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SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS AND THE 2030 AGENDA

Why environmental sustainability and gender equality are so important to reducing poverty and inequalities

WOMENS MAJOR GROUP¹ AT UNEP

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1. Introduction

On September 25th 2015, the Heads of States of the UN's 193 member states adopted the "2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development" and its 17 "Sustainable Development Goals".²

This is the result of two policy processes that have merged, namely the sustainable development process, which was developed following the Earth Summit held in Rio de Janeiro in June 1992, and the development process, with the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) at its core.

One of the main outcomes of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development ("Rio+20"), which was held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil in June 2012, was the launch of a process to develop a set of universal goals and targets to address economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development, and to merge the Rio process with the "MDG" process.³

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¹ The publication is based on previous publications by the authors, including the Women's Major Group 2013 policy publication. This publication is available at: http://www.womenmajorgroup.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/06/Womens_priorities_SDG.pdf

² UN adopts new Global Goals, charting sustainable development for people and planet by 2030 <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=51968#.VgmE7MblD-Q>

³ For further information on the history of women's movement in Sustainable Development please see: <http://www.womenmajorgroup.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/06/History-of-the-Women%E2%80%99s-Movement-and-Sustainable-Development-4.pdf>

Already in 1987 the Brundtland report noted *“inequality is the planet’s main ‘environmental’ problem; it is also its main ‘development’ problem.”* For that reason, the Brundtland Commission concluded that sustainable development does not only mean poverty eradication in terms of “meeting the basic needs of all” but also that “those who are more affluent adopt lifestyles within the planet’s ecological means.”

Unsustainable development, inequality and the violation of the human rights of women and men are closely linked. In fact, they are different faces of the same problem. Respect for human rights, including in particular the right to non-discrimination, prescribes that every human being, regardless of his/her sex, race, religion, age or sexual preference, has an equal right to enjoy the natural wealth of our planet. This equal right to ecological space, not only of current generations, but also of future generations, is at the heart of sustainable development as well.

With women forming the majority of the world’s poor⁴ specific attention is needed to eliminate the multiple causes of inequality and discrimination which they face.⁵ The root causes of inequality are often embedded in deeply rooted patterns of discrimination, causing women to receive lower wages, own less property, and be more vulnerable to the hardships of poverty and environmental degradation.

The care economy, which encompasses paid and unpaid work, tends to rely on the cheap or invisible labour of women. The provision of care is central to livelihoods and should be a collective responsibility involving men equally, as well as families, households, communities, and the public and private sectors. This does not imply the monetization of unpaid care work, but does call for its effective redistribution.

Women’s unpaid contributions to our economies are not valued nor measured. The main economic indicator used for policy decision-making, i.e. the gross domestic product (GDP), is ‘gender blind’. It does not reflect the unpaid contribution of women or the unvalued contribution of nature to our economies. In the words of Robert Kennedy, the GDP “measures everything, except that which makes life worthwhile”.⁶ According to some estimates, women’s unpaid labour is equivalent to at least half of a country’s GDP.⁷ The unpaid labour performed by women is a large part of the so-called ‘care economy’. It involves the unpaid work usually performed in the domestic sphere providing direct (feeding, clothing, cleaning and caring for the ill, young and vulnerable) and indirect care (wood collection for energy purposes, seed collection for self-sustenance, etc.) that enables others to take part in the economy and generate income. “If the care economy sputters, it will have serious consequences for both society and its productivity as it is losing its most important resource and value generator – people”.⁸ Gender-aware indicators reflecting the value and persistence of this work should be implemented in all economic and policy planning, advancing already existing statistical advances such as time surveys and satellite accounts and incorporating their data in the development models.

The contribution of nature and ecosystems also remains invisible in the GDP. Intact ecosystems assure the survival of the poorest people, who depend for up to 80 per cent of their livelihoods on functioning ecosystems.⁹ Given women’s unequal care responsibilities their dependence on natural resources for survival in the form of water and wood gathering for their households in rural and urban poor contexts (just to cite two examples) makes them more vulnerable to the depletion of natural resources.

4 Estimates that globally women account for 70 per cent of the poor are based on a combination of assumptions, such as women’s land ownership (1-2 per cent), property ownership and income levels (up to 80-90 per cent lower for the same job than men in some countries). See UNDP Human Development Report <http://hdr.undp.org/en/>

5 UNICEF(2007). State of the World’s Children 2007: Women and Children, the Double Dividend of Gender Equality. UNICEF: New York.

