

Women's Major Group Governance & Structure

What is the Women's Major Group?

The Women's Major Group (WMG) was created as an outcome of the Earth Summit in 1992, where Agenda 21, the "blueprint for sustainable development" outlined the critical role, rights and responsibilities of nine Major Groups, including women, in global sustainable development processes. The WMG is an open-ended alliance that in 2015 comprises 600+ organizations and individuals that self-organize to promote human rights-based sustainable development with a focus on women's human rights, women's empowerment and gender equality through engagement with intergovernmental negotiations on sustainable development and environment.

The primary role of the Women's Major Group is to ensure and facilitate meaningful participation of women's groups and other organizations and social movements striving for gender equality, gender justice, women's human rights and sustainable development in UN policy spaces. The Women's Major Group influences policy by ensuring effective participation of women and women's organizations in UN processes; facilitating coordinated and highly strategic advocacy with decision-makers; developing compelling, evidence-based advocacy messages, materials, and analysis; and engaging in communications and media work to raise awareness of women's demands and hold governments accountable.

To ensure that women's participation is meaningful, the Women's Major Group facilitates conversations among women across all regions and from diverse perspectives to share information about advocacy opportunities; develop common platforms for advocacy; map country positions and priorities; and ensure coordinated outreach to governments in capitals and with missions in New York. While much of this work is done virtually through multiple listservs and online conference calls, the WMG also facilitates in-person strategy meetings ahead of and during key meetings. For example, during the Open Working Group and Post-2015 Intergovernmental Negotiations, the Women's Major Group held strategy sessions the weekend before the meetings started and morning briefings to share information and coordinate strategies.

The long-term goal of the WMG is to bring about policies based in a coherent global sustainable development framework that are founded on core principles of gender equality and justice, women's rights and environmental sustainability. This sustainable development framework and related policies are important - and necessary - to overcome structural economic, social and environmental crises that disproportionately impact women and girls; to tackle intersecting inequalities and multiple forms of discrimination based on gender, age, class, caste, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender identity, disabilities, and other status; and to create diverse, vibrant, equal and just societies for all people.

WMG Communications

The WMG uses multiple modes of communication to share updates, events, opportunities for participation and other information, including via conference calls, listservs, website and social media.

The WMG hosts regular **conference calls** for general information sharing and to provide opportunity for discussion on current events/topics, as well to discuss advocacy opportunities such as position papers or responses to documents. The WMG also hosts specific conference calls in advance of negotiation sessions or

other meetings, such as the post-2015 intergovernmental negotiations. Notes are shared back to the lists for those unable to participate.

The WMG has several **listserv**(s) to facilitate multi-layered communication and serve the needs of the constituents

- General WMG listserv is focused on information sharing of relevant information, e.g. pertaining to gender equality, women's human rights and sustainable development. This list is moderated and is open to all.
- Advocacy listserv is intended for more in-depth conversations and advocacy strategy on current negotiations and processes and is open to civil society only, upon filling out a survey to help understand each person's interest, expertise and experience.
- Regional listservs are facilitated by the regional OPs and focus on relevant issues in that particular region.
- Event-focused listservs are short-term to support communication during a specific meeting.

WMG **online/social media** presence

- Official website of the WMG: <http://www.womenmajorgroup.org/>
- Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/WomensMajorGroup>
- Twitter: https://twitter.com/Women_Rio20

Decision-making

Decision-making in the WMG happens at different levels and in different spaces.

General working methods

As a result of regular WMG calls and/or information shared across the list, different tasks or interest groups form organically. The OPs also identify specific opportunities based on upcoming events and urgent needs. In most cases, members volunteer to lead or support work on a specific task. In some cases, members form a small conversation group to discuss an issue of relevance/importance to them, and any outcomes are shared back to the larger group.

Selecting participants and speakers for meetings

The WMG shares out all relevant information regarding participation and speaking opportunities in meetings via the listservs. The WMG requests nominations/applications from interested speakers/participants and then the selection is made either via the OPs or an appointed selection committee, according to agreed criteria, considering: region, thematic expertise, experience in the process (e.g. OWG) depending on the event in questions. WMG strives to balance new and diverse faces to build capacity of the larger group with more experienced people that support consistency and coherency and also have the important ability to mentor others. When funding is offered, the process is open to ensure that everyone has the opportunity to apply.

Preparing for participation / advocacy

The WMG facilitates in-person preparatory meetings a day before each of the official sessions. This has been the case for the OWG, CSW, HLPF, and Post-2015. These meetings provide orientation to the meeting, including community building, logistics, discussion of advocacy positions and further preparation for advocacy during the meeting.

