



Policy Brief #7

Recommendations on Women's Human Rights and Gender Equality

for the UN General Assembly Open Working Group on Sustainable Development Goals (OWG on SDGs)

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The recommendations on women's human rights and gender equality presented here have been compiled from two civil society consultations conducted by UN-NGLS in 2013: a teleconference-based consultation that resulted in the report [Advancing Regional Recommendations on the Post-2015 Agenda](#), and an [online consultation](#) on four post-2015 reports to the Secretary-General. A list of organizations that participated in these consultations is available [here](#). This policy brief also draws on the December 2013-January 2014 [online consultation](#) orchestrated by the Addressing Inequalities Networked Alliance (AINA) and co-moderated by UN-NGLS on the issues brief "Promoting Equality, including Social Equity" produced by the UN inter-agency Technical Support Team for the OWG on SDGs. While presenting a wide range of views, this brief does not intend to represent the complete breadth of perspectives and recommendations emerging from civil society on the issues of women's human rights and gender equality for the post-2015 development agenda.

Civil society networks advocated for a universal, interlinked, multi-sectoral, and holistic approach to the SDGs that upholds the achievement of women's human rights and gender equality as central to the achievement of sustainable development. Contributors issued a resounding call for both a standalone goal on gender equality and women's human rights and the "mainstreaming" of gender equality and women's human rights through comprehensive targets and indicators in the SDGs. Recognizing that women from socially excluded communities face multiple forms of discrimination, the SDGs must include a strong focus on the achievement of equity and social justice.

The process of developing the post-2015 agenda presents an opportunity to rethink the prevailing development model: several networks emphasized the need for the SDGs to stimulate profound and transformational change to the structures and systems that govern the lives of women and men. Contributors underscored that gender-equitable sustainable development cannot be achieved under the prevailing neo-liberal economic model; therefore, this brief begins with civil society recommendations on macroeconomic policy and the structural shifts necessary to set the conditions for gender equality and the fulfillment of women's human rights. These recommendations call particular attention to the negative effects on women of fiscal cuts, including recent austerity measures, and inequitable trade policies. They also emphasize the need to transform the global economic system, particularly through reforming international financial institutions, trade and investment policies, and the governance of global supply chains. The post-2015 agenda must create policy space for equitable development, contributors stressed, and must require States to fulfill their

obligations to develop fiscal, trade, and monetary policies that support, rather than undermine, women's rights.

Contributors emphasized the importance of a rights-based approach to achieving gender equality, integrating the broader human rights framework into the post-2015 agenda and guaranteeing the full implementation of existing human rights agreements, including the [Universal Declaration of Human Rights](#); the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and its [optional protocol](#); the [Beijing Platform for Action](#); the [Cairo Programme of Action](#); the [Millennium Declaration](#); the [outcome of the UN Conference on Sustainable Development \("Rio+20"\)](#); and agreed conclusions of the [Commission on the Status of Women](#). State and non-state actors, including international financial institutions, must respect the fundamental human rights principles of universality, indivisibility, interdependence, participation, accountability, equality and non-discrimination. States must ensure the progressive realization of human rights for all by using the maximum of their available resources. The post-2015 agenda must recognize women as full rights holders, and integrate a comprehensive strategy with robust accountability mechanisms to fulfil women's economic, social, and cultural rights on par with civil and political rights. It is critical that States fulfil women's right to participate meaningfully in formulating, implementing, and monitoring the post-2015 agenda, in part by resourcing women's organizations and feminist movements.

Detailed recommendations are presented below, organized according to the following six objectives:

1. Reform macroeconomic policy to ensure gender equality and the fulfilment of human rights;
2. Promote women's access to decent work and social protection, and address unpaid care work;
3. Eliminate gender-based violence and discrimination;
4. Ensure sexual and reproductive health and rights;
5. Ensure gender-equitable distribution and safe use of natural resources;
6. Address the gendered nature of armed conflict, peace-making, and transitions to peace.

1. Reform Macroeconomic Policy to Ensure Gender Equality and Fulfil Human Rights

- a) Bring all macroeconomic policies and practices in compliance with human rights obligations, including government revenue and expenditure, development assistance, debt and deficit financing, monetary policy and financial regulation, industrial policy, and trade architecture. Ensure that all States invest in effective, appropriate, and consistent policies and programmes for the achievement of gender equality, women's human rights, and women's empowerment.
- b) Reform international, regional, and domestic trade and financial systems to eliminate structural drivers of inequality and foster social norms that prioritize equality and equity.
- c) Ensure synergies between macroeconomic and social policies to contribute to mobilizing resources for economic, social, cultural, civil and political rights, and to support equality along the lines of socioeconomic status, race, caste, and ethnicity as well as gender. Identify and eliminate gender biases in the formulation of policy, and collect and publish data disaggregated by sex as part of a comprehensive diversity of categories.
- d) Create transparent mechanisms to regulate foreign direct investment and multinational corporations to ensure that the economic and financial interests of these actors do not undermine or conflict with the public interest, people's rights to socioeconomic security and decent livelihoods, or respect for human rights and sustainable development.