6 See: <http://www.theguardian.com/news/datablog/2012/may/24/robert-kennedy-gdp>

7 See: <http://www.wecf.eu/english/articles/2012/06/saschagabizon-unwomen.php>

8 See: <http://www.undp.org/women/CD-Gender-and-Budgets-2004/3.1-care.htm>. Both these concepts (social capital and care economy) essentially capture the ‘values’ of human investment and activity in the economy.

9 TEEB (2010). The Economics of Ecosystems and Biodiversity. Mainstreaming the Economics of Nature, Synthesis of approach, Recommendations and Conclusions of TEEB. Available at: <http://www.teebweb.org>



If rivers dry up, the women and girls that depend on them have to walk longer distances to collect water for their families. This is the same if forests are depleted and women need to collect wood to cook and warm up their houses.

About the Women's Major Group

The Women's Major Group (www.womenmajorgroup.org) was created as a result of the 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. Its fundamental role is to assure effective public participation of women's groups and other organizations and social movements striving for gender equality and gender justice in the United Nations policy-making process on sustainable development. The Women's Major Group (WMG) is recognized as one of nine major groups by the United Nations Environment Programme, where it is currently facilitated by a team of organizations, including Global Forest Coalition (GFC), Niger Delta Women's Movement for Peace and Development, as well as Women in Europe for a Common Future (WECF) / Women International for a Common Future (WICF), Soroptomist International, Women Organizing for Change in Agriculture (WOCAN) and Asia Pacific Forum on Women, Law and Development (APWLD). The WMG is also recognized by ECOSOC as one of the major groups involved in the post-2015 SDG policy process. The WMG at UNEP and ECOSOC are organized globally with over 600 representatives of nongovernmental organizations.

2. Post-2015 Development Agenda and Sustainable Development Goals

2.1. Lessons from the Millennium Development Goals

The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) were agreed in the year 2000 as a global action agenda to eliminate extreme poverty by 2015. The eight MDGs were mostly not achieved, progress was very uneven, and even though extreme poverty (as measured by an income below 1 dollar a day) was reduced overall, this was mostly due to progress in a few emerging economies, and not in least developed countries.¹⁰ In most countries, inequalities have increased, even if gross national product (GNP) increased. The lack of a systematic and well-defined accountability architecture has been identified as a key reason for some major shortfalls in achieving the MDGs, including commitments under MDGs 3 (gender equality), 5 (maternal health), 7 (environmental sustainability) and 8 (the global partnership).¹¹ Another main lesson learned from the MDGs is that we need to understand the root causes underlying the current unsustainable and inequitable system in order to develop a new economic paradigm that allows for the survival of the planet, as well as a more equitable social order.

The MDG report shows that an environmental cost has been paid in those countries that have experienced decreased levels of poverty. The Human Development Report (2013) warns that if **environmental degradation** continues at the current rate, these gains in poverty reduction will be entirely turned back, pulling over **3 billion** people back into extreme poverty.¹²

2.2. The Sustainable Development Goals

The WMG has been one of the most active civil society groups participating in the policy-making process which led to the adoption in June 2014 of the 17 SDGs and their 169 Targets.¹³

The SDGs were negotiated in an unusual intergovernmental process called the Open Working Group (OWG) where Member States negotiated mainly in smaller groups of two or three countries, and not as usual by larger political groupings composed of G77 countries, the European Union and the United States.

10 Uneven progress of UN Millennium Development Goals. See: <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-11364717>

11 CESR and OHCHR (2013). Who Will Be Accountable? Human Rights and the Post-2015 Development Agenda .

12 UNDP (2013). Human Development Report 2013. Available at: <http://hdr.undp.org/en/>

13 Open Working Group proposal for Sustainable Development Goals. See: <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/sdgsproposal>.



The General Assembly's (GA) Open Working Group (OWG) on the SDGs submitted its proposal to the 68th session of the United Nations General Assembly in September 2014. The General Assembly has adopted the 17 SDGs and with that, the Rio and MDG processes were officially merged.

The adoption of the SDGs is a commendable achievement

The WMG in their policy statement following the agreement of the 17 SDGs,¹⁴ commended those governments who fought hard to secure and advance gender equality and the women's human rights in the SDGs. The WMG deplored that certain countries, led by Saudi Arabia, have consistently tried to delete the language around the rights of women and girls. The WMG also commended the co-chairs for forging a compromise with all Member States and for not having given in to pressures to reduce the goals to the lowest common denominator. The WMG concluded that the ambition should have even been higher, but that the adoption of the SDGs is a significant step forward. The intergovernmental negotiations to formulate the SDGs were an inclusive and complex process amidst sharp differences and disputes among Member States. Taking this political reality into consideration, the WMG acknowledged that the adoption of the SDGs is a commendable achievement. The WMG continues to support and promote the SDGs as the "Seventeen for Sustainability", despite attacks by certain Member States, including the United Kingdom.

