. The goal is the central inclusion and safety of women and girls. To get to that goal, a process needs to be put in place and supported by elected government officials. The road to getting government support may be easy (e.g., many of the city council member's are women and have taken ownership and/or are strong supporters of this effort) or difficult (e.g., council members do not think there are problems facing women and girls or they think the problems are not severe enough to require special attention).

Based on my experience as a founder of a City for CEDAW Community Coalition and conversations with those who have put a Community for CEDAW initiative in place or are trying to do so, eleven points should be given early consideration in developing a program that can lead to effective intervention:

**1. Identify needed community partners for a coalition.** It is very important to look for partners in the community that will help get the government to move forward on this effort. In some communities, the major civil society organizations (CSOs) dealing with issues faced by women and girls are already talking. They can serve as the base for a coalition. In other communities, all the organizations are not easily identified. In that case, have a class of students or members of a community organization identify a list of possible coalition members. Find what those organizations are concerned about regarding the situation of women and girls by reading their websites and then interviewing leaders of the groups. Ask the leaders if their organizations would like to be involved in a coalition. As a City for CEDAW effort needs government action, make sure at least some coalition members easily “have the ears” of those who will vote on this initiative.

Not all organizations will have the same kind of interest in the issues or time to be involved in the coalition's activities. Organizations should have room to decide whether they just want to be connected (hear what is going on) or be centrally-involved. In tobacco-control coalitions, for instance, often the major organizations in a community that are centrally concerned with tobacco-control (e.g., health care organizations with paid staff working on tobacco-control) provide the central leadership or staffing for the community effort. Another example (Fritz 1999) is the Environmental Justice Networking Forum (EJNF), an environmental justice

coalition that was formed in South Africa in 1992. The coalition had more than 550<sup>17</sup> organizational members from different kinds of groups – “trade unions, women’s associations, youth groups, rural organizations, (and) religious groups”. This work even led to the formation of a coalition of civil society organizations in the Southern African region. While a very large number of groups were identified with the EJNF coalition, these groups were not all active in an intense way.

**2. Emphasize a human rights basis for this effort.** Cities for CEDAW is all about gender equality in a human rights context. The expectation is that basic human rights documents - such as CEDAW and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights - will be strongly connected to the work in a local community.<sup>18</sup> Some of those deciding on whether there will be a Cities for CEDAW initiative in their community may not be aware of or easily accept UN documents as basics. (One decision maker was initially opposed to this effort because he thought that CEDAW said abortion was acceptable. He needed to receive a copy of CEDAW and confirm that abortion is not mentioned.) Someone putting a City for CEDAW effort in place might need to just mention the UN documents in a preamble or introduction to the local effort and use other U.S. human rights documents as your starting point. The idea is not to forget to introduce at some point the UN work in connection to what is being done in the local community. For some communities, this will be the effort from the beginning; other communities may need more time.

**3. Discuss girls as well as women.** CEDAW, adopted in 1979, focuses on women; girls are mentioned only once in a discussion of female student drop-out rates. The 2016 U.N. Sustainable Development Goals include a gender equality goal (#5) and mention girls “explicitly in seven targets” (Albrechtsen 2018). A City for CEDAW effort should explicitly include girls. Years ago a National Action Plan for women (based on UN Security Council Resolution 1325 Women and Peace and Security) had a footnote when women were first discussed. The footnote said that any time the word women was used that girls were meant to be included. Many people do not read footnotes. Girls should be mentioned, in appropriate places, throughout a community’s documents (e.g., media releases, gender analysis, resolution, ordinance).

**4. Look for and encourage political will.** Political will, in which leaders prioritize the central inclusion and security of women and girls, is extremely important in change initiatives (Fritz 2018). Decision makers (e.g., council members) have to be the ones to put this initiative in place. You need to find one or more champions to make this happen. In one city, for instance, the mayor (the top elected officer in the community) did not have a vote, but used her friendly efforts with each council member to get someone to put this issue forward and others to vote for it. (The mayor's bargaining chip with the person who agreed to sponsor the issue was that the mayor would personally contact all the other council members to get the needed votes. The mayor did this enthusiastically.... and successfully.) In some other cities, members of the city's coalition have been very helpful. In one city, the new co-chairs of the city coalition were chosen, in good part, not only for their enthusiasm for this effort but because one had been a donor to

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<sup>17</sup> Some have said there were 600 or 700 organizations that were coalition members at one time.

<sup>18</sup> The effort also could be paired with an effort to become a Human Rights Cities. For more information see, for instance, Blau 2014; <https://www.pdhre.org/projects/hrcommun.html> or <https://groups.google.com/a/ushnetwork.org/forum/#!forum/hrcitieslist>

many of those on council (and could easily talk with them) and the other used to work for the city administration at a high level. It is important for those running the initiative to remember that coalition members and those with political will need to have as much information as possible to help convince decision makers to start and continue this effort.

**5. Consider developing "right-sized," appropriate basic drafts of documents.** If a community is starting a City for CEDAW effort or is further developing what it has been doing, reviewing documents [e.g., media releases, resolutions, ordinances, gender analyses, executive orders, reports, requests for research proposals (RFPs)] developed by other communities can be very helpful. This process allows you to think about what you would like to do... or not do. A coalition also needs to decide what kind of draft (e.g, complete draft; drafts of options; draft of points to be covered) would be helpful in their community. They also need to think about who should be involved in the drafting committee. For instance, should one or several government representatives be involved in the drafting and at what stage. If a draft is not provided to government representatives, the effort may go in unexpected directions and the government representatives who took the time to draw up the draft may now think they have the best way to do things and are not open to changes.

