

## **Agenda 2030: A Feminist Analysis of the Post 2015 Development Agenda**

30 September 2015

On Sunday August 2nd, 2015, after two years of consultations and over eight months of intergovernmental negotiations, the United Nations reached consensus on a blueprint for achieving all three dimensions of sustainable development in the next fifteen years, titled [“Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda.”](#) This Outcome Document, adopted on September 25 2015, contains [17 Sustainable Development Goals \(SDGs\)](#) [169 Targets](#) on social, environmental and economic priorities to achieve inclusive and sustainable development throughout the world. This agenda is intended to be applied universally to ensure wellbeing for both people and the planet.

RESURJ, along with members of the Women’s Major Group, advocated for a stand-alone gender equality goal as well as for gender equality to be recognized as cross cutting throughout all aspects of sustainable development. We welcome the recognition in the [Political Declaration](#) of the necessity to not leave half of the population behind, and that the realization of gender equality and the human rights of women and girls will significantly contribute to progress across all goals and targets. The Political Declaration also reaffirms important international agreements such as the International Conference on Population and Development’s Programme of Action and the Fourth World Conference on Women’s Beijing Platform for Action. As importantly, it also makes references to addressing the specific needs of indigenous peoples; youth; people with disabilities; older persons; migrants and people living with HIV/AIDS, and commits to ensuring universal access to sexual and reproductive health care services and information as well as to deliver quality education at all levels.

All of these mentions are important and have been hard fought gains for women’s and social justice movements from around the world engaged in this process. The Political Declaration as well as the Goals and Targets themselves highlight important challenges the world is grappling with. However, the United Nations and the donor community spent inordinate amounts of funding in the name of “consultation” with grassroots communities over the last two years, and merely recognizing and reaffirming existing commitments will not bring about the change needed to ensure that people in all their diversities can live healthy, just and fulfilling lives. In the end, we wonder whether the voices of those along the margins were actually heard. As usual in United Nations inter-governmental negotiations, last minute decisions were made behind closed-doors and between powerful nations that undermined certain advances that had been agreed, particularly around climate change.

### **Context of Final Post-2015 Negotiations**

The last session of negotiations scheduled from July 20th to 31st, extended into the weekend after the draft text underwent several language changes amidst points of contention between countries of the Global North and South. The impasse in reaching a

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consensus was exacerbated by the disappointments of many governments from the Global South and civil society with [the outcome of the Third International Conference on Finance for Development \(FfD3\) which took place Addis Ababa](#), Ethiopia from July 13-16, 2015. The outcome document of the FfD3 entitled the Addis Ababa Action Accord (AAAA), fell short of agreeing on removing global obstacles to sustainable development and failed to effectively addressing systemic power imbalances in the global financial architecture. Notably, the Conference failed to reach agreement on establishing an international tax cooperation body aimed at curbing illicit financial flows, ensuring states fulfill their human rights obligations through holding multinational corporations (MNCs) accountable for rights violations, and rebalancing the distribution of power within International Financial Institutions (IFIS) with a particular focus on reform of their lending rules. These were important priorities for many countries of the Global South as well as women's and human rights activists as implementation of the new Sustainable Development Goals heavily depends on addressing these systemic challenges which have exacerbated inequalities across the world. Reactions from the Women's Major Group and the Women Working Group on *FfD3* can be found [here](#) and [here](#).

As expected, the issues contested during the final hours of the Post-2015 negotiation primarily focused on resolving the the relationship between the Post 2015 Sustainable Development Agenda and the Addis Ababa Action Accord (AAAA), paragraphs on climate change, the principle of Common but Differentiated Responsibilities (CBDR), foreign occupation, migration and human rights of all.