The WMG had advocated for a dual strategy, of having again a standalone goal on gender equality and women's right – similar but much more comprehensive than the MDG goal 3 – as well as ensuring the gender equality dimension in the other SDGs.

The Gender Equality Goal

The WMG welcomes the agreement on SDG goal 5 to "Achieve gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls". The WMG regrets though that a few countries have refused to refer to "women's rights" in the title. The WMG welcomes in particular the targets of SDG 5 to "end all forms of violence, discrimination, early forced marriage and harmful practices against women and girls", "universal access to sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights", to "ensure women's full participation in decision making, and equal rights to land and economic resources".¹⁵ At the same time, the WMG deplores the fact that the language does not go far enough, and does not recognize the sexual rights of women, men and young people in order to control their sexuality, and allow them to live free of coercion, discrimination and violence. Even though there were a majority of states in favour of this stronger language, a vocal minority, including the Vatican and Saudi Arabia, once again blocked consensus. It was not until the last hours of negotiations of the 2030 Agenda, in July 2015, that the outcome finally included a full reference to reproductive and sexual health, as well as rights.

Importance of goals on oceans, climate and SCP

The WMG welcomes the fact that gender equality and women's rights are addressed in different SDG goal areas, including women's equal rights to education and life-long learning, to decent work and equal pay for work of equal value.¹⁶ The WMG welcomes the fact that, unlike the MDGs, the agenda has standalone goals on ecosystems, ocean, sustainable consumption and production¹⁷ and a standalone goal on climate change which recognizes women's role,¹⁸ and comprehensively aims to end poverty and hunger, ensure healthy lives, universal access to water and sanitation for all, not just for a the more easy-to-reach groups.

14 WMG-8 Red Flags following the conclusion of the OWG Sustainable Development Goals. See: <http://www.womenmajorgroup.org/womens-8-red-flags-following-the-conclusion-of-the-open-working-group-on-sustainable-development-goals-sdgs/#more-1515>

15 Goal 5 targets: end all forms of discrimination; eliminate all forms of violence against all women and girls; eliminate all harmful practices, such as child, early and forced marriage and female genital mutilations; recognize, and value unpaid care and domestic work; take measures to ensure women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities; ensure universal access to sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights as agreed in accordance with the Programme of Action of the ICPD and the Beijing Platform for Action and the outcome documents of their review conferences; and specific means to implement gender equality and women's rights, including legislation, access to finance, productive resources etc.

16 Including in the context of ending poverty, addressing inequalities, health, education, decent work and capable institutions.

17 Including standalone goals on sustainable use of oceans, ecosystems, forests, and halting biodiversity loss.

18 Launching urgent action prior to 2020, whilst ensuring priority for the legally binding UNFCCC policy process.



The goal on reducing inequalities, and other important goals and targets

The standalone goal on reducing inequalities within and between countries (goal 10) is imperative to addressing the root causes of poverty, and so are its targets to reverse the trend towards ever-growing income inequalities by reforming global financial systems and fiscal measures. Goal 16 on peaceful inclusive societies and its targets on participatory decision-making, access to justice and reducing arms flow are as important as the goal 17 on means of implementation (MOI), as well the implementation targets under each of the goals.

Reducing excessive wealth as important as reducing poverty

The WMG had advocated for stronger targets in a number of goal areas, in particular goals and targets that would reverse the *concentration of power*. The SDGs can only be successful when it *not only aims to reduce extreme poverty, but also extreme wealth*. Currently, the 80 richest individuals own as much as the bottom 50 per cent worldwide.¹⁹ Just 5 per cent of the 46.2 trillion-dollar wealth of the world's so-called "High Net-Worth Individuals" is enough to cover the annual cost of a global social protection floor and climate change adaptation and mitigation combined. For the SDGs to be transformative, they must radically change the global political economy system through a redistributive framework that aims to reduce inequalities of wealth, power and resources between countries, within countries, between rich and poor, and between men and women. The WMG had therefore called for specific language on *progressive tax systems* worldwide and innovative financing mechanisms such as the *financial transactions tax (FTT)*. The WMG also had called for *extra-territorial practices* to be addressed, ending impunity of costs being transferred to States, citizens and the environment and corporations getting away with this as if they have 'rights' which would stand above those of people.