- e) Promote policies and programmes to redistribute income, wealth, and assets to counter the negative effects of unequal distribution of resources and power within and between countries.
- f) Recognize and value unpaid care work when formulating and evaluating macroeconomic policies and development strategies.
- g) Employ the [Maastricht Principles on Extraterritorial Obligations](#) as the foundation for facilitating good economic governance.

2. Promote Women’s Access to Decent Work and Social Protection, and Address Unpaid Care Work

- a) Enact policies to overcome women’s unequal access to economic livelihood opportunities and formal employment, including by: promoting equal pay for equal work; ensuring freedom from discrimination; combatting gendered labour market segregation; shifting tax structures; providing incentives for employers; enforcing labour rights; improving the quality of employment; reducing the volatility of earnings; prohibiting sexual harassment; valuing and redistributing unpaid work; and ensuring full employment, decent work, and a living wage for all.
- b) Implement universal social protection worldwide in the form of a basic income for all women and men, and access to services such as healthcare, food, water, energy, housing, and employment.
- c) Implement supportive labour policies, including minimum wage policies, regulations on work hours, and protection for trade union and collective bargaining rights, particularly for women.
- d) Measure and recognize the value of unpaid labour through statistics and analysis and as a criterion for evaluating economic policy; reinforce State responsibilities to invest in social services including childcare, elder care, and healthcare to reduce the burden of care work on women; and promote the redistribution and equal sharing of unpaid labour through government incentives, labour laws and regulations, equality legislation, etc. Institute and measure work/family policies and equal maternity and paternity leave benefits, and promote the transformation of patriarchal social norms and stereotypes that constitute men as “breadwinners” and women as “care-givers.”

3. Ensure Gender-Equitable Distribution and Safe Use of Natural Resources

- a) Protect the equal rights of women to use and own land and access rivers, lakes, and seas to help ensure food sovereignty, health, nutrition security, and economic autonomy. Implement legally binding safeguards against land- and resource-grabbing, and ensure land reform is gender-equitable and in line with human rights principles and standards.¹ Promote equal distribution of land and resources amongst women and men; prioritize the rights of people over corporations regarding land and other resources.
- b) Halt the commodification of nature and the dispossession of Indigenous and rural peoples. Manage natural resources in the interest of nature and of people, especially women; eliminate the use of harmful technologies and genetically modified organisms, and institute mechanisms for technology assessment, particularly in relation to technology transfer.
- c) Recognize and fully respect the unique knowledge of Indigenous peoples and peasant and coastal communities, especially the traditional knowledge held by women, in accordance with the [United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples](#).

¹ In their contribution to the UN-NGLS online consultation, Landesa explained: “For women in particular, secure rights to land and other resources enhance their rights to self-determination and support their well-being, as well as that of their families and communities. Thus, targets to increase the number of women and men with secure rights to land – and to ensure that women realize these rights on an equal basis with men – can help achieve multiple development goals in a post-2015 world.”

- d) Acknowledge that climate change disproportionately impacts women and girls, and compounds impoverishment; strengthen resilience through community-driven, human rights-based, and feminist policies. Design and implement effective rights-based, socially just, gender-responsive and coherent ecosystem-based approaches to halt climate change. Encourage sustainable agricultural practices to help protect smallholder farmers (often women) and provide for climate change mitigation. Recognize women's roles and support gender-sensitive policies toward food sovereignty and in climate change mitigation and adaptation.
- e) Ensure that women and girls have access to safe, clean and renewable energy in their households and for their enterprises. Ensure women's access to all resources essential to livelihoods, e.g. seeds, water, sanitation, and hygiene.

4. Eliminate Gender-Based Discrimination and Violence

- a) Eliminate structural barriers to gender equality, taking into account the various roles and vulnerabilities of women and their level of influence at individual, household, community, national, and global levels.
- b) Enact and enforce laws and policies that contribute to achieving gender equality and women's human rights, particularly in marginalized communities; eliminate laws, policies, and practices, including early and forced marriages, that are harmful to women, girls, and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and intersex (LGBTQI) people.
- c) Ensure the full and equal participation of women in all public and private decision-making, including the economic, legal, social, and political life of their communities, and control over finances and resources. Take temporary special measures² to secure equality of outcomes that address both the public and private spheres of women's lives. Build affirmative action policies to ensure women from excluded communities can participate in political leadership and governance.
- d) Ensure women's access to productive resources, such as credit, infrastructure, skills, and technology, particularly through public investment in these areas.
- e) Take long-term integrated action, including non-sexist and anti-discriminatory education, to transform stereotypes and norms based on gender and other axes of social exclusion including age, caste, ethnicity, and disability; expand the use of tools to assess gender equality and empowerment. Conduct intersectional analysis and appropriate interventions to address multiple forms of discrimination.
- f) Enact national legislation to ensure the human rights of LGBTQI people, and eliminate discrimination against them, including in access to healthcare, education, and justice. Promote changes to attitudes, beliefs, and behaviours that perpetuate and foster discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity expression. Require States to report to the UN regarding their efforts to protect the human rights of, and ensure equality for, LGBTQI people.
- g) Combat all forms of gender-based violence, through zero tolerance targets and by enacting and enforcing laws. Include indicators that measure the reduction of violence against women and girls, along with indicators that measure perceptions of safety. Require States to report on their programmes to eliminate violence against women and girls on a regular basis. Implement

