



Global Diplomacy Lab

The Gender and Democracy Week

7 to 12 August 2023, Ollin, Mexico

When non-profit leaders Gabriela de la Torre and ElsaMarie DSilva connected at the BMW Foundation's Responsible Leaders Network Driver Meet in Berlin, they decided to team up and merge their two network initiatives – the Democracy Week and the Gender Alliance. And so, the Gender and Democracy Week was born. The Gender Alliance, co-founded by DSilva in December 2019, is a cross-network initiative bringing together feminists from the Responsible Leaders Network, the Global Diplomacy Lab, the Bosch Alumni Network, and the Global Leadership Academy Community (by GIZ). The Democracy Week was initiated by Greta Rios from Ollin, Mexico, during the pandemic, and Gabriela de la Torre, as a Board member of Ollin, was eager to strengthen the project.

Gabriela de la Torre and ElsaMarie DSilva designed the Gender and Democracy Week as a hybrid format, enabling people worldwide to participate and host events. An in-person spotlight event in Mexico City brought together leaders from various networks – BMW Foundation, Bosch Alumni and the Global Diplomacy Lab. The dynamic campaign, held from August 7 to 12, 2023, aimed to spark meaningful conversations, amplify voices, and contribute to the advancement of gender equality in democratic contexts. Combining the two important themes of Gender and Democracy meant bringing the intersectional perspective to discussing topics like inclusion, urban living, violence against women, indigenous rights, climate change, youth leadership, technology and the role of the private sector.

The campaign's global reach drew participants from diverse time zones, highlighting the universal significance of gender equality within democratic frameworks. The campaign's influence extended across 24 countries on all continents and encompassed a wide spectrum of sectors, from academia and civil society to the private sector and beyond. The in-person event was rich in resource and story sharing, bringing the global perspective to local issues and vice versa. Participants, hailing from 10 different countries, built solidarity beyond borders, offering unique perspectives from their diverse backgrounds, and sharing expertise from their practical work. Interactive sessions included panel discussions, fishbowl discussions, trust circles, and game play.

Two thought-provoking site visits to Transparency International and the indigenous community in Xochimilco provided firsthand perspectives to participants. Transparency International identified how corruption affects different civil and political rights. The identification of obstacles



and possible solutions in the anti-corruption cycle involves prevention, detection, investigation, prosecution, and reparation. During the visit to Xochimilco, international participants had the privilege of meeting with local “chinamperos,” the dedicated agriculturalists of this region. Xochimilco, a borough in the middle of Mexico City, brings to life a snapshot of pre-colonial Mexico City: its web of canals and artificial islands are home to the Chinampas, fertile floating gardens that are designed for agricultural purposes. Over a shared meal, the chinamperos shared their enduring struggles related to land preservation and their fight for active participation in democratic processes.

Key principles and Values

The in-person programme was held on the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (UNAM) Campus, thus bringing in youth voices that are critical for ensuring a holistic overview of the problems. Some key principles and values that emerged from these discussions are:

Equal Representation: It is important to have diverse and inclusive representation in a democracy. Gender-balanced participation across all sectors, from politics to economics, is critical to ensure that decisions and policy will reflect the needs and aspirations for all.

Transparency: Transparency is the cornerstone of a robust democracy. It is important to advocate for open governance and access to information, fostering accountability and trust between governments and citizens.

Active Citizen Participation: Democracy thrives when citizens actively engage in decision-making processes. It is critical to create spaces for meaningful participation, where individuals are heard, and their contributions drive positive change. This must include intergenerational dialogue and participation of indigenous and other vulnerable communities.

Empowerment of Marginalised Communities: All forms of discrimination and marginalisation must be eliminated and a commitment to empower marginalised communities, ensuring their rights, dignity, and equal opportunities must be encouraged.

Education and Healthcare for All: Education and healthcare are fundamental rights that underpin democratic societies. Access to quality education and healthcare for everyone, without distinction, must be a priority.

Justice and Equality: Justice is the bedrock of democracy. Equitable legal systems that protect the rights of all, irrespective of gender, race, or background must be the norm.

Engaging Men and Boys: Men and boys must be encouraged to break the patriarchy, challenge the status quo and create a culture of respect and consent.



Action Items

The participants determined the following action items through an interactive and inclusive dialogue:

Feminist Policies: It is important to recognize the need for feminist policies in shaping our societies. By challenging harmful norms and dismantling systemic inequalities, there is a commitment to policies that promote gender equality and social justice.

Fostering Inclusivity: The participants agreed to nurturing inclusive spaces that respect and value all voices, irrespective of gender or identity, meeting people where they are and embracing dialogue over imposition.

Empowering the Next Generation: It is important to nurture the potential of future generations through inclusive education, equipping them with the tools to become informed and engaged citizens. Mentoring, coaching and access to STEM education are some of the pathways identified.

Environmental Responsibility: A just democracy acknowledges a personal and professional responsibility to the environment and the need to advocate for policies that prioritize sustainability and address climate challenges.

Collaboration Across Borders: Gender equality is a global goal and so collaboration across borders is an effective strategy.

The Gender and Democracy Week was immensely successful in fostering a space for deep and meaningful discussions and potential collaborations. All participants agreed that they would like to continue with the week next year.

About the initiators

Gabriela is the General Director of the Adopt a Talent Program (Programa Adopte un Talento, PAUTA), a non-profit organization at the Nuclear Sciences Institute of the National University of Mexico (UNAM).

ElsaMarie DSilva is the Founder of Red Dot Foundation, a non-profit that works on gender equity, safety and justice.