



Towards the Realization of Women's Rights and Gender Equality: Post 2015 Sustainable Development

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Towards the Realization of Women's Rights and Gender Equality:
Post 2015 Sustainable Development
Meeting Report
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Introduction

This summary report is the culmination of a two-day strategic meeting, “Towards the Realization of Women’s Rights and Gender Equality: Post 2015 Sustainable Development,” which took place in Florham Park, New Jersey from June 11-12, 2013. The meeting was organized to identify, analyze, and strategize about the linkages between the realization of women’s rights and gender equality and macroeconomic policy within the context of the post 2015 sustainable development framework and processes. The Center for Women’s Global Leadership (CWGL), with the support of the Ford Foundation, convened women’s rights advocates, economic and social rights experts, and human rights lawyers working from a feminist perspective.

The consultations were guided by the following objectives: to (i) identify priorities for the realization of women’s rights and gender equality within the context of macroeconomic policy; (ii) select and develop key messages for selected priorities; (iii) brainstorm strategies for selected priorities; and (vi) discuss next steps. This summary report intends to highlight key points from the meeting and share strategies for moving forward.

Background

The United Nations (UN) Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), which range from halving extreme poverty rates to halting the spread of HIV/AIDS and providing universal primary education, are rapidly approaching their deadline in 2015. There has been uneven participation from women’s rights groups, with civil society organizations based primarily in the Global North dominating the discussion and this alarmed many women’s rights and feminist organizations.

Women’s rights and feminist organizations view this as an important moment to influence the process and advocate for the inclusion of language promoting the realization of women’s rights and gender equality. Moving forward to 2015, there needs to be sustained feminist engagement on all issues, and at all levels, to ensure that the outcome of the post 2015 process is poised to facilitate the realization of women’s rights and gender equality. This summary report aims to capture the essence of the meeting discussions.

What are our priority post 2015 sustainable development women’s rights and gender equality asks in relation to economic policy?

Over the course of the two-day meeting, participants engaged in a series of conversations about the relevance of economic policy for the achievement of women’s rights and gender equality in the context of the post 2015 development agenda. Economic policy, and especially macroeconomic policy, has a critical role to play in the realization of women’s rights: from the allocation of maximum available resources to the privatization of public services. Without understanding economic policy’s impact on women’s rights and gender equality, we will fail to holistically respond to inequality at a systemic level.

Day One

On the first day, participants broke out into small working groups to discuss the linkages between economic policies, women's rights and gender equality, and post 2015 sustainable development. Each group identified economic policy priorities and themes that impact the achievement of women's rights and gender equality and should ultimately be addressed in the post 2015 sustainable development process. Below are the highlights from the groups' discussions and report backs:

- Women's access to land is impacted by discriminatory inheritance, family and marital law as well as private investments and policies, which promote large scale land acquisitions or land grabbing by transnational corporations. A lack of **property rights** for women not only impacts access to land, but also critical resources such as water and food for women and their families.
- Certain regions are rich in minerals, oil and gas, but with little oversight and poor transparency the **extractive sector** can increase inequality, and result in corruption and environmental degradation. Extractive industries often displace communities with little accountability and this displacement has impacts on women's economic and social rights.
- Basic social services and protections are needed across the board for women and men in the formal and informal sectors. **Social security** must be reformed and expanded so that it is enjoyed as a right by all.
- Realizing women's rights must go beyond the promotion of women's empowerment in the labor market. Work must be viewed as a continuum that encompasses both paid and unpaid labor in order to understand the constraints women face in realizing both their rights to **decent work** and rest and leisure. Women's participation in the labor should not be instrumentalized, but rather the post 2015 sustainable development framework should emphasize women's right to work and decent work as well as address their responsibility for unpaid labor.
- Government's allocation of resources demonstrates their willingness to realize women's rights and gender equality. Are governments' investments progressively realizing economic and social rights or are they regressing on commitments that have been made? In these austere times, governments should be **rethinking budgets** and shift from cutting social spending to decreasing the amount of resources allocated for military spending.
- Additionally, access to quality and affordable health care, which includes reproductive health, is determined by government's allocation of resources. Decisions about whether or not to fund family planning services, access to abortions, and educational resources on **sexual and reproductive health and rights** impacts women's ability to make autonomous decisions about their lives and bodies.

