

Gender equality and women's rights at the UN General Assembly post-2015 discussion

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1. Introduction and summary

As we approach the 69th session of the UN General Assembly, the Gender and Development Network (GADN) calls on Member States to ensure that the final post-2015 framework will be an ambitious one containing all the elements needed to achieve gender equality and women's rights. To achieve this, the framework will need to build on the positive advances made thus far in negotiations, while filling in the missing gaps.

The Gender and Development Network has laid out elsewhere our full position on the post-2015 framework and the need to make gender equality and women's rights a central issue¹. In this note we reflect first on the overall current state of the debate and then comment on the final Outcome Document of the Open Working Group (OWG) on Sustainable Development Goals, suggesting what could be usefully kept or improved.

In summary our key points going forward are:

- There should be a standalone goal promoting gender equality and women's rights with strong targets.
- There should be specific targets on; violence against women and girls, women's political participation and influence, unpaid care, women's control over economic assets and access to decent work, girls and women's education and sexual and reproductive health and rights. These should be either under a gender goal or specifically and adequately addressed under other goals.
- Language under these targets should be at least as progressive as under existing international agreements, and should aim to be more ambitious.
- The principle of universality must apply to all gender equality related targets.
- Indicators should reflect the need to tackle structural barriers.

¹ GADN (2014) Women's rights and gender equality in the post-2015 framework - GADN position paper available from <http://www.gadnetwork.org.uk/storage/post-2015/GADN%20Post-2015%20position%20paper.pdf>

GADN (2014) Unpaid Care: a priority for the post-2015 development goals and beyond available from <http://www.gadnetwork.org/storage/gadn-responses-and-briefings/GADN%20Unpaid%20Care%20briefing.pdf>

GADN (2013) Achieving Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment in the Post-2015 Framework available from <http://www.gadnetwork.org.uk/storage/Achieving%20gender%20equality%20and%20women%27s%20empowerment%20in%20the%20post%202015%20framework.pdf>

- Tackling inequalities by income and other disadvantage that intersect with gender inequality should be a priority.
- An appropriate socio-economic context is necessary.

2. Women's rights and gender equality in the current post-2015 debate

Some major advances have been made, and there are a number of proposals that we believe are essential to protect as we move towards the final deliberations. However, despite positive discussions in the process so far, we also remain concerned about various issues that are continuing to undermine the creation of a truly progressive post-2015 framework, strong enough to tackle the deep rooted and persistent gender inequalities that exist.

2.1 A standalone goal on gender equality and women's rights

Overall GADN is pleased to see broad based support for the continued inclusion of a standalone goal on gender equality and women's empowerment. Further, we propose that a gender equality goal should specifically mention **women's human rights**, recognising that women are often denied their human rights specifically because they are women.

We are also heartened to see that discussions on the gender equality goal have covered a breadth of issues ranging from the importance of women's participation and influence in decision making and the need to eliminate all forms of violence against women to the unequal burden of unpaid care. As is reflected in the OWG Outcome Document, targets on eliminating **violence against women and girls (VAWG)**, on addressing the unequal burden of **unpaid care** work and supporting women's full, equal and effective **participation** should be included in the final framework. We strongly believe that women's right to **control economic assets and income** is a central component of achieving gender equality and so should be a specific target. Specific proposals on language are outlined in section II.

In all areas of gender equality, whether it is employment, women's control over assets, or women's access to sexual and reproductive health and rights, accelerated progress towards gender equality and the realisation of women's rights is needed by 2030. An ambitious and progressive agreement should not retract on any gains made elsewhere in existing agreed language and should instead set ambitions that are **higher than existing agreements**. This is particularly true for targets on sexual and reproductive health and rights.

Targets included under the standalone goal on gender equality and women's rights should be **time bound** in the same way as other targets, in order to ensure urgent action is taken towards achieving them. Where targets should be met immediately, rather than by 2030, this should be made explicit rather than, as in the OWG Outcome Document, omitting any reference to deadlines.