Lack of recognition of indigenous women, pastoralist women and artisanal fisher women

The WMG notes that most of the "environmental" goals on agriculture, oceans, ecosystems, and sustainable consumption and production, do not acknowledge that women farmers, indigenous women, pastoralists and artisanal fisherwomen are already feeding the majority of the world population, and are more productive per unit than large industrial agriculture, while maintaining the largest seed and livestock diversity. The call for more productivity based on gene banks and technology (Goal 2), instead of supporting agro-ecology and the rights to land, water, diversity and livelihoods of small food providers and particularly women, is a step in a wrong direction. This will worsen hunger and resource erosion. Instead, the WMG had called for inclusion in the SDGs of free, prior and informed consent and the rights of indigenous peoples, including references to *indigenous and community conserved areas and territories* (ICCA's)²⁰ as well as references to women as decision makers, resource managers and experts on adaptation and disaster resilience in goals on water, energy, and management of ecosystems.

Lack of attention to women's role in peace and justice

In an agenda that is intended to ensure human dignity, the respect, protection, and fulfilment of the full range of human rights obligations must be central. Because of its focus on peace, rule of law, and access to justice, Goal 16 would have been the logical place to include many aspects of a human rights-based approach to development. However, the WMG regrets the lack of attention to women's role in peace and justice, particularly with respect to access to meaningful, affordable or free and human rights-based justice systems for all individuals, and particularly for women and marginalized groups.

Technology focus remains on trade and private access

Although technology is introduced in many different goals as an essential component for the realization of each goal, there is not a recognition of the urgent need for fair and equitable access

19 Forbes Magazine based on earlier calculation by Oxfam in its publication on inequalities.

20 Global Forest Coalition "Supporting Community Conservation" 2015 <http://globalforestcoalition.org/resources/supporting-community-conservation/>



to technology and to overcome intellectual property barriers, the need for developing countries to build and develop their own technological base, and the extremely important need to integrate multilateral, independent, participatory *evaluation* of technologies for their potential social, economic, environmental and health impacts, while women are seen as mere recipients of technology. The establishment of a technology transfer mechanism that could address these aspects should have been clearly affirmed.

2.3. Agenda 2030: monitoring and accountability

The 17 SDGs are the core part of the 2030 Agenda. In addition, governments are negotiating the other parts of the agenda, including the indicators for the 169 targets, the political declaration, the process for monitoring and accountability, and the financial and non-financial means of implementation.

The WMG calls for robust, transparent and participatory monitoring and accountability mechanisms that can improve the *credibility, ownership and effectiveness* of the 2030 Agenda for people and for states, and make the entire process more transformative and responsive to peoples' needs and for the sustainability of our planet. As the Secretary-General has said, a new paradigm of accountability is in fact "the real test of people-centred, planet-sensitive development."²¹

Accountability for the 2030 Agenda is a matter of universality, not conditionality. Unlike the MDGs, which applied primarily to developing states, this is a universal agenda and therefore provides an entry point for meaningful monitoring and accountability of domestic implementation by countries at every income and development levels and mutual accountability between states and with other development actors for global partnerships for development. The Women's Major Group firmly believes that States and the people who live within their borders will benefit from effective accountability.

To ensure accountability governments should solemnly *reaffirm to realize the universal aspirations for peace, development and human rights* for all and our determination to achieve the post-2015 development agenda, and *pledge to review on a regular basis the progress made* in implementing the provisions of this Declaration.²² *Re-affirm principles of transparent, inclusive and participatory processes, ensuring the involvement of civil society organizations and all major groups,*²³ especially women's, youth and other groups representative of diverse constituencies and those in vulnerable situations, *in decision-making processes and in follow-up mechanisms at local, national, regional and global levels, including their meaningful participation in the High-Level Political Forum.* In this regard, the *right of the public to access information,*²⁴ and fundamental related rights should be explicitly listed, especially *rights to seek and impart information, to self-expression, to freedom of organization, association and assembly, and to freedom of the media.*²⁵

States should ensure that the accountability structure of the post-2015 development agenda is:

- **Universal:** Accountability for the 2030 Agenda should be about ensuring universality, not conditionality. All countries, regardless of whether they are high, middle or low-income countries, as well as other development actors, including the private sector, should be held accountable to their commitments in the 2030 Agenda, and any review mechanisms established to monitor the implementation of the 2030 Agenda should ensure that all states participate.

21 UN Secretary-General (2015). The Road to Dignity by 2030: Ending Poverty, Transforming All Lives and Protecting the Planet. United Nations: New York. Available at: http://www.un.org/disabilities/documents/reports/SG_Synthesis_Report_Road_to_Dignity_by_2030.pdf

22 Adapted from UN Millennium Declaration, paras 31 and 32.

23 On civil society engagement, see Rio+20, paras. 43 (including major groups), 53, 75(h); UN Millennium Declaration, para. 20 (partnerships with the private sector and civil society organizations).