- Economic policies should not discriminate against any group based on race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, class, religion, caste, ability, language, etc. Therefore, governments must consider the **distribution of resources** available across groups when economic policies are developed. There is both an unequal distribution of resources within countries as well as among countries. The latter can be partially addressed by reforming policies of international global institutions such as the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, the World Trade Organization.
- It is vital to recognize that transnational corporations exert considerable influence on the ability of States to adopt policies that facilitate the realization of human rights. Transparency and accountability in the governance structures of these private bodies as well as mechanisms for monitoring must be integral to the post 2015 sustainable development agenda. We must move beyond corporate social responsibility to **corporate accountability**. A sustainable business model should value people over profits.
- **Trade policy**, including bilateral and multilateral agreements on intellectual property, and agreements on agricultural subsidies must be woven into conversations about women's rights and gender equality. For example, trade agreements directly impact the cost and availability of pharmaceutical products and, therefore, the right to health. Trade liberalization can also increase competitive pressures and force down labor costs in ways that undermine decent work and increase economic insecurity.
- The **leadership and participation** of women's rights and feminist organizations in reforming dominant economic policies must be considered at all levels, including the development, implementation, and evaluation of policies.

During a short workshop on macroeconomic policies and its intersection with women's rights and gender equality, Radhika and Kate, led a discussion on relevant issues related to fiscal and monetary policies, labor policy, financial regulation and corporate accountability, and trade. The following are highlights:

Monetary and Fiscal Policy: Monetary and fiscal policies are two important components of macroeconomic policies which can serve to undermine or support the realization of women's rights. The allocation of resources toward reproductive health and rights as well as the care economy, social protection floors, decent work, and a living wage are intrinsically linked to gender equality. Analyses of governments' expenditures demonstrate their commitments, or lack thereof, to gender equality. Governments should maximize available resources for women's economic and social rights and demonstrate their support for women's rights, in part through budgetary allocations. Rather than instituting austerity policies in response to concerns about debt, governments should be rethinking their budgets by decreasing their support of the financial sector and increasing social spending. Further, there are no effective international mechanisms for holding States accountable for their economic policies that have impact outside of their borders, even though States do have extra-territorial

obligations that include the impact of their actions beyond their borders. We need a re-evaluation of existing international institutions—International Monetary Fund, World Bank, World Trade Organization—to correct global economic imbalances, enforce accountability, and promote stability.

Labor Policy: Unpaid work needs to be brought to the forefront of an agenda that promotes the realization of women's rights: it must be recognized in statistics and policy, reduced by public investment, and redistributed so that unpaid work is shared equally between men and women. The promotion of decent work in the post 2015 sustainable development agenda will need to identify and change the structural factors that have been contributing to the rise of precarious and informal employment. In addition, social security must be reformed and expanded so that it is enjoyed as a right by all.

Financial Regulation and Corporate Accountability: Economic growth in which gains are unevenly shared and which expands inequality is counterproductive to the realization of human rights and achievement of social justice. If the corporate sector is not adequately regulated, the pursuit of profit will most likely increase inequality, unsafe working conditions, tax evasion, environmental degradation, land-grabbing, and failure to realize human rights. Financial regulation must cross borders to ensure a global standard. Commodity speculation on food and water impact sustainable development and without key global agreements on corporate accountability we will continue to experience a failed global economic governance system. Strengthening the regulation of business and corporate accountability are integral to curbing inequalities and the erosion of human rights.

Trade Policy: Poor communities of both women and men have clearly been adversely affected by trade agreements globally, and it is no surprise that trade necessarily affects women differently than men because of their different and often secondary social status in the economy. Women and children are also the most negatively affected when social programs are privatized and/or deregulated. In the aftermath of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) between Canada, Mexico and the United States, community property became privatized, job loss increased, and safe working conditions deteriorated for those working in factories, a sector in which women are overrepresented. We know that without decent work there are no good jobs, and although the free market may increase profits for the corporate sector, it often does so by exploiting its workers. A gender-aware perspective in trade policy must be taken into account in the post 2015 sustainable development agenda.

Day Two

On the second day of the meeting, participants committed to continuous learning about the ways in which their work to promote women's rights and gender equality links with macroeconomic policies.



Participants committed to:

- Incorporate this lens into their organizational strategic plan.
- Enhance understandings on financing for climate change and link to a community resilience fund.
- Share information with international networks.
- Stay engaged and on top of advocacy with governments about gender equality and women's rights within economic policy.
- Host informal social meet-ups for (young) women to discuss links, especially regarding climate change and women's leadership.
- Promote women, peace, and security agenda linked to economic policy.
- Work on financing for gender equality and economic justice.
- Produce a primer on debt and women's rights.
- Integrate analysis on economic policy into our advocacy messages on women's rights.