### **The Post 2015 Negotiations Process**

Feminist advocates and women's human rights organizations that have followed this process for over three years received the consensus with mixed reactions. Last year, at the conclusion of Open Working Group 13 in July 2014, the sentiment in the room exuberated genuine ambition, hope and true commitment by many governments from the South and North to learn from the mistakes of the MDGs and commit to a true *transformative* agenda that would change peoples lives by eradicating poverty and hunger, promoting gender equality and creating a more sustainable and equal future for all. However, at the conclusion of the intergovernmental negotiations on the evening of August 2nd, the negotiation room was marked by an ever clear North-South divide. A divide which is unconstructive and has persisted at seminal moments of the UN intergovernmental process over the last few years. This divide also has its roots in the fact that the last negotiations on Post 2015 were viewed by many as final opportunity to ensure systemic issues would be effectively addressed by the international community over the next 15 years, such as climate change, growing inequalities within and between countries, the impact of economic crises, and persistent human rights violations. Addressing these issues in a substantive way would indeed be contributing to transform the current patterns of economic, social and environmental injustices.

### **The North-South Divide: Finance Matters**

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RESURJ, the International Women's Health Coalition and the Women's Major Group highlighted a number of these fault-lines by issuing two press releases<sup>[1]</sup> published during the final days of negotiations.

The press releases focused on the dynamics that had become central to the negotiations in the final months. Although the European Union, United States and other Northern governments remained committed to priorities such as gender equality and human rights, many of them approached the final negotiations with a Northern-donor agenda focused on development financing. This dynamic was also witnessed in the Third Conference on Financing for Development. Throughout the negotiations Northern governments rejected the inclusion of reference to common but differentiated responsibilities and consistently pushed for the annexing of the Addis Ababa Action Accord (AAAA) into the Post 2015 Declaration as the main means of implementation for the new development agenda. Throughout the negotiation process, civil society from the North and South alike called for Northern governments to contribute to the development of a transformative agenda by supporting priorities such as common but differentiated responsibilities, inequalities within and between countries, addressing illicit financial flows and to shift their thinking towards that of universality, where governments have equal responsibility for the different ways in which sustainable development must be met in their own countries and regions.

### **Universality and the Three Dimensions of Sustainable Development**

The final text presented on August 2nd, is composed of a preamble which outlines the 5 P's for sustainable development (People, Planet, Prosperity, Peace and Partnership), a political declaration, a chapter on means of implementation, and a chapter on follow up and review as well as [the 17 goals and 169 targets which serve as the basis for global development for the next fifteen years](#).

Unique to Sustainable Development Goals and the Political Declaration is its aim to address the social, economic and environmental dimensions of sustainable development and its principle of universality. The SDGs has a level of ambition not seen in the MDGs where the goal was for poor countries to barely make a dent in elevating minimum social standards. The SDGs "are universal goals and targets which involve the entire world, developed and developing countries alike." This approach stands in stark difference to lack of universality in the approach of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) where rich countries took on the main role of *helping* poor countries to develop and which pushed developing countries further into dependency on donor countries to 'catch up' on their development. The reductionist approach of the MDGs gave developed countries a free pass from fulfilling their own obligations when it came to addressing their own internal challenges as well as addressing issues related to environmental degradation and unsustainable economic models. Also of note is that the MDGs were essentially developed, and given wholesale from the Secretary General's office while the SDGs have been developed through largely transparent intergovernmental process. This is important for ownership of the sustainable development agenda and its implementation, but also for acknowledging that any global sustainable development programme needed to be inclusive and participatory.

The principle of universality within the Post-2015 sustainable development agenda calls on countries of all income and development levels to take actions towards achieving sustainable development and addressing issues ranging from poverty and hunger, to inequalities and addressing climate change both within their borders but also to bearing responsibility for their development actions extraterritorially. This means that the roles that developed countries play must go beyond that of being providers of Official Development Assistance (ODA – their role as donors) to look within their own borders and re-assess economic models that exacerbate inequalities between men and women, rich and poor, the haves and the have nots, as well as that create unsustainable production and consumption patterns incompatible with sustainable development. Imperative to this new approach is the means of implementation for this so-called development, which cannot be centered only on ODA but must also include capacity building and a process for transfer of environmentally sound technologies to developing countries, among others.