24 Rio+20, para. 44.

25 UN Millennium Declaration, para.25 (ensure freedom of the media and right of the public to have access to information).



- **Open, democratic, transparent, and participatory:** Those affected by development – in particular women of all ages, girls, and people from other marginalized groups and their representative organizations – should have the primary voice in holding states and other actors accountable to development commitments. They should be involved in the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of all development programmes that affect them. With this in mind, people and civil society organizations (CSOs) should play a key role in any review mechanisms created to monitor implementation of the post-2015 development agenda, including at national, regional and global levels. This includes *well-resourced and equipped independent civil society accountability mechanisms*.
- **Human rights-based:** States must ensure that they are implementing their development commitments in line with their international, regional, and national human rights obligations under relevant laws and treaties. Information from reviews and expert assessments issued by human rights bodies, including the United Nations Human Rights Council and treaty monitoring body system, should guide state implementation of the 2030 Agenda.
- **Data-driven, evidence-based and verifiable:** Monitoring and evaluation of implementation of the 2030 Agenda should be based on disaggregated data extensive data, collected by the state and verified by independent experts, including civil society organizations.
- **Regular, timely, and results-oriented:** The process of holding states accountable to their development commitments should occur regularly and often enough to ensure adequate monitoring of implementation. Accountability processes should be focused on ensuring results, namely the full implementation of the 2030 Agenda in line with human rights obligations.
- **Promotes joint or mutual accountability:** States and others involved in global development partnerships should be able to hold each other accountable for development commitments. This mutual accountability should include non-state actors, particularly international financial institutions, who should be held accountable to the roles they play in implementing the agenda.

Review mechanisms for the 2030 Agenda

All review mechanisms should be grounded in principles of respect for and protection and fulfilment of human rights and fundamental freedoms, including sexual and reproductive rights, in accordance with the principles of equality and equity, gender equality, *free, prior and informed consent*, transparency, accountability and rule of law.

They should create linkages with existing human rights accountability mechanisms, and draw from the best practices used in those mechanisms, such as the Human Rights' Council's Universal Periodic Review (UPR), to inform the High Level Political Forum's²⁶ own methods of work in this area.

The Secretary-General's Synthesis Report for the first time lays out a framework for review of the 2030 Agenda. It calls for three tiers of review, national, regional, and global, that integrate existing mechanisms, such as human rights treaty bodies and also review of global partnerships, where both recipient and donor countries are monitored on their commitments.²⁷

²⁶ High Level Political Forum – HLPF <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/hlpf>

²⁷ UNSG Synthesis Report, para. 149.



In line with and building on the recommendations in the Secretary-General's Synthesis Report, the Women's Major Group calls for the following structure and modalities of reviews for the 2030 Agenda:

a. National-level monitoring and review

Civil society organizations must be involved at every stage of the accountability process, including as representatives on the accountability mechanism, key witnesses at any hearings or evidence-gathering sessions, and have the ability to publicly respond to reports or statements relating to the post-2015 framework. The participation of civil society will enable governments to understand the issues being faced by particular populations or in key regions, and will support the development of better policy and programming to support the government in achieving its targets. In order to ensure even greater representation, civil society organizations should be able to participate, including as experts on expert review panels, with particular emphasis on including women of all ages, girls, and marginalized groups. *As for the United Nations process, national processes should foresee an own space for women's organisations, a sort of national "Women's Major Group" spaces.*

National-level reviews should be the cornerstone of accountability for the 2030 Agenda. As the Secretary-General points out in the Synthesis Report, national-level reviews are the closest to the people affected by development programs, and thus States must place high priority on ensuring robust reviews within their borders.

b. Regional-level monitoring and review

The regional reviews should also have robust mechanisms for the participation of civil society organizations, other constituencies and major groups, similar to those described for a global review mechanism below.

c. Global-level monitoring and review

Only 8 to 9 days were scheduled for the annual review of progress by all 194 countries on the post-2015 development agenda during the HLPF; this appears to be little when compared to the time required for the Universal Periodic Review. The WMG sees possibility of synergies to be built with other existing review processes of Multilateral Agreements and Conventions, including a role for UNEP for example on Goal 12 on sustainable consumption and production.

The WMG further endorses the proposals of human rights organizations, led by the Centre for Reproductive Rights, Amnesty International, the Centre for Economic and Social Rights and Human Rights Watch, that the universal peer review of the HLPF has the following characteristics:

- A culture of universal participation;
- An interactive dialogue that reviews each state's progress in implementing the post-2015 agenda;
- Review of every state three times between 2016 and 2030;

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