The array of ideas that were proposed by participants illustrates the depth to which these discussions will be able to influence future thinking regarding the linkages between women's rights, gender equality, and macroeconomic policies.

Participants also worked on identifying longer-term strategies for the selected priority areas named above. They also developed specific messages, identified targets, and brainstormed strategies for reaching key stakeholders.

Group one decided that they would embark on transforming economic power with a people-centered approach. Long-term they focused on: building movements, bringing in feminist economists voices as new experts, contextualizing conversations, analyzing the chain effect of policies and understanding taxation and fiscal policies in relation to the realization of women's rights. Ultimately, there was a commitment to influence constituencies through primers, as well as connecting organizational issues areas back to fiscal policies.

Group two focused their key messages on taxation and expenditure, by shifting tax policy away from indirect taxes, such as the value-added tax (VAT) which have disproportionate impacts on women, to taxing income/assets as well as increasing corporate taxes to increase revenue. There was agreement on the importance of redesigning and rethinking budgeting to ensure that women's rights and women's needs are met at national and community levels. For example, more money should be allocated for social protection and there should be a maximum allocation of resources to realize economic and social rights, e.g., the right to health, education, and decent work. Governments should increase transparency and participatory budgeting to ensure the realization of women's rights and gender equality. Participants committed

to targeting Ministers of Finance and parliamentarians. They also noted that in order to spread their message, they will need to increase women's economic literacy, magnify their reports in the media, build alliances, and educate policy makers about the issues.

Group three's key message was, "Corporations are robbing women's rights," and within this context they focused on global corporate accountability and tax evasion. Their strategy centered on building a global and legally binding monitoring framework that would regulate taxation. This mechanism would also integrate redress plans. It would be implemented with the aim to end foreign direct investment incentives, tax breaks, and subsidies. They will target governments, the UN open working group on sustainable development, the UN working group on business, civil society organizations, and communities in the global south. The participants also discussed strategies for their work, including: mapping of related women's rights activities, identifying allies, collecting data on corporations' impacts on local communities, mobilizing around the September 2013 UN General Assembly meeting, and building capacities of communities.


Moving Forward

Overall the participants agreed that the post 2015 sustainable development agenda should be people-centered and include feminist voices to ensure that linkages are made between human rights principles, the realization of women's rights and macroeconomic policy. In order to develop a sustainable development agenda post 2015 to transform economic power, women's rights and feminist organizations must be strategically and substantively engaged in a coordinated way in both the post 2015 and the sustainable development goals processes at the global, regional and international levels.

During the course of the meeting it became clear that capacity building in the area of economic literacy and rights is a necessity for women's rights allies. It is also critical that women's rights organizations create synergies with one another with regard to the ways in which economic policies impacts women's rights. There are a multitude of actors involved in the process, with the private sector dominating much of it. Thus it is the responsibility of feminist and women's rights groups to amplify the ways in which economic policies and the lack of corporate accountability impact the lived realities of women and men everywhere.

Movement building is central to the success of integrating gender equality and human rights into the post 2015 sustainable development processes at the local, national, regional and international levels. Women's rights and feminist organizations must build strong alliances with civil society networks at all levels as well as with like-minded governments to facilitate the realization of women's rights and address the erosion of human rights resulting from macroeconomic policy prescriptions.

There is an urgent need to increase women's economic literacy, build alliances and demand accountability for economic justice and women's rights.



As a follow-up to this strategic meeting, participants pledged to:

- Develop a mapping of activities related to the post 2015 sustainable development processes.
- Engage with, and monitor, the upcoming UN General Assembly in September 2013, and the UN Open Working Group meeting on “sustained and inclusive economic growth, macroeconomic policy questions,” in November 2013.
- Continue to bring a feminist economic justice analysis to their work and increase their knowledge of the linkages between macroeconomic policies and women’s rights.
- Communicate through a working burst list where participants are able to share information and further strategize.

A two-day meeting was not enough time to cover both the substantive and coordination aspects of developing strategies for the post 2015 sustainable development agenda with the aim of promoting the realization of women’s rights and gender equality. However, it did provide an important springboard for future collaborations and advocacy planning moving forward.

Appendix 1: Participants List

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