Knowing the constituency base

WMG recently launched a survey to understand the participants better. Questions include biographical data, professional affiliation, thematic expertise, process expertise, level and type of work, and preferred mode of participation, among others. This supports outreach on particular issues and also can help to identify regional or thematic strengths and gaps among the WMG constituents. The survey is not required, and for those who have not taken it, the WMG maintains a database with basic information such name, email, organization and country.

Preparing Statements and Position Papers

Over the past several years, the WMG has developed an extensive set of [positions](#) on a range of policy issues, with broad input from the global women's rights movement. These positions come from the WMG's credible and diverse membership. These positions have been the basis for the WMG's work in the Open Working Group (OWG) and in the post-2015 and related sustainable development processes.

Women's Major Group statements are developed collaboratively and based upon existing positions. The WMG strives to reach consensus, aiming for the most ambitious position possible. If there are clearly dissenting voices but a small portion, then their voice will be acknowledged as input but not reflected in the consensus. And then they may speak in the name of their own organization, or place a document on the WMG website in the name of their own organization.

The WMG makes every effort to balance and facilitate diverse voices via all media before a meeting. Once negotiations or meetings begin, those members present (and when possible, those who have elected to be on the meeting-specific listserv) need to have authority to make decisions as needed – based on agreed positions by the WMG and taking into account the progress at the meeting.

The general guide to developing papers is as follows, which is adapted when necessary due to time constraints or other mitigating factors:

- a. Understand the context for a position paper (OWG, HLPF, PGA, etc) & share the opportunity and/or discuss on a teleconference
- b. Invite members to express interest in contributing to the paper
- c. Consult with thematic experts as relevant
- d. Establish a timeline and process, including identification of the Drafting Lead (often an OP but can also be another WMG member)
- e. Drafts are usually prepared via Google Docs for transparency and inclusion, but in some cases a lead collects comments and then makes a first draft
- f. The draft is shared and opened up for comments setting up a reasonable deadline
- g. Address any differences in opinion during the period
- h. Revise to reflect inputs
- i. Consult for consensus – this is generally via posting a draft final version for final urgent comments/concerns
- j. If no reservation are expressed, then the document is finalized for distribution/posting/printing/translation, as appropriate
- k. If reservations are expressed, time may be taken to resolve them; document may change to a “sign-on”; or footnoted reservation may be added

Organizing Partners: Criteria and Election Process

The WMG transitioned to a team of eight organizing partners (OPs) in 2014.

Criteria for WMG OPs

- Current working experience in areas related to women's human rights, women's economic development, and/or women and the environment
- Availability of staff experienced in gender mainstreaming and women's human rights
- National and/or regional/international scope of activities related to women's human rights and gender equality.¹
- Organizations with proof of their independent juridical personality and non-profit and/or tax-exempt status in a State Member of the United Nations
- Organizations with demonstrated working relationships with national, regional or global organizations or networks involved in women's human rights and gender equality activities.
- Demonstrated national/regional constituencies of women including of traditionally under-represented groups.
- The organization should have an established office or address (called e.g. headquarters), with an executive officer. It should have statutes which are transparent and accessible and if a network preferably a democratically adopted constitution.²
- In case of network organization, the organization shall have procedures which give authority to speak for its members through its authorized representatives.³
- The organization shall have a representative structure and possess appropriate mechanisms of accountability to its board or members.⁴
- Organizations should have sufficient financial and human resources to be able to engage in the policy process for at least 2 years.
- Organizations should be experienced in proposal writing and fundraising
- Organizations should show the capacity to coordinate Women's Major Group position statements, strategies, relevant meetings and delegate activities to WMG members.

Balanced distribution of OPs: Geographic distribution / Thematic representation

The WMG strives to have regional representation and thematic diversity by bringing together organisations which have:

- Global policy process expertise⁵
- Regional expertise (8 regions - see under 3 below)
- Relevant thematic expertise⁶
- Organisational expertise (e.g. networking, advocacy, outreach, grassroots, capacity building)

¹ UNEP Stakeholders engagement policy

² ECOSOC Resolution 1996/31

³ ECOSOC Resolution 1996/31

⁴ ECOSOC Resolution 1996/31

⁵ UN processes on Post2015, Post Rio+20 (SDGs, Financing for SD etc.) as well as experience in other relevant processes such as CPD, CSW, UNFCCC, UNCBD and regional UN processes

⁶ Gender Equality, Women's Human Rights, Sexual and Reproductive Health & Rights (SRHR), Peace & Rule of Law, Energy, Forests & Biodiversity, Oceans & Seas, Climate Change, Food Sovereignty, Energy, Education, Decent Work, Finance, Macroeconomics, Trade and Investment, Social Justice and Social Protection, Technologies, & ICT, a.o.