Universality is a key principle of the framework and is as true for gender equality as for any other goal. In particular, targets on gender equality should not be subject to caveats on what is ‘nationally appropriate’ or in accordance with ‘national laws’.

In order to successfully implement the post-2015 framework, there is a need to promote better funding mechanisms, gender disaggregated data collection and gender responsive budgeting. To ensure this framework has ‘people centred’ accountability mechanisms, women and girls who are experiencing an issue must be involved in assessing whether efforts to address it are successful or not and capture their reality. Ways in which to measure changes in social norms will also be essential.

2.2 Mainstreaming gender equality throughout the framework

The final framework must recognise that **effective mainstreaming** of gender equality is essential to achieving the transformative change that is needed. Mainstreaming requires that targets recognise the specific, gender related barriers that women and girls face. The inclusion of measures to promote gender equality and women’s rights in the OWG Final Outcome Document in areas such as education and adult literacy, health, water and sanitation, employment and labour rights is welcome and should be protected in the final framework.

Gender inequality intersects with other inequalities which the final framework must address in order ensure that women from disadvantaged communities such as indigenous women, disabled women, migrant women etc. are not left behind. This requires a commitment that **no targets can be reached if some groups are left behind**. This could be achieved through interim equity or ‘stepping stone’ targets to reduce gaps in human development outcomes between more and less advantaged groups in society, by gender and other forms of inequality.

Within the final framework certain goals are particularly important to setting a social and economic climate for achieving gender equality and women’s rights. For example, success will only be possible with **macroeconomic policy** that specifically addresses the structural causes of inequality. The final framework should include specific targets that incentivise public policies known to address economic inequality including gender budgeting, decent work, progressive taxation and social protection. Securing a strong goal on **promoting peaceful and inclusive societies** is also important as conflict and insecurity have been major factors in holding back progress on gender equality.

For many of the targets, effective mainstreaming of gender will be achieved through the use of **transformative indicators**. To ensure that long term structural changes occur, indicators for each target should be a mix of progress measures on tackling structural barriers, as well as concrete outcomes such as the number of women leaders. The choice of indicators for each target should be driven by an analysis of how change will be achieved, rather than solely on the existence of data. While indicators should be measurable, political will and technical capacity should be directed to ensure

that data can be captured for the targets that most reflect women's priorities. GADN has compiled a list of measurable indicators with existing data.

3. GADN response on gender issues in the final Outcome Document of the Open Working Group on Sustainable Development Goals

This section contains specific comments and recommendations on the final outcome document of the OWG. Whether or not the OWG document is to be used as a basis for the final framework, we hope that this level of detailed proposals will be helpful in informing proposals for the final goals and targets.

In analysing the OWG's Outcome Document, we have looked primarily at areas directly related to gender equality, but support the work of, among others, the Women's Major Group, Beyond 2015, AWID and the Post-2015 Women's Coalition and our member organisations on other areas which will also be relevant in relation to women's rights.

3.1 Goal 5: Achieve gender equality and empower women and girls everywhere

Overall points

- The gender goal would be strengthened by explicit reference to women's human rights, going beyond women's empowerment to recognise that women are denied their human rights specifically because they are women.
- We question why most of the targets do not have a date as a majority of the targets in other focus areas do, and suggest that they should all be by 2030 or an earlier date if that is what is intended.
- We strongly believe that women's right to control economic assets and income is a central component of achieving gender equality and so should be a specific target not a means of implementation.
- We are delighted that the target on unpaid care remains, and see this as an important area towards achieving gender equality. We suggest wording to strengthen this target below.

