



Women's Major Group comments to the 2019 Global Sustainable Development Report (GSDR)

6 June 2019

Overarching Comments

This report is a strong effort to bring together analysis to detail the myriad ways we are failing to address the SDGs and their interlinkages, but substantive oversights in its analytical perspective and recommendations risk its ability to fully rise to the task it has set before it.

In general, the WMG is excited that the report brings together useful data that can be used for advocacy purposes and presents analysis of how some targets, if not considered together, might clash or impede each other. The summary of the negative trends under particular goals ("rising inequalities, climate change, biodiversity loss, and increasing amounts of waste from human activity that are overwhelming natural capacities to process"), is also vital to advocacy work to steer us back on track.

Yet the report's inadequacy in fully recognizing the degree to which our global capitalist system is undermining our achievement of the SDGs is regrettable, especially given the critiques of the growth paradigm it is willing to embrace.

Despite the premise of challenging growth and the dominant and destructive paradigm associated with the pursuit of growing GDP, the report's "Call to Action" fails to follow its critiques to their natural outcomes and posit substantive actions to move away from the market-driven model of development. The consistent point that "Economic growth can contribute to absolute income poverty alleviation, but GDP growth will not address multidimensional poverty by itself". There is analysis of the existing work on national multidimensional poverty measures. The report raises issues of wealth inequality and urgency to act due to planetary and climate crisis, but the solution put forth is more public-private partnerships. The promotion of more PPPs and furthermore engaging the private sector, although phrased in a way that suggests the private sector needs to contribute more funds, fails to address the undeniable need for regulating the private sector and taxing appropriately. While illicit financial flows and tax avoidance is acknowledged, there is little mention of tax structures: a comprehensive analysis should recognize the ways that tax loopholes and inappropriate incentives that serve as corporate giveaways are systemically depriving the public sector of resources, enabling environmental destruction and the exploitation of communities in a race-to-the-bottom, and increasing inequality.

Correspondingly, trade is heavily mentioned only in relation to food, without acknowledging the impact of mega-trade agreements and FTAs. Recognizing that trade agreements are bad for smallholder

farmers is an important step, though, consistent with the gender-blindness of the report, the effects on women or indigenous peoples' remains unstated and unexplored.

Looking to the part without seeing the whole ultimately undermines the scope and efficacy of recommended actions; for a report that so clearly sees the impacts of our current regime, a deeper analysis of the causes is merited.

A second, and vital, oversight, is the failure to integrate gender meaningfully in its analyses and recommendations. Given the incredible body of research, that the report is totally gender blind, only placing gender equality in case studies is surprising and disappointing. Gender can and should easily be recognized as one of the levers that will spell the difference between sustainable development and a world where inequalities and injustices systematically persist. Likewise, strengthening linkages between the human rights mechanisms with SDGs, or even strengthening human rights in general, would indicate that the role of human rights in achieving the SDGs is fully recognized.

Specific and Elaborated Comments

We appreciate the section of impediments in all the 6 targeted areas. This is in line on what we said about putting structural impediments as part of discussion.

The report is rightly pointed out the risk oligopolistic concentration of agrochemical and food markets as well as the megamerger of 6 agribusiness and agrochemical companies to 3. However, nothing on the recommendations tackle the issue of this corporate power. The issue of land grabbing/acquisition is only mentioned once in the whole 140 pages report in the global commons section, while it is missing in the food and nutrition section.

The focus on science and technology in the report is very concerning. Technology poses opportunities as well as major challenges. On digital technology, the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) has widespread impacts on our economies and our people. While technology can be immensely beneficial, current policy approaches reflect limited understanding and recognition of the extensive and often adverse economic, social and environmental impacts of technology especially if it is highly concentrated in a few mega-corporations. These span impacts on employment, incomes, citizen's privacy, policy independence across sectors such as agriculture, manufacturing, services, health, finance and environment, and on grassroot constituencies. The rapid expansion and control of such technology are dehumanising our peoples and humanising the machines. GSDR should recommend the UN to undertake more analysis of all kinds of new technology including digital technology and to note of the new regulations that are being brought by some governments in the region to ensure future policy space, protect domestic businesses and protect the privacy of citizens. The report should recommend to re-energising of the Technology Facilitation Mechanism and for it to fulfill its mandate.

The GSDR has a lot of very useful data and case studies that captures many of the challenges of implementing the 2030 Agenda, including the acknowledgement that the "entire 2030 agenda is threatened by rising inequality in income and wealth". However the conclusions and recommendations around addressing inequality does not address several crucial points:

- That the entire economic order needs to be overhauled in order break up the concentration of wealth and power at the top; giving incentives to private sector to implement sustainable development will not get us there;
- That public-private partnerships (PPP), as a partnership model applied to delivery of public goods and services, have actually been exploitative, profiteering and denied people universal, safe, affordable and accessible public services, e.g. the many instances of water privatisation around the world from Bolivia to Indonesia. The report should mention other successful partnership models such as public-public partnerships that are more accountable in the context of public service delivery.
- The fossil-fuel based industries that number among the corporations that are among the 25 wealthiest economic units in the world, is extremely significant and threatens realisation of the 2030 Agenda. These have not just spent years creating false narratives and denying climate change, they have colluded with states, most significantly the government of the US who last year withdrew from the Paris Agreement. This is an example of how corporations are profiting off the rise in populism and autocracy as the strongmen, fascist leaders are likely to be amenable to agree to their requests.
- The GSDR does not address the rise in populism and autocracy or in reverse, the rising deficiency in democracy. All of the recommendations for fairer, more inclusive, holistic actions, valuing indigenous knowledge and rights, etc. to realise the SDGs are not likely to be taken up by the likes of Donald Trump, Rodrigo Duterte, Narendra Modi, Jair Bolsonaro, etc. The state of human rights and democracy is central to the 2030 Agenda; if the quality of democracy is poor and there is impunity for human rights violations, there will not be a real commitment to realising the SDGs, as undemocratic institutions and leaders have no obligation for accountability or respect for service to the public.
- Human rights and women's rights seem absent from the entire report. Violations of human rights, whether it is killing environmental defenders like Berta Caceres, the displacement of communities in Myanmar for building a 'Special Economic Zone', or judicial harassment of indigenous activists in Thailand who are being forced to leave ancestral land under the provisions of a new forestry act - these are all canaries in the coal mine that indicate the alarming negative trends within the SDGs. In short, the situation of human rights and human rights defenders should be taken into consideration of the report.
- The summary of nuclear energy's high costs and low emissions and public concerns about the management of nuclear waste and safety, overall does not give an accurate picture; nuclear waste is a threat to health and safety in many parts of the world, from the Marshall Islands where the [nuclear dome is leaking and radiation is found in the marine life](#) including clams that the community consumes, to the effect of nuclear waste on water supply in Central Asian post-Soviet nations, to the impacts on Japanese women's reproductive health after Fukushima.
- The commentary on decline in unions should acknowledge the growth of corporate power, the dispersal of responsibility across the global supply chain, and again the weakness of democracy in countries that are hosting the production of goods at low costs in poor conditions. The report should recommend strengthening unionisation which is an equaliser in the worker/employer dynamic, and especially stress that the right to organise, bargain and strike must be protected as these are what workers especially in the global south are unable to realise.

- The public health implications of climate change ([particularly on women](#)) are not mentioned, this is another aspect of climate change that SIDS and developing nations, particularly in Asia, that should be considered when discussing reparations.
- The critique on trade agreements and implications on food security, sustainable farming, agroecology is very good, but can be supplemented by additional dimensions of the implications of trade agreements on other SDGs and human rights, from the limitations on labour rights, the threat to states and economies posed by investor protections such as the investor-state dispute settlement mechanism, and the overarching problem of how they contradict with core human rights commitments. In this regard, the GSDR can further emphasise the importance of policy coherence between such agreements, human rights conventions and the 2030 Agenda as well as other ambitious international commitments such as the Beijing Platform for Action (BPfA).
- The call for "planetary justice" is a strong one, and it can be strengthened further within the framework of Development Justice which calls for 5 transformative shifts which are also framed around realising justice and accountability.

A gender perspective would enrich this report significantly: at the moment women are mentioned as vulnerable groups that need to be taken into consideration, and realizing that achieving women's human rights is a vital and necessary mechanism to achieving all the SDGs should be underpinning all the recommendations within the Call to Action. For example, Women's low representation in formal labour force is mentioned but the need to redistribute care and domestic work as well as supplement with state policies and public services should be underlined further. Increasing women's presence in STEM, which is a recommendation littered across the report, is not going to transform gender roles or the valuation of care work which is essential to the economy and realisation of specific goals. It is also important to note the relationship between [attacks on women's rights and the quality of democracy](#).

A gender perspective should further inform the Call to Action. For 4.1, for example, here are a few ways in which the recommendations' failure to include gender does not take into account significant interlinkages and imperils progress toward sustainable development:

- The general recommendation to "Provide universal access to health care (with special attention to pregnancy and child care)" is inadequate; women's and girls' access to sexual and reproductive health and rights must be delineated, recognizing SRHR as a right that is [integral to many SDGs](#), including SDGs 3, 4, 5, and 13.
- Likewise, "universal access to education" with only a reference to the poorest populations, without making recommendations regarding the removal of barriers and explicit exclusion of all girls, does a disservice to the rich body of research that poverty is not the only factor complicating access to education. Specifically addressing barriers related to gender, caste, ethnicity and race, among others, will be central to translating the general idea of universal access into actual attendance and equal rates of progression and completion of education. Framing the reduction of "group inequalities especially between women and men" within a recommendation focused on the rule of law and anti-discrimination has the unfortunate implication that achieving equal opportunities are simply a matter of enforcement, not concerted and systematic efforts to reshape economic and social institutions, patterns, and mores for real change.
- Women's groups and organizations require more than the freedom to organize and access o information. They require access to real resources and opportunities to contribute their voices

to decision-making at local, national, regional, and international levels. Feminist activism is the [strongest lever](#) for improving policies to reduce violence and ensure women's human rights, yet is some of the most [underfunded work](#) vital to sustainable development.

Critiques of 4.2-4.6 would follow similar lines, and the WMG is willing to assist in identifying additional resources and references. The previous two years ([2018](#), [2019](#)) of position papers associated with the priority SDGs under review at the HLPF provide an initial glimpse into how this framework of recommendations can and should be strengthened to include gender as a cross-cutting theme; 4.4 and for example, would be strengthened by the incredible work on SDG 7 ([start here](#)).