### **Gender-related Goals and Targets**

The Sustainable Development Goals contain important Goals and Targets for attaining women's human rights and gender equality. Stand-alone Goal 5 on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment is a huge advance from the MDGs. In addition, gender equality objectives are also contained in targets within goals on Ending Poverty (Goal 1); Food Security (Goal 2); Health and Wellbeing (Goal 3); Education (Goal 4); Water and Sanitation (Goal 6); Employment and Decent Work (Goal 8); Reducing Inequalities (Goal 10); Peace and Justice (Goal 16), and Means of Implementation (Goal 17).

- End all forms of discrimination against women and girls, eliminate discriminatory laws, policies and practices, and adopt policies and legislation to promote gender equality (Targets 5.1, 5.c and 10.3);
- Double the agricultural productivity and the incomes of small-scale food producers, particularly women, indigenous peoples, family farmers, pastoralists and fishers, including through secure and equal access to land, other productive resources and inputs, knowledge financial services, markets and opportunities for value addition and non-farm employment (Target 2.3)
- Eliminate all forms of violence against women and girls (Target 5.2);
- Recognize and value unpaid care work performed by women and provide public services and social protection to reduce their burden of work (5.4);
- Ensure that education promotes gender equality, that all girls complete primary and secondary education, that women have equal access to tertiary and vocational education and eliminate gender disparities in education (Targets 4.7, 4.1, 4.3 and 4.5);
- Protect women's rights to economic resources, including ownership and control over land and other forms of property and inheritance (Targets 1.3 and 5.a);
- Ensure universal access to sexual and reproductive health care services, including for family planning, information and education, and the integration of reproductive health into national strategies and programmes (Target 3.7);
- Reduce maternal mortality (Target 3.1);

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- End HIV/AIDS (Target 3.3);
- Eliminate all harmful practices, such as child, early and forced marriage and female genital mutilations (Target 5.3);
- Ensure reproductive rights (Target 5.6)
- Achieve full and productive employment and decent work for all women and men, including for young people and persons with disabilities, and equal pay for work of equal value (Target 8.5);
- Protect labor rights and promote safe and secure working environments of all workers, including migrant women (Target 8.8);
- Promote the rule of law at national and international levels, and ensure equal access to justice for all (Target 16.3);
- Provide legal identity for all including birth registration (Target 16.9);
- Promote and enforce non-discriminatory laws and policies for sustainable development (16.b)
- Enhance capacity building support to developing countries to increase the availability of high-quality, timely and reliable data disaggregated by income, gender, age, race, ethnicity, migratory status, disability, geographical location (17.18)

However, we caution that these commitments won't be more than words on paper if Member State don't follow through with real political will and financing to ensure that gender equality and justice are enjoyed by all. Furthermore, this agenda will require the continued participation of women's and feminist organizations in planning, implementation and monitoring process of the ambitious goals and targets at all levels, but particularly in local and national contexts.

### Shortcomings:

We welcome the reference to respect the human rights of all without distinction of any kind in Paragraph 19 of the Political Declaration but feel disappointed with the last minute changes pressed by African and Arab Group which called for the deletion of the paragraph altogether. As compromise the co-facilitators imported paragraph 9 of the Rio+20 outcome document which contains weaker languages on both counts "to respect, protect and **fulfill** all human rights" with "respect, protect and **promote** human rights," as well as the narrowing of the list on non-discrimination on any grounds by deleting ethnicity, age and migration status.

We deeply regret that notwithstanding the adoption of numerous resolutions by several UN bodies and progressive laws passed by several Member States, this final draft outcome does not specifically call for an end to all forms of violence and discrimination of people on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity worldwide.

Despite many positive aspects of the new Sustainable Development Agenda, governments missed a huge opportunity to truly address the power imbalances that exacerbate inequalities in our current global economic model and fell short of addressing the root causes of the recent financial and environmental crises. Also, the central role that

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corporations are to play in financing implementation of the new agenda under the auspices of a “New Global Partnership” without a normative regulatory framework and internationally agreed upon accountability mechanisms, is a major cause of concern.

## **Reservations**

In the final hours of the negotiations, the spirit of consensus was undermined by disclaimers from countries of both South and North, stating that they welcomed the document, but in their final statements conveyed disagreement with certain aspects of the document and implied that changes needed to be made prior to its adoption.