Wording suggestions:

Proposed goal 5. Achieve gender equality, *and women's rights and* empower women and girls everywhere

5.1 *by 2030* end all forms of discrimination against women and girls everywhere

5.2 *by 2030* eliminate all forms of violence *including sexual violence* against all women and girls in public and private spheres, including trafficking and sexual and other types of exploitation

5.3 *by 2030* eliminate all harmful practices, such as child, early and forced marriage and female genital mutilations

5.4 *by 2030* recognize, *reduce and redistribute* and value unpaid care and domestic work through the provision of public services, infrastructure and social protection policies, and the promotion of shared responsibility *between women and men* within the household and the family ~~as nationally appropriate~~

5.5 *by 2030* Ensure women's full, *equal* and effective participation *and influence* at all levels of decision-making in political, economic and public life, *including in leadership positions*

5.6 ensure universal access to sexual and reproductive health and [reproductive] rights ~~as agreed in accordance with the Programme of Action of the ICPD and the Beijing Platform for Action and the outcome documents of their review conferences~~

We argue that 5a – c should be targets not treated separately

- 5.a undertake reforms to give women equal rights to economic resources, as well as access to ownership and control over land and other forms of property, *public services*, financial services, inheritance, and natural resources in accordance with national laws
- 5.b enhance the use of enabling technologies, in particular ICT, to promote women's empowerment
- 5.c adopt and strengthen sound policies and enforceable legislation for the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls at all levels

We would also like to see the following under goal 5 if it is not included in full under goal 8:

- *ensure women's equal access to full and productive employment and decent work, and equal pay for work of equal value address the barriers that women face such as occupational segregation by gender.*

3.2 Mainstreaming gender throughout the document

Mainstreaming gender requires:

- Drafting of targets that specifically recognise gender related barriers.
- The inclusion of targets under each goal that are a particular priority in achieving gender equality – below we have **highlighted those targets most likely to be a priority for gender equality**. (We have omitted some focus areas because they are not our area of expertise, rather than because they are not important.)
- A commitment that no targets can be reached if some groups are left behind.

- For many of the targets, effective mainstreaming of gender will be achieved through the use of **transformative indicators**.

Proposed goal 1. End poverty in all its forms everywhere

1.1 by 2030, eradicate extreme poverty for all people everywhere, currently measured as people living on less than \$2 a day *with a focus on addressing the structural barriers faced by women and the most marginalized groups, who make up the majority of poor people.*

1.2 by 2030, reduce at least by half the proportion of men, women and children of all ages living in poverty in all its dimensions according to national definitions *recognising that poverty levels will differ within households with women more likely to be poor.*

1.3 implement nationally appropriate social protection systems and measures for all *that work for women and girls*, including floors, and by 2030 achieve substantial coverage of the poor and the vulnerable.

1.4 by 2030 ensure that all men and women, particularly the poor and the vulnerable, have equal rights to economic resources, as well as *equal* access to basic services, *individual and collective rights to* land ownership, (and control over land) and other forms of property, inheritance, natural resources, appropriate new technology, and financial services including microfinance *that support their welling and livelihoods, with specific measures to address the barriers facing women.*

1.5 by 2030 build the resilience of the poor and those in vulnerable situations, and reduce their exposure and vulnerability to climate related extreme events and other economic, social and environmental shocks and disasters *recognising the additional barriers that women face.*

Proposed goal 3. Attain healthy life for all at all ages

3.1 by 2030 reduce the global maternal mortality ratio to less than *40* per 100,000 live births.

3.7 by 2030 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 *and fulfil sexual and reproductive rights, including access to quality and comprehensive affordable and integrated SRH information, education and services including modern methods of family planning.*

3.8 achieve universal health coverage (UHC), including financial risk protection, access to quality essential health care services, and access to safe, effective, quality, and affordable essential medicines and vaccines for all *with particular attention to the most marginalized and people in vulnerable situations.*

Proposed goal 4. Provide equitable and inclusive quality education and life-long learning opportunities for all

The language of target 4.5 is welcome, however the Education For All Goals² take a more integrated approach to gender, ensuring that each target makes clear reference to ensuring attention to gender equality and the most marginalised which is a more effective approach – aligning this target outside others could result in differential measurement of data.

