

Major Group Position Paper

The Women Major Group's vision and priorities for the Sustainable Development Goals

March 2014

Introduction

This short position paper details the Women's Major Group's vision and priorities - including themes, goals, targets and indicators – for the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the wider post-2015 development agenda and the High Level Political Forum (HLPF). It forms part of the European Commission-funded multi-stakeholder engagement programme [*"Sustainable Development 2015" \(SD2015\)*](#). This paper provides an opportunity for the Major Group to communicate and consult on its position as a basis for ongoing stakeholder engagement, capacity building and advocacy.

The paper sits alongside similar position papers authored by the other Major Groups. A synthesis report of these position papers is provided by Stakeholder Forum in order to identify common priorities and important differences across the Major Groups' positions and compare them with the [*Open Working Group on Sustainable Development Goals' \(OWG\) 'focus areas'*](#), published in February 2014. The review will be used as a basis for engagement between the Major Groups and the OWG, and to establish priority clusters for further coordination and advocacy work on those themes. The individual papers will be updated by the respective Major Groups in September 2014 following a series of global and regional capacity building, outreach and advocacy exercises under the *SD2015* programme.

The Women's Major Group was created as a result of the United Nations 1992 Rio Earth Summit, which recognized women as one of the nine major groups of civil society whose participation in decision-making is essential for achieving sustainable development. The Women's Major Group (WMG) is organized globally with over 500 representatives of non-governmental organizations that work on women's rights, sustainable development and environment policy processes. The WMG facilitates meaningful participation of diverse women's groups, civil society organizations, social movements and women from indigenous and other communities in international policy negotiations on issues of sustainable development. The Women's Major Group develops policy positions on the thematic areas of Post-2015 and Sustainable Development Goals, presents women's recommendations to policy makers as well as media, and raises awareness on gender equality and equitable and sustainable policy alternatives. The core partners facilitate strategy meetings, conference calls, surveys, and open calls for input to understand and prioritize issues on its agenda. In 2013, the WMG created open thematic advocacy groups¹ to transparently and effectively develop priorities and share knowledge and research related to issues of Post-2015 and the Sustainable Development Goals

This discussion paper is based on a large number of thematic position papers and reports by the Women's Major Group, which can be downloaded from http://womenrio20.org/policy_statements.php. These position papers highlight the root causes of the unsustainable development model that has triggered the ecological, social and economic crises the planet is facing today, and the structural, transformative changes that are needed to address these crises. Instead of moving towards a so called "green economy" that continues to place economic growth as the key priority, the members of the WMG propose a transformation towards a sustainable, equitable and inclusive economy that includes alternative measures of prosperity, mindful that in many areas such economies have long existed or should be restored. We call for a specific, stand-alone goal on gender equality and women's human rights in the post-2015 framework; and equality, including gender equality, to be a crosscutting priority in all dimensions of

the sustainable development framework, and therefore to be reflected in the preamble and in the form of concrete targets. Reaffirming previously agreed commitments on women's human rights should be the bare minimum of any post-2015 framework.

Our position

The Women's Major Group calls for a structural transformation to international sustainable development. While we recommend the following clusters of priorities, we are clear that these will not be enough on their own to guarantee a just and sustainable development framework for all. The proposed Sustainable Development Goals should form part of a broader agenda of deep structural and transformational changes that is firmly rooted in human rights obligations and the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities (CBDR), and should not be limited to reductive targets and indicators. Social, economic and ecological justice, including women's and girls human rights and gender equality, must be firmly embedded. The SDGs should, at the bare minimum, build on the development frameworks set in the 1990s and integrate women's human rights and a human rights architecture in general into the development agenda, taking into account the diversity of needs and constraints based on gender, age, class, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation and abilities. States should protect and fulfil human rights, and the principles of non-regression, progressive realisation, equity, equality, non-discrimination, accountability and participation and should guarantee the full implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and its optional protocol, including Recommendations 12 - 29 as well as other human rights' instruments. These include human rights' instruments related to the right to freedom of speech, association, and peaceful protest, the right to access to independent media and information; the right to public participation in political processes and civil engagement at all levels; the right to access to justice; and the right to food.

Our Recommendations

We are currently elaborating a position paper, which includes detailed recommendations for goals, targets and possible indicators in priority areas across the post-2015 sustainable development agenda, with a primary call for a goal on gender equality and women's human rights. The paper further elaborates complementary priority areas relevant to gender equality and women's rights to:

- 1. Achieve gender equality and the full realization of women's human rights;**
- 2. Ensure all conflict prevention and peace building processes respect, protect, and fulfill women's human rights;**
- 3. Eliminate inequalities and eradicate poverty;**
- 4. Redistribute productive and reproductive work and achieve decent work for all;**
- 5. Secure safe and sustainable and just production and consumption patterns and eliminate hazardous substances and technologies;**
- 6. Secure food sovereignty and food and water security;**
- 7. Halt climate change, transition from carbon intensive infrastructures and ensure a benevolent planetary system for human existence;**
- 8. Ensure safe, sustainable energy and mobility, which benefit women and men equally and are compatible with planetary boundaries;;**
- 9. Conserve ecosystems and ensure sustainable governance of oceans and seas, lakes, land, soil and other natural resources,**
- 10. Sustainable urbanization to achieve decent, safe, inclusive, productive and resilient cities and human settlements;**
- 11. Achieve the highest attainable standard of health for all across the life course;**

- 12. Ensure equitable and universal access to formal, non-formal, and popular free quality education and lifelong learning for all;**
- 13. Align macro-economic policies with human rights standards within the SDGs; and**
- 14. Promote effective, rights-based governance and accountability.**