For some Member States the discontent emerged from the last minute changes to the language on some targets (in specific to targets 2.5 (which replaced the word ‘ensure’ with the weaker term ‘promote’) and 15.6 (with the addition of “internationally recognized”). Others wished to clarify their standards on sexual and reproductive health services and reproductive rights and anything in the document, which contradicts national laws, culture and religious beliefs. Similar reservations were expressed at the end of the Open Working Group process in July of 2014 and conveyed in the report of the [Open Working Group Report on Sustainable Development Goals](#). And there were also those [who conveyed concerns with the way Common but Differentiated Responsibilities \(CBDR\) appears in the Open Working Group Report on the Sustainable Development Goals; the inclusion of foreign occupation in the Political Declaration; and ensuring that nothing in the outcome document interpret o alter the agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights; or mandate transfer or access to technology.](#)

At the 69th General Assembly Session held on September 1st, 2015 convened to adopt the resolution pertaining to Post 2015 sustainable development agenda in advance of the Summit for formal adoption of the outcome document, [several Members’ states made reservation](#) on issues related to gender, sexual and reproductive health and rights, the rights of children and adolescents and sexual orientation and gender identity. The fact that countries such as Senegal on behalf of the Africa Group, Chad, Egypt and Iran made these retrogressive statements does not come as much of a surprise. What is surprising is the fact that only a few countries, from both North and South alike, decided to take the floor with supportive statements for sexual and reproductive health and rights, gender equality, and the rights of adolescents in regards to their sexuality.

It is disconcerting that after two years of stocktaking and consultations as well as eight months of intergovernmental negotiations, some countries still find themselves falling short in fully committing to fulfilling women’s human rights even when they have agreed on the importance of achieving gender equality for sustainable development. More importantly, many of the reservations vocalized by Member States on September 1st, are incompatible with their own national policies and programmes in addressing sexual and reproductive health and rights.

## **The true test of commitment: Implementing the New Sustainable Development Agenda**

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It is imperative that governments from the South and North alike stand strong in defense of human rights, the principle of non-discrimination and equality for the implementation of the Post 2015 Sustainable Development Agenda. This includes support for a strong indicators framework guided by the principles of human rights, non-discrimination, equality and inclusiveness. Progress will only be measured if measured for all groups of people across the 169 targets of the SDGs, particularly the most marginalized who are often rendered invisible in national data collection as a consequence of their own marginalization. Therefore, Member States must commit to support an indicators framework based on careful data disaggregation that count all people while fully respecting privacy and confidentiality in data collection and systematization.

As a feminist alliance and as advocates for sexual and reproductive justice, we celebrate that women's bodies and sexualities were not at the center of the political battle in the last stage of the intergovernmental negotiations: it is only a cause for celebration because of the sad truth that more often than not political 'horse-trading' has instrumentalized women's and girls' bodies in intergovernmental negotiations spaces such as the Commission on Population and Development and the Commission on the Status of Women. We welcome the efforts by many Member States to ensure that sexual and reproductive health care services was clearly spelled out in both the political declaration and the targets under the health goal and that reproductive rights was upheld under the gender equality goal. Although we would have preferred the full recognition of sexual and reproductive health and rights as well as a clear target on comprehensive sexuality education, securing these targets is a major step towards recognizing that gender equality cannot be achieved without recognizing women's bodily autonomy. We now call on all governments to pay more than lip service to these commitments.

This week at the start of the UN summit on sustainable development 193 countries signed off on the 17 sustainable development Goals and 169 Targets. The adoption was met with applause and cheers in the General Assembly hall. But amidst celebration is the essential reminder that the hardest part is just beginning which will be to fully implement the sustainable development agenda. The simple reality is that without strong political will and sufficient financing for implementation as well as a strong indicators framework to monitor progress, the 2030 Agenda will not be bring about the transformative change promised across the 29 pages of the outcome document adopted on September 25th, 2015. What we need now is for this agenda to be fully funded and for countries of all income levels to take ownership for developing effective strategies and implementation plans, for governments to be accountable to their people through participating in follow-up and review processes to ensure that commitments made at the United Nations are truly translating into action that will bring about positive and long-lasting changes to peoples' lives.