4.1 by 2030, ensure that all girls and boys complete free, equitable and quality primary and secondary education leading to relevant and effective learning outcomes *with particular attention to gender equality and the most marginalised*

Proposed goal 6. Secure water and sanitation for all for a sustainable world

6.1 by 2030, achieve universal and equitable access to safe and affordable drinking water for all *paying special attention to the needs of women and girls and those in vulnerable situations*

6.2 by 2030, achieve *universal and equitable* access to adequate and equitable sanitation and hygiene for all, and end open defecation, paying special attention to the needs of women and girls and those in vulnerable situations

Proposed goal 8. Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all

Goal 8 currently does not include ambitious targets on ensuring living wage, a universal social protection floor and redistributive fiscal policies to address root causes of poverty and inequalities.

8.5 by 2030 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 *recognising the specific barriers that women face*

Reinsert targets:

Create a sound macroeconomic environment with strong fiscal and monetary policies and progressive taxation

Explore the possibility of a broader system of capital accounting looking beyond GDP and incorporating social, human and environmental capital and unpaid care

Proposed goal 10: Reduce inequality within and among countries

Addressing all forms of inequality within and between countries is essential to achieve gender equality and women's rights, especially for the most marginalised women such as indigenous women, disabled women and migrant women. We therefore support the inclusion of targets under this goal which seek to progressively address inequalities, such as target 10.4.

Economic growth on its own is neither a guarantee for poverty reduction nor a pre-requisite for decent work. We regret to see the target from the zero draft (2 June 2014)

² UNESCO 'Education for All Goals' available from <http://www.unesco.org/new/en/education/themes/leading-the-international-agenda/education-for-all/efa-goals/>

on sustaining income growth of the bottom 40% (previously target 8.2, now 10.1) is no longer as robust, since women make up the majority of the poorest populations.

Target 10.4 is also welcome in order to achieve progressive fiscal, wage and social protection policies and promote economic policies that support gender equality and women's rights.

Proposed goal 16: Achieve (Promote) peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels

Focus area 16 on Peaceful and inclusive societies, rule of law and capable institutions is a critical area for gender equality and women's rights. It is imperative that it remain in the final framework, and especially for specific action on sexual violence and other peace related indicators and on women's participation in peace processes.

16.1 significantly reduce all forms of violence and related death rates everywhere *and eradicate gender based violence*

16.6 develop effective, accountable and transparent institutions at all levels *removing the social norms that exclude women from full participation.*

16.7 ensure responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making at all levels *and removing the social norms and practices that have led to certain groups, such as women, being excluded from these processes.*

16.10 ensure public access to information and protect fundamental freedoms, *such as freedom of expression, association, speech and peaceful assembly for all citizens and citizens organisations*, in accordance with (national legislation and) international agreements

Proposed goal 17: Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalise the global for sustainable development

17.19 by 2030, build on existing initiatives to develop *participatory* measurements of progress on sustainable development that complement GDP, and support statistical capacity building in developing countries.

Reinsert 17.16 from OWG13 which has been removed:

17.16 undertake regular voluntary participatory monitoring and reporting of progress on SDGs, led by governments but informed by key actors such as civil society, academia, within a shared accountability framework, including means of implementation, the global partnership among Member States and multi-stakeholder initiatives and partnerships

The Gender & Development Network (GADN) brings together expert NGOs, consultants, academics and individuals committed to working on gender, development and women's rights issues. Our vision is of a world where social justice and gender equality prevail and where all women and girls are able to realise their rights free from discrimination. Our goal is to ensure that international development policy and practice promotes gender equality and women's and girls' rights. Our role is to support our members by sharing information and expertise, to undertake and disseminate research, and to provide expert advice and comment on government policies and projects.

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Working groups

GADN brings together development practitioners, experts and academics working on thematic issues through working groups. The post-2015 working group is aiming to improve the Beyond 2015 framework so that it better promotes women's and girls' rights and gender equality.

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