The detailed position paper is expected to be online in English, French and Spanish in March or April 2014 on: http://womenrio20.org/policy_statements.php

Framework

The promotion of only an objective-based global framework risks reducing development agendas to a list of goals, targets and indicators that perpetuate “development silos”. A Plan of Action, which includes a robust analysis of key systemic issues and the means of implementation to carry them out, should be included. We call for a comprehensive approach to developing SDGs from a gender and human rights perspective. Human rights obligations, gender equality, the principle of Common but Differentiated Responsibilities, and the recognition of historical responsibilities must form the basis of the post-2015 development framework. We call for political, programmatic and financial accountability for commitments made and we reassert states’ responsibility to uphold, through policy regulation and enforcement, the interests of the public and of the environment over that of corporate power. The dismantling of state institutions has to be reversed. Good governance, which includes consistent enforcement of law and order and full and effective participation of women in decision-making and restorative justice are pre-conditions for sustainable development.

Means of implementation are essential if the next generation of global goals is to be met. A sustainable development financing strategy must, as a minimum, reaffirm commitment to the 0.7% ODA target and call for a turnaround from its recent decline and ensure access to and transfer of environmentally sound and safe technologies. Technology transfer, financing, monitoring, assessment, and research should be in line with the precautionary principle and the principle of free, prior informed consent. An independent technology assessment and monitoring organization should be established. Public financing must be prioritized over public-private partnerships. Public services cannot be turned over to the market since they are a public responsibility. Donor or corporate interests must not drive the post-2015 agenda. Public budgets, including military budgets, need to be transparent, open to public debate and incorporate a gender perspective and social and environmental safeguards. Gender-sensitive fiscal policy is an important point of entry to address many SDGs. This includes both gender budgeting as well as reducing indirect taxes and increasing progressive and direct taxes to income, which will diminish the burden on women, who spend their money in household payments.

Sustainable development also means reforming and regulating global financial markets, and fostering a macroeconomic environment that preserves national policy space for governments to fulfil their human rights obligations and effectively advance the three pillars of sustainable development. Trade and investment policies should be subject to ex ante and ex post facto gender, human rights and environmental impact assessments. A binding multilateral code of conduct for transnational corporations to control and monitor their compliance with human rights obligations and environmental sustainability standards and ensure accountability needs to be developed and an autonomous Centre for Dispute Resolution on transnational private and public investments should be established. An international debt resolution mechanism is needed to resolve the on-going debt crisis that forms a major obstacle for sustainable development in many countries.

A comprehensive, transformative post-2015 sustainable development agenda should also respect and promote the rule of law, including in shared resources like oceans and seas, where there is a need for a legal regime for the conservation of marine biodiversity and a global high seas enforcement agency. Legally binding commitments in the field of sustainable development, including in the field of chemical management, biodiversity, desertification and climate change, should be further strengthened and properly enforced, taking into account the crucial role of women and Indigenous Peoples in conserving the world’s ecosystems. Moratoria on dangerous technologies like synthetic biology, nanotechnology, biochar, geo-engineering, nuclear energy and genetically modified organisms should be imposed or reinforced and market-based conservation mechanisms should be abandoned.

Monitoring and Evaluation

It is essential that gender-disaggregated data and indicators are used to monitor and evaluate the implementation of the proposed goals and targets. It should be ensured that GDP is viewed as only one, inadequate, indicator of development progress. Gender-disaggregated indicators should recognize and account for the value of care work, and expand the global understanding and measurements of wellbeing and development through appropriate targets and indicators, taking into account the contributions of unpaid work and nature without commodification or financialization of nature.

There also is a need to incorporate qualitative data to monitor progress throughout all areas. Monitoring and evaluation should not be limited to states and the UN system, but it should also monitor the gender differential impacts of foreign direct investments and trade and investment policies and agreements that might restrict the policy space of states to fulfill their obligations regarding human rights and sustainable development, including women's access to basic services.

The agenda should also include references to means of holding states accountable to their development and human rights commitments, in local, national, regional, and international fora. These fora should provide for the participation of all women, including from marginalized group, and should use disaggregated data collected in monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to assess state compliance. They should also provide access to effective remedy and redress for violations of women's human rights in implementing development programs.

Next Steps

The transformative change needed to achieve sustainable development will be impossible without the full and effective participation of women in all phases of decision-making and implementation. There should be meaningful participation of women's and social movements in the design, delivery, monitoring and evaluation of the development goals, policies and programs. As a truly global open public policy network of over 500 women's groups, the Women's Major Group on Sustainable Development is excellently positioned to mobilize and engage women in the development of the post-2015 development agenda and its subsequent implementation.

Conclusion

There is a clear need for transformative change in order to achieve a human rights-based sustainable, equitable and inclusive development for all women and men of all ages and abilities. Transformative changes require changing the patterns of production and consumption, reforming the international trade and financial architecture, and building strong transparency and accountability mechanisms that halt the exacerbation of social, economic and gender inequalities. Transformative action entails, among others, enforcing legally binding corporate accountability, halting the commodification of nature, respecting the unique knowledge of traditional and coastal communities and the governance rights of indigenous peoples and peasant and coastal communities, protecting women's land tenure and land use rights, securing food and energy sovereignty, eliminating financial support of ecologically or socially harmful economic activities, and banning the use of unsustainable substances and technologies. Support for sustainable energy technologies and agroecological practices, increasing transparency of public budgets and ensuring meaningful participation of women in the design, delivery, monitoring and evaluation of the development framework is paramount. Finally, there will be no sustainable development without ensuring that all girls and women have the ability to control their reproduction, have healthy and satisfying sexual lives, and live a life free from stigma, discrimination and violence.