**6. Provide adequate financing.** In the beginning of the Cities for CEDAW effort, there was some advice about what needed to be in an ordinance (e.g., conduct a gender analysis, have a community or community/government group that would monitor progress). One of the other suggested requirements was that there be guaranteed financing, and a formula was even suggested that would set the amount based on the number of women and girls in the community. Many communities may struggle with setting a definite financial allocation because of a number of reasons such as (a) a report needs to be submitted before discussing allocation, (b) a bad economic situation in the community and/or (c) competing demands for a limited amount of money. Some communities will find sufficient funds and may do so whether financing is part of the ordinance or not. Communities also may raise funds to support an initiative. One city, for instance, made sure that the government had a definite amount allocated, but also raised funds (much of this was done by Coalition members) to have enough money to fund a Gender Analysis.

There also probably will be an additional cost to conduct a gender analysis. While an analysis might be done by a government department (or departments) and funded through the existing budget, a community-wide project might be seen as too big of an undertaking for a department. The size of the budget for the study will be determined in part by available resources, the scope of the project and the size of the community. One community put an ordinance in place thinking that a government office would do the gender analysis and costs would be covered by the department's current budget. Others have allocated, for instance, \$20,000 - \$25,000. In one case the initial allocation was to hire a half-time coordinator for the initiative and that person, after studying the situation, would submit a budget request for the study. [About \$40,000 was allocated and that higher amount may be because a Request for Proposal (RFP) approach was going to be put in place.] Some communities have used an RFP to look for organizations to do the gender analysis, while other have not issued an RFP and used local organizations to do the studies.



**7. Put an Advisory Committee/Task Force in place.** Communities are advised to put some kind of advisory committee or task force in place (at the highest level possible) even if there is a government department focused on women and girls. Communities need to think about what kind of group they want to have and about the length of terms. One community decided their advisory group members should represent certain sectors of the community (e.g., a person representing the community coalition that initiated the drive to make the community a CEDAW city, someone who represents labor, someone who represents migrants). Some communities want a number of government representatives on the committee and others want only one or two. There can be reasons for the different strategies. The advisory board members can (to varying degrees) set priorities and timelines, assess the evolving funding situations; provide updates and media plans for the decision makers and the public and, most importantly, plan for community monitoring of the process and the outcomes. Committee members should have staggered terms and so initial appointments might differ in that they are, for instance, one, two or three-year appointments.

**8. Conduct a Gender Analysis.** A community should know what kind of reports have been already conducted concerning the women and girls in the community. This will help determine if a new general analysis is needed and, if so, what needs to be covered. It also is very important that the community representatives look at other communities' gender analyses to discuss what they would like to do in their own community.

The existing analyses are quite different; for instance, they can have different areas of focus. One, for instance, is starting its work mainly by looking at a city administration while others have some information about city administration, but focus more on the community. A community might plan to do a general report every so often and focus on specific areas in different years. The analysis should determine what data are available for consideration and what needs to be provided in the future; it also needs to see to what extent gender budgeting is in place. It is important that a gender analysis not only cover what needs improvement; it should provide information and analysis about what is going well.

A gender analysis can be conducted by a local government department (or departments), a local research group or an outside group. The group selected to do the research might be invited to do this work based on existing knowledge about the research group or responses to a Request for Proposal (RFP). There are different reasons that lead to the choice of a research team. These reasons might have to do with a track record for doing this kind of work, the amount of available funding, political considerations and/or the desire to have the work done by those in the community or a group with no ties to the community.

**9. Have short-term and long-term goals.** Government representatives and the community need to see periodic reports about what is being done and see some improvements. If only long-term goals are chosen, the government representatives and the public may not feel the time and money invested in this effort are worthwhile. It is important, then, to choose some goals which can be accomplished well and in a short time as well as other goals which may be difficult and require long-term commitments.

**10. Look for opportunities to use the different levels of intervention to support this initiative;** Those who are initiating Cities for CEDAW activities should periodically discuss intervention levels. The chart of intervention levels provided in this chapter could be helpful

when discussing what is being done at the different levels. The levels of intervention for any project may need to change over time in order to make the project more effective.

**12. Establish an up-to-date website.** While there are many ways that should be considered to provide information to the public, I will only discuss websites here. There are a number of choices to consider regarding websites. One choice is to have no website as the community does not have the resources to have one or to keep it up-to-date. It may be that both of these problems can be addressed. For instance, the community government may offer a place on the government website. Some may find this fine, while others might want to also have a website through the community coalition. It may be that one of the coalition members would agree to host a website that might be open to different kinds of conversations. However the website is established, it absolutely has to be up-to-date and monitored. It can be an excellent way to let the government representatives (and their staff) know what is going on and to provide information to and from the public. In addition to providing information about the work connected to the community's effort, the website can list resources, have a section with answers to frequent questions, provide important links as well as information about relevant community events. There needs to be discussion about how questions will be answered by those who visit the website. (One government website outside of the U.S. allowed comments but was not monitored correctly; information was showing up on the site that was not at all appropriate.) Just as a website has to be up-to-date, those responsible for the website need to find a way to quickly respond to questions from the public.

## Conclusion

The central inclusion of women and girls is among the world's most important topics. This chapter has covered some of the basics in regard to beginning and developing a City for CEDAW initiative that can support international efforts for change. The main points learned are that there is no "one right way" of moving forward, but there are some general considerations (11 are listed here) that might be discussed before a community initiative is put in place as well as during the different stages of development. Working effectively on a local level can improve the prospects for a national or international initiative to be successful.

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