

A decorative graphic consisting of a grid of dots in various shades of gray and red, arranged in a pattern that suggests a world map or a network of connections.

# Strengthening Gender Justice

## Recommendations for the Sustainable Development Goals and the Post-2015 Development Agenda

**WOMEN'S MAJOR GROUP**

September 2013

- Twenty years after the 1992 UN Summit in Rio, gender equality and women's rights are still being inadequately framed as ›mainstreaming‹ concerns, rather than as a transformative necessity for the realization of sustainable development.
- The recently-published report from the High Level Panel on the Post-2015 Development Agenda has been criticized by the Women's Major Group (WMG) for heightening and re-orienting development toward the interests and priorities of corporations while marginalizing the concerns of women all over the world.
- The processes involved in the negotiation of a new Development Agenda lack clarity concerning their mode of interaction, the question of which one will lead, and how they will frame one another. All of this hampers both the effective participation and the impact of civil society organizations and social movements.
- To ensure transparent and democratic processes, feminist, women's, human rights, environmental and social justice movements should all be given effective and meaningful channels of participation. It is therefore essential to strengthen and deepen the capacity of Major Groups to contribute to the creation of an inclusive, sustainable and equitable development agenda.

## 1. Introduction

One of the main outcomes of the UN Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20), held in June 2012, was the agreement reached by governments to launch a process to develop a set of goals and targets to address the economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development and to prepare a sustainable development financing strategy that would facilitate the mobilization of resources required to achieve sustainable development. Parallel to this, both the progress and the lack of it in achieving the Millennium Development Goals, as well as the shape of a development framework after 2015, have been discussed by UN agencies, governments and different civil society organizations.

The Women's Major Group (WMG), created as a result of the United Nations 1992 Rio Earth Summit, is one of the nine UN major groups representing civil society whose participation in decision-making has been recognized as essential for achieving sustainable development. Its role is to assure the 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 process on Sustainable Development. The WMG is organized globally and includes over 500 representatives of non-governmental organizations. Two organizing partners (Women International for a Common Future, WICF, and Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era, DAWN) and two core group members (Women's Environment and Development Organization, WEDO, and Global Forest Coalition, GFC) coordinate the WMG.

This *Perspective* aims to summarize some of the main recommendations that are being put forward by women activists, advocates, practitioners and academics who are part of the WMG and have contributed to the report »Gender Equality, Women's Rights and Women's Priorities: Recommendations for the proposed Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)« and the Post-2015 Development Agenda<sup>1</sup>.

1. More information available at [www.womenrio20.org](http://www.womenrio20.org).

## 2. The Politics of Gender and Sustainable Development

The 1992 Rio Earth Summit recognized structural inequalities in the global system and connected these to the growing environmental crisis. Through strong lobbying, civil society gained recognition that has enabled it to participate in official UN processes on sustainable development through a structure referred to as Major Groups. The nine groups established include social rights holder groups like farmers, trade unions, indigenous peoples, women, children and youth, thus creating a formal mechanism for social groups to be represented in the follow-up activities of the Commission on Sustainable Development that was convened under the United Nations Economic and Social Council.

During the 1992 Earth Summit, women advocates and allies focused their efforts on integrating gender equality and women's rights through Chapter 24 of Agenda 21. The summit also provided global momentum for other integrated frames of human rights and sustainable development in global, regional and national policymaking. One process is the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) that moved from a prevalent Malthusian focus on demographic targets through population control toward a perspective recognizing human rights, women's right to decision-making over their bodies and reproductive choices, and sustainable development.

Twenty years after the Rio Earth Summit, the world finds itself in the biggest recession since the 1930s. It was the result of global crises that were in turn triggered by the capital-hungry and risk-taking actions of international financial investors that spread into the real economy and lead to social spending cuts and the privatization of public services, entrenching the influence of the World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF). This is largely a repetition of the kind of structural adjustment policies that were imposed three decades ago, bringing with them a regime of inequality and high unemployment together with precarious labor conditions – all of which have been aggravated still further in the meantime. At the same time, there has also been a deterioration in the climate crisis and resultant environmental destruction.