² CEDAW [General recommendation No. 25, on article 4, paragraph 1](#) explains temporary special measures as directed "to accelerate the improvement of the position of women to achieve their de facto or substantive equality with men, and to effect the structural, social and cultural changes necessary to correct past and current forms and effects of discrimination against women, as well as to provide them with compensation. These measures are of a temporary nature."

security sector reforms that prevent, respond to, and end impunity for violence against women, girls, and LGBTQI people; protect and support survivors of violence; prosecute and punish perpetrators; and provide gender-sensitive remedies. Recognize the particular risks and situations of socially excluded communities and women's human rights defenders and develop effective and gender-sensitive responses to violence against them. Commit to ending all violence on the grounds of sexual orientation and gender identity. Prohibit and take action to eliminate harmful practices, including customary practices based on the idea of the inferiority or superiority of any sexual orientation or gender identity.

5. Ensure Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights

- a) Eliminate inequalities in access to health services (particularly by wealth quintile, age, sex, geographical location, sexual orientation and gender identity, caste, ethnicity, ability, nationality, health, or legal or other status); address the inter-linkages between health (including sexual and reproductive health and rights) and inequality, and between ill-health and its impact on all other aspects of development, such as employment and education.
- b) As part of guaranteed universal healthcare, ensure sexual and reproductive health and rights for all, particularly for girls and women,³ including through the provision of quality, comprehensive, integrated and non-discriminatory sexual and reproductive health services in various locations and situations including emergencies. Such services should bear in mind the specific needs of men and women, adolescents and young people, persons of diverse sexuality and gender identities, and persons with disabilities.
- c) Guarantee universal and equitable access to: comprehensive sexuality education; safe, effective, affordable methods of contraception; safe and adequate maternity care; safe abortion; and prevention and treatment options for HIV and other sexually transmitted infections.
- d) Ensure women and girls are free to decide on all matters of their sexuality and the number and spacing of their pregnancies, without coercion, discrimination, or violence. Eliminate legal and policy barriers (e.g. parental and spousal consent laws and laws that criminalize sexuality) to women's and girls' ability to access their sexual and reproductive rights, and thereby enable their full and equal participation in education, employment, and decision- and policy-making. Promote policies that enable people to exercise their sexual rights and their right to take free, informed, voluntary, and responsible decisions on their sexuality. Invest sufficient resources to provide universal sexual and reproductive healthcare.
- e) Make sexual and reproductive health services and comprehensive sexuality education youth-friendly and available to young people in and out of schools.
- f) Promote the prevention and timely detection of HIV/AIDS, particularly through: accelerated action to ensure universal access to comprehensive treatment; increased investment in prevention; and addressing the intersections between violence and HIV. Health services must enable women living with HIV to receive non-discriminatory health care to make informed, autonomous choices about their sexual and reproductive rights, including during pregnancy and their future fertility to ensure it is free from coercion.
- g) Ensure the provision of sexual and reproductive health services and psychosocial care in conflict/post-conflict situations and humanitarian crises, particularly for survivors of sexual violence and refugees or internally displaced persons.

³ In their contribution to the UN-NGLS online consultation, CHOICE for Youth and Sexuality recommended the incorporation of sexual and reproductive health and rights into the SDGs as a standalone goal.

6. Address the Gendered Nature of Armed Conflict, Peace-Making, and Transitions to Peace

- a) Adopt holistic measures to ensure peace and security for people in general, and women in particular, including through women's participation in peace-making and security practice and through comprehensive strategies aimed at recognizing, including, and enhancing women's capacities and potential, as well as the structures and relations that discriminate against and constrain them from assuming a full and equal role in society.
- b) Integrate the [Women, Peace, and Security agenda](#) of the UN Security Council into the post-2015 framework through a holistic approach that addresses participation, prevention, and protection, as well as relief and recovery.
- c) Recognize that the effects of militarism, militarization, military spending, and the arms trade (e.g. small arms and light weapons, and particularly nuclear weapons) erode gender equality, increase violence and impunity, and impede the realization of women's rights.
- d) Require States to demilitarize and to shift resources away from military spending towards investments in social equality and sustainable development.
- e) Hold States accountable for the prosecution and punishment of perpetrators of sexual and gender-based violence in conflict and post-conflict situations and ensure that gender based crimes against humanity are not granted amnesty during peace processes; commit funds for in country monitoring of the implementation of UN Security Council Resolutions [1325](#), [1820](#), [1888](#), [1889](#), [1960](#), [2106](#), and [2122](#).