OP responsibilities

- Consulting with national/regional women's human rights and gender equality networks to prepare written inputs in the form of discussion papers and priorities for action papers addressing gender equality and women's human rights within economic, social and environmental spheres -including the cross-sectorial themes- that reflect their group's views on progress made, outline obstacles and constraints to implementation, and identify new challenges to be met by major groups to expedite implementation.
- Organizing, managing and disseminating data and information on Major Groups and the post 2015 process
- Consulting with women's networks to identify participants to serve on their sector's delegation
- Providing logistics and developing processes so Major Groups will be able to maximise their understanding and presence at the HLPF and other Rio processes
- Provide guidance and find expertise to develop policy positions representing the best from the Major Groups constituencies relevant to the agenda points of the HLPF
- Have proper and valued knowledge of the UN in general and Rio/OWG outcome processes in particular to provide Major Group constituencies with background information and/or capacity building expertise.
- Coordinate and facilitate the participation of representatives of their respective sector throughout the OWG sessions, working in collaboration with other major groups' sectors' representatives.⁷
- Coordination of Women's Major Group working group around SD and related themes

Specific roles and tasks of Organizing Partners:

- To Provide strategic direction and guidance to the Women's Major Group through an inclusive, consultative and transparent process, of decisions surrounding WMG positions on all Post 2015/Rio 20 outcomes
- To facilitate public representation of the WMG and coordinate active member participation in regional and global meetings related to Post 2015 by speaking to previously agreed WMG positions
- To keep the WMG as well as regional and national constituencies informed of all WMG activities and strategies through regular communications
- To streamline policy papers and positions developed by various WMG thematic and/or advocacy working groups and convert materials for global advocacy purposes
- To conduct advocacy meetings in New York and regional meetings on behalf of the WMG and organize members to participate with adequate preparation and strategy
- Secretariat role, which can be covered by OPs, or can be subcontracted, which includes maintaining websites other social media, listservs, etc,

Process for Nominations, Selection and Ending of OP position⁸

The WMG aims at a balanced distribution of OPs as much as possible, bringing together organizations that have expertise in relevant international and regional policy processes, thematic debates as well as organizational topics (see footnote [6] above).

⁷ DESA, Sustainabledevelopment.org, can be retrieved at <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/majorgroups/about>

⁸ Proposed is a slate nomination and election process that will produce balance between regions, themes and types of organizations.

- An organization nominates a person for the function of OP and this person has the responsibility of fulfilling the ToR of OPs;
- Each nominee will indicate if it is global, regional or global and regional, along with that person's and their organization's thematic focus area.
- If this person is no longer available or not complying with the ToR, the other OPs will decide if the organization needs to step down. It is up to the other OPs to decide if they call for special elections or wait to the next period of elections.
- The WMG can elect a minimum of 4 OPs and maximum of 10 OPs, from the nominated organisations, striving for:
 - 8 OPs: one OP per region and two global co-chairs (one North/one South) selected from among the regions in order to ensure geographical representation: (1) Africa, (2) Asia (3) MENA (4) Europe & CA (5) Latin America (6) North American preferably NY based 7) Pacific 8) Caribbean.
 - Adequate attention to thematic balance: social, environmental and economic dimensions
- Elections ensure institutional and leadership continuity on a rotational basis allowing previously elected OPs to be re-elected for a second term, up to 2 consecutive terms.
- The nomination and election process will be transparent and organized by an independent selection committee.
- Regions can come with one commonly agreed nominee, avoiding the need for further election/selection processes.

Organizing Partners as of May 2015

| Organization | Region | Contact |
|--|---------------------------------|---|
| Asia Pacific Forum on Women, Law & Development | Asia and the Pacific | Tessa Khan Email: wmg@apwld.org |
| Gender Equity: Citizenship, Work and Family (Equidad de Género: Ciudadanía, Trabajo y Familia) | Latin America and the Caribbean | Emilia Reyes Email: emilia@equidad.org.mx |
| Forum of Women's NGOs of Kyrgyzstan | Central Asia & Europe | Nurgul Dzhanaeva Email: nurguldj@gmail.com |
| Global Forest Coalition (GFC) | Global | Isis Alvarez Email: isis.alvarez@globalforestcoalition.org |
| International Women's Health Coalition (IWHC) | North America | Shannon Kowalski Email: skowalski@iwhc.org |
| Women Environmental Programme | Africa | Priscilla Achakpa Email: Priscilla.achakpa@wepnigeria.net |
| Women in Europe for a Common Future (WECF) | Global | Sascha Gabizon Email: sascha.gabizon@wecf.eu |
| Women's Environment & Development Organization (WEDO) | Global | Eleanor Blomstrom Email: eleanor@wedo.org |

Joining the WMG

The WMG is open to all interested organizations working for gender equality and women's rights in sustainable development. To stay up-to-date on the WMG, join the WMG General listserv. Sign up on the WMG website at <http://www.womenmajorgroup.org/> or contact lean@wedo.org, providing your name, organization, and country.