In response, a corporate-driven agenda for a green economy was also debated strongly at the Rio+20 Summit

in 2012. Such a marketized system seeks to legitimize strategies such as geo-engineering and the bioeconomy as well as market-oriented emissions reduction schemes that may include carbon trading, the Clean Development Mechanism (CDM), REDD+ and much more. They do not, however, address issues like unsustainable consumption and production. Developing countries and some civil society groups have joined forces to counter this approach by demanding recognition of Agenda 21 and other long-fought principles of sustainable development such as common but differentiated responsibilities, technology transfer, and »free, prior and informed consent« of indigenous peoples and communities affected by state-run or private sector development plans.<sup>2</sup>

However, more progressive positions are (still) in a minority position compared to those that minimize gender equality and justice and other women's rights concerns. Instead of being priorities at Rio+20, the concerns brought up by civil society groups and women activists were used as bargaining chips by some states to win concessions in what they considered »strategic areas«. This was, for instance, the case with the demand from women to fully control their bodily autonomy and integrity, which prompted an attack on women's sexual and reproductive health (and their reproductive rights) by a small but powerful group led by the Vatican, Russia, and some Middle East and North African states. Meanwhile, some countries from both the South and North that are traditionally seen as allies in the battle for sexual and reproductive health and rights did not do enough to hold the line. Instead, they focused on other priorities such as the green economy and market-based financing mechanisms. It was only at the very end of the process that the G-77 block broke ranks on this point, by which time it was already too late to include sexual and reproductive health and rights in the final text. The result was that the final text laid a basis or point of reference that could be used to further erode gains made in other arenas such as the ICPD.

In this highly-politicized context of international, regional and national negotiations on sustainable development, the members of the WMG give their firm backing to sustainable development as a process of redistributing wealth, assets, and power in order to achieve social,

economic and ecological justice, as well as to tackle intersecting inequalities and multiple forms of discrimination based on gender, age, class, caste, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender identity, disabilities, and other status.

### 3. Women's Movement Resistance to a Corporatized Development Agenda

Well before 1992, and the now-famous Rio Earth Summit, women's groups in every region of the world had been leading work in all areas that contribute to sustainable development. This included social, environmental and economic approaches, and, in particular, a focus on gender equality and human rights. Feminist groups and the wider Women's Movement were absolutely key to the transformative shifts that brought these various areas together. This was clear in the work of the »Planeta Fêmea«<sup>3</sup> at the Earth Summit itself and in subsequent decades of advocacy and activism, including the persistent and long-running efforts of the WMG.

Twenty years after the Earth Summit in Rio, the WMG is united with other civil society groups and actors in criticizing the huge lack of progress since 1992. Neither sustainable consumption and production nor equitable inter-state and intra-state resource distribution have been ensured. Instead, there are exacerbated structural obstacles in the form of unequal trade and finance regimes that impede sustainable development in developing countries. In all states today there is a need to urgently reduce the levels of environmental destruction and degradation, to address climate change and biodiversity loss, and to address persistent inequalities preventing the realization of individual and collective rights, including women's rights.

Gender equality and women's rights are being inadequately framed as »mainstreaming« concerns, rather than as a transformative necessity for the realization of sustainable development.<sup>4</sup> The recent report from the High Level Panel (HLP) on the Post-2015 Development

2. Women's Major Group, Reflections on HLP post 2015 report: by far not good enough! (June 2013) [http://www.womenrio20.org/docs/Women\\_MG\\_analysis\\_High\\_Level\\_Panel\\_post\\_2015\\_report.pdf](http://www.womenrio20.org/docs/Women_MG_analysis_High_Level_Panel_post_2015_report.pdf).

3. Sen, G. and Nayar, A. 2012. »Population, environment and human rights: a paradigm in the making« in *Powerful Synergies: Gender Equality, Economic Development and Environmental Sustainability* (Sept 2012), UNDP, NY, pp 81-93.

4. Women's Major Group, Gender Equality, Women's Rights and Women's Priorities: Recommendations for the proposed Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the Post-2015 Development Agenda (September 2013).

Agenda shows a heightened and disturbing re-orientation of development toward the interests and priorities of corporations. This will only further marginalize and minimize the concerns of women all over the world – and the communities they live in. It is of the utmost concern that corporations now have unprecedented levels of access to United Nations and state-level decision-making processes. The world is in a period of acute economic and financial crisis. It is also facing other massive challenges: human rights violations, militarism, food and fuel shortages, climate change and environmental degradation. Nevertheless, the influence of transnational corporations has never been as strong or as networked in its resolve to protect profits above all else, and preserve the structural inequalities that secure such gains.

#### 4. Key Recommendations from Members of the WMG

In light of this criticism of the overall orientation of the Post-2015 Development Agenda as it is currently being discussed, and with the aim of influencing the process to develop a set of goals and a financing strategy on sustainable development, the WMG has elaborated recommendations to the Open Working Group (OWG) on the SDGs and the Intergovernmental Committee of Experts on Sustainable Development Financing (ICESDF). Structuring the main claims and alternative recommendations made by the WMG, four different dimensions of the proposed SDGs have been addressed:

- the structure, characteristics and governance of the SDGs
- the sustainability of livelihoods, the rights of nature and the use of technology
- the right to health, full access and attainment of sexual and reproductive health and rights
- the transformation towards a sustainable economic system

*On the Structure, Characteristics and Governance of the SDGs and the New Development Agenda*

- To be firmly rooted in human rights obligations and the principle of common but differentiated responsibil-

ities. Not limited to reductive targets and indicators. Implemented in a context of deep structural changes and democratization of the global governance systems.

