



## **A Feminist Brief: Post 2015 Development Agenda**

### **WOMEN AND GIRLS AT THE CENTER: OUR HUMAN RIGHTS ARE NON-NEGOTIABLE**

Currently, Member States, the UN system, civil society organizations, academia, private sector and businesses, research institutions and other stakeholders around the world are engaged in various processes to negotiate a new global framework for sustainable development - the post-2015 development agenda. Cognizant of the pitfalls of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), including the lack of focus on realizing women's rights in the goal of promoting gender equality and women's empowerment, it is essential that the future development agenda be explicitly shaped by, and grounded in human rights, economic justice, peace and environmental sustainability to ensure gender equality, the realization of women's rights and women's empowerment.

Shifts and realities on the ground, such as the deepening and widening inequalities within and between countries, ongoing and new conflicts, increasing militarization, surveillance, intensification of natural disasters, gender-based violence, increases in human insecurity, and retrogression in the realization of human rights for all, make it clear that the post 2015 sustainable development agenda must focus on the enabling environment and economic structures that limit the realization of women's rights and social justice. Progress towards ending poverty, hunger, inequalities from an intersectional approach, the prevention and elimination of all forms of violence against girls and women as well as links between gender-based violence and impunity, militarization, military spending, forced migration, displacement, and expropriation of livelihoods especially for rural and indigenous women, and the prevalence of small arms must be addressed if meaningful gains are to be made.

The future development agenda must address fundamental structural and transformational changes informed by the concrete realities of women throughout the life cycle, especially the most vulnerable and marginalized, and recognition of women as full citizens. It must tackle intersecting and structural drivers of inequalities, and multiple forms of discrimination based on gender, age, class, caste, race, ethnicity, place of origin, cultural or religious background, sexual orientation, gender identity, health status and abilities. Furthermore, a genuine new global partnership would have those most marginalized at the center, ensure truly democratic processes, transparent decision-making and accountability, with existing human rights accountability mechanisms linked at the regional and global levels.

After a total of 13 meetings over 18 months, the Open Working Group (OWG) on Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) discussions culminated in a final outcome document with 17 proposed goals and 170 targets, which was adopted by acclamation on July 19, 2014. In accordance with Rio+20 paragraph 248, the report of the Open Working Group will be submitted to the 68th session of the UN General Assembly, by which it will be considered for "appropriate action." In addition, it will be reflected as part of the full range of inputs<sup>1</sup> in the synthesis report of the UN Secretary General to be presented before the end of 2014.

Even though the adoption of this outcome document was more of a compromise than consensus, the final product can be considered a fair step in defining the post-2015 agenda. However, this is still a work in progress. There are various shortcomings, including a lack of political will to mainstream human rights throughout the document to significantly enhance the power of people to claim their rights. The outcome document only recognizes human rights in the introduction as a means to greater economic growth and not as intrinsically valuable obligations and fails to adequately ensure their full integration in all the proposed goals and targets. The document gives limited consideration to the current macroeconomic model, which perpetuates inequalities and conflict as well as the root causes of poverty, including the

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<sup>1</sup>The Secretary General report will include President of the General Assembly's summary of six special events organized under 'setting the stage' and the High-Level Stocktaking event; Report of the Intergovernmental Committee of Experts on Sustainable Development Financing; accountability consultations led by Regional Economic Commissions; and outputs from the Independent Advisory group on data revolution.

growing feminization and intergenerational transfer of poverty, and instead opens the door to private sector and businesses without the provision of commensurate safeguards on accountability.

The proposed goals and targets lack strong language about reforming the current neo-liberal policies of economic growth, privatization, de-regulation and reduced government spending, in the form of austerity measures. The document also does not adequately address their roles in fueling human rights violations including sexual and reproductive rights violations, particularly of women. This focus on economic growth also neglects to make the linkages between existing human rights accountability mechanisms at the regional and global levels. Furthermore, although some of the targets especially mention marginalized people, people who are discriminated against on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity are excluded.

As we await the directions on the modalities of how the different inputs from the OWG, the UN PGA special events, the Intergovernmental Committee of Experts on Sustainable Development Financing (ICESDF), the High-Level Political Forum (HLPF) and other processes will be considered and merged for the upcoming intergovernmental negotiations; it is critical to reiterate the need to ensure the realization of women's rights, gender equality and women's empowerment through the:

- *Ratification (as necessary) and Implementation of existing international commitments on human rights, gender equality, women's and girls' rights and empowerment*, including CEDAW, ICESCR, ICCPR, Beijing Platform for Action, UN Security Council Resolutions on Women, Peace and Security (WPS), and require application on the basis of non-retrogression, progressive realization, and common but differentiated responsibilities as overarching principles;
- *Human rights accountability for non-State actors*, including through the review of international financial institutions and other private sector entities and transnational corporations by human rights entities such as the Universal Periodic Review, Maastricht Principles on Extraterritorial Obligations of States, CEDAW and its Optional Protocol and other international and regional human rights mechanisms;
- *Financing for human rights and gender equality including sexual and reproductive rights*, which requires gender budgeting throughout the proposed goals, targets and indicators with dedicated gender equality funding. Critical to this is prioritization of public financing, reforms in taxation, reduction of military budgeting and spending and identification and utilization of other mechanisms to secure resources for the diversity of actors engaged in development, human rights and peace work, especially women's organizations and movements; This effort should include a special goal on full access to sexual and reproductive health services for all without any kind of discrimination;
- *Reform the current economic system*, in a way that development agenda and economic policies recognize women as workers, agents of economic growth, as well as their traditional skills and knowledge for livelihoods for ensuring food security for all. Reforms should also include commitments on provision of universal social security to all, guarantee individual access, control, ownership and management of productive resources for sustainable livelihoods for women, and ensure gender sensitized and accountable development initiatives, policies and programmes;
- *Reform of international financial regulatory systems*, which should reflect the needs of people at their center; develop policies and implement concrete initiatives, such as gender budgeting, and set goals with the recognition that women and men do not share the same realities and experience economic crises differently;
- *Substantive change to tax systems*, to ensure that corporations make significant contributions to sustainable development and the communities that sustain them, and are informed by the different realities and experiences of women and men, i.e., tax policies that support families and women's workforce participation;
- *Full and equal participation of women at all levels within public and private institutions*, through recognition, redistribution and reduction of the unequal burdens women face because of unpaid care work as well as strengthened mechanisms with adequate funding for the participation, mobilization and creation of an enabling environment for women-led civil society;
- *Create a global partnership*, which ensures the provision of commensurate safeguards for the protection and promotion of human rights above private sector interests, particularly in the area of natural resources, land and water grabs;
- *Ending militarism, ensuring freedom from gender-based violence and discrimination*, which are critical to the achievement of sustainable development, must be addressed through identifying links between military spending, the prevalence of small arms, impunity, and violence against Women Human Rights Defenders.