- To integrate women's rights and the human rights architecture, emphasizing universal provision while taking into account the diversity of needs and constraints based on gender, age, class, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation and abilities. States should respect the principle of non-regression and guarantee the full implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and its optional protocol as well as other human rights instruments such as the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

- To fully recognize women as full rights holders, rather than merely portraying them as impacted communities, welfare recipients or labor supply.

- To develop concrete means of implementation that prioritize public financing over public-private partnerships.

- To include targets and indicators disaggregated by sex, age, income group and urban/rural, etc., as well as expanding the understanding and measurements of well-being and development through appropriate targets and indicators, taking into account the contributions of unpaid care work and nature to the sustainability of life without commodifying them. Moreover, to strengthen and develop targets and indicators on wage inequality, job segregation and informalization of work.

- To ensure meaningful participation of women's and social movements in the design, delivery, monitoring and evaluation of the development goals, policies and indicators at global, regional, national and local levels.

*On the Sustainability of Livelihoods, the Rights of Nature and the Use of Technology*

- To recognize the ecological limits to the 'growth' paradigm and safeguard sustainable development while addressing the risks and burdens disproportionately borne by women and girls.

- To make developed countries re-pay their climate debt via transfers of environmentally sound technologies and

financial resources required for states in the South to shift to low-carbon growth.

- To recognize and fully respect the unique knowledge of indigenous peoples and peasant communities, especially the knowledge held by women, as well as territories and areas conserved by indigenous peoples and local communities.
- To guarantee women's land tenure and land use rights, including through land reform programs.
- To secure food sovereignty based on the recognition of smallholder farmers, and particularly women, as key economic actors whose right to use and own land should be protected through legally binding safeguards against land grabbing.
- To redirect support to alternative sustainable energy technologies, agroecological practices and local sustainable value chains that can safely meet energy and food needs while generating employment and supporting local communities.
- To urgently request all governments to ratify and implement the Convention on Biological Diversity's Nagoya Protocol on Access to Genetic Resources and the Fair and Equitable Sharing of Benefits Arising from their Utilization (ABS), and legal measures that ensure full respect for the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP).
- To promote technology transfer, financing, monitoring and assessment, and research in line with the precautionary principle and the principle of free, prior informed consent and establish independent technology assessment and monitoring organization at national and global levels.
- To reaffirm the moratorium on geo-engineering and to phase out all financial policies and policy mandates that support carbon credits, unsustainable industrial forestry and bioenergy production.
- To keep ecosystems and forests out of carbon-markets and other market-mechanisms that trigger privatization and restrict access to women.

*On the Right to Health and the Full Access and Attainment of Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights*

- To halt the use of unsustainable, radioactive and harmful substances and technologies and re-affirm or impose moratoria on dangerous technologies like synthetic biology, nanotechnology, biochar, geo-engineering and genetically modified organisms.
- To urgently guarantee sexual and reproductive rights, and provide universal access to quality, comprehensive, integrated sexual and reproductive health services including contraception, maternity care, safe abortion and STI and HIV prevention and treatment within primary health care.
- To ensure that women, adolescents and girls receive a set of comprehensive sexuality education and services that respects their human rights throughout their life cycle.
- To eliminate laws and harmful practices that criminalize women for accessing sexual and reproductive health care (including abortion, emergency contraception, HIV services).
- To guarantee the human rights of women, girls and people with diverse sexual orientations and gender identities in a manner that eliminates all forms of discrimination and violence.

*On the Transformation towards a Sustainable Economic System*


- To regulate commodity markets in order to limit fluctuations in food prices and protect small producers.
- To close tax havens and implement a global financial transaction tax.
- To ensure that trade and investment policies make explicit reference to Agenda 21 and Rio+20 commitments in line with the precautionary principle and the principle of free, prior and informed consent and critical ecosystem protection as well as not impeding women's access to basic services including quality education and skill development opportunities, healthcare, drinking water, and to sustainable and affordable energy sources.

- To reinforce strong corporate accountability including penalty clauses and the application of the Maastricht Principles on Extraterritorial Obligations of States in the area of Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.
- To phase out subsidies to agro-industrial agriculture and large-scale industrial bioenergy and re-orient national agricultural plans toward local smallholder agro-ecology practices that make women's work and contributions visible while guaranteeing their rights and food sovereignty.
- To eliminate subsidies for industrial fishing fleets, promote and respect community-based governance models for marine protected areas and set targets for the implementation of the International Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-scale Fisheries.
- To foster a macroeconomic environment that preserves national policy space for governments to fulfill their human rights obligations and effectively advance the three dimensions of sustainable development in an integrated manner. This policy space should allow governments to increase their tax base through progressive policies, and, at the same time, enable governments to address gendered labor market segregation while ensuring full employment, decent work and a living wage for all while also promoting the redistribution of unpaid care work among different social actors inside and outside the households.
- To implement universal social protection worldwide in the form of a basic income for women and men. A global social protection floor will assure women, men and children access to basic services such as health care, food, water, energy, housing and employment.
- To recognize and account for the value of care work and protect the rights of care workers.
- To increase transparency and promote public debate of national budgets (including military budgets), moving towards the inclusion of social, environmental and gender concerns in *all the phases* of the budget and policy cycle. Gender-budgeting should therefore be a fixed part of public budgets.

## 5. Challenges and Opportunities of the Current Processes from a Feminist and Women's Movement Perspective

The definition of the Development Agenda after 2015 represents a complex crossroads. It is intersected by a multiplicity of often overlapping processes such as the Post-2015 discussions and the Rio+20 negotiations. The rise and growing influence of new global actors only compound this complexity. What is more, this is all taking place in the midst of interlinked environmental, economic and care crises. In this context, the task of comprehending and effectively influencing the processes leading to a New Development Agenda poses a huge challenge for feminist and women's social movements. At the same time, the very fact that this review and re-definition of the Agenda is taking place represents an opportunity for rights holders to have a say in the survival of future generations and the future of the planet. Members of the WMG are eager to partake in this process and contribute to the collectivity of voices that are building this new roadmap: a roadmap that forcefully demands radical transformations in the way that development is conceived and pursued.

One of the main challenges that arises from the current context is the juxtaposing of processes that are shaping it, such as the Open Working Group (OWG) on the SDGs and the Post-2015 Consultations. It is not clear for some governments, civil society organizations (CSO) and social movements how these processes will interact and which one will lead or frame the other. This uncertainty has made effective participation and incidence arduous. Effectively tracking consultations and following up on the impact of contributions and proposals that different actors have put forward has proved especially challenging. Nonetheless, the current stage of the negotiations provides an opportunity to expand and deepen participation mechanisms for social movements while creating accountability measures that empower them to effectively track negotiations and their results. For instance, the current OWG on the SDGs as well as the creation of the High Level Political Forum represent important opportunities to strengthen the Major Groups' structure by opening up more effective participation channels, facilitating the inclusion of more social actors, and implementing accountability mechanisms.



Another relevant challenge faced at this crossroads results from the structural limitations faced by government delegations, particularly those from low and middle-income countries. These are often small teams located in their home countries that follow global negotiations. They only comprise a limited number of experts, which makes it very difficult for them to adequately follow and influence negotiations that take place at UN headquarters in New York or in third countries. Nevertheless, the actual process represents an opportunity for UN agencies and governments to implement measures that counter-veil this structural inequality, creating new and transparent communication channels between UN headquarters, member states, and CSO and social movements.

One of the fundamental recommendations that members of the WMG make is that the Development Agenda should be clearly grounded in the fundamental principles of human rights. Hence, UN agencies should work in an integrated manner at both institutional levels: the human rights institution(s) in Geneva, as well as institutions in New York that are focused on the Development Framework. This represents a valuable opportunity to foster greater institutional articulation at the UN level, as well as to move forward the integration of a human rights framework in a new development paradigm.

Finally, but no less important, the rise of national and multinational corporations as new global actors, together with the expansion of their influence on global, regional and national policy processes, including through financial contributions and other forms of partnerships, represents a major concern for CSOs and social movements. Their influence is challenging in two specific ways:

- in terms of the already-unequal power structures
- in terms of transparency and accountability.

Firstly, corporations have at their disposal financial capacities that are often larger than those of governments and, clearly, those of CSOs and social movements. This intensifies the already unequal power relations that limit the capacities of social movements and low- and middle-income countries to impact the policy process in comparison with those of these powerful global actors. Secondly, corporations are only accountable to their shareholders and their priorities are focused on profit-maximization, leaving peoples' livelihoods and the

sustainability of the planet outside their fundamental priorities. This is the main reason why development should not be left in their hands. It is clear that a development framework requires stable and reliable public financial resources and the implementation of mechanisms that make all decision-making processes transparent and accountable to the citizens of the world: it must have the sustainability of the planet and its peoples at its heart. This is certainly one of the major challenges arising from this historical crossroads.



#### About the Author:

**WMG Editorial Team** is led by DAWN, GFC, WECF and WEDO based on the main recommendations of the report »Gender Equality, Women's Rights and Women's Priorities for the proposed Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)« written by WMG members. For further information see: [www.womenrio20.org](http://www.womenrio20.org), <http://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/index.php?menu=157>.

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