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Women Major Group's contribution for the 8th session of the Open Working Group on the Sustainable Development Goals (OWG8) *Gender Equality*

Analysis and key recommendations by the Women's Major Group Putting women and girls at the center¹

The Women's Major Group welcomes the Open Working Group's deliberations on how inequalities, including gender inequalities, should be addressed in the sustainable development goals and post-2015 development framework.

In these discussions, we call on members of the Open Working Group to endorse:

- **A specific, stand-alone goal on gender equality and women's human rights in the post-2015 framework; and**
- **Equality, including gender equality, to be a crosscutting priority in all dimensions of the sustainable development framework, and therefore to be reflected in the preamble and in the form of concrete targets.**

As the UN Technical Support Team (TST) expressed in their issue brief "gender inequality is the most pervasive form of inequality around the world and a pressing human rights concern." Although previous international consensus documents, including the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, the ICPD Programme of Action, and their follow up outcomes, the Millennium Declaration and MDG 3, have emphasized the critical importance of guaranteeing women's human rights and addressing gender inequalities, progress in this regard has been slow and uneven. Gender inequalities persist, and women and girls of all ages continue to bear the brunt of these inequalities across all societies.

As the TST issue brief stated, gender inequalities "play out across all areas of life in every country, cutting across both public institutions, such as governance systems and markets, and the private sphere, such as families and households." To have meaningful and sustainable progress in attaining substantive equality and eliminating inequalities based on gender, the post-2015 development framework must prioritise action in this area, and place women and girls human rights at the centre. As the TST observes, failure to address gender inequalities "is costly for societies and undermines all three dimensions of sustainability."

¹ This briefing paper was elaborated by members of the Women's Major Group on Sustainable Development, <http://www.womenrio20.org/>. It is based on a more comprehensive report with recommendations for the post-2015 agenda by WMG members: http://www.womenrio20.org/docs/Womens_priorities_SDG.pdf. For more information, please contact Heather Barclay <hbarclay@ippf.org> or Meena Bilgi <meenabilgi@gmail.com>.

While recognizing the links between gender equality and sustainable development, the WMG emphasises that achieving gender equality is also a fundamental human rights issue that must be addressed in the SDGs and post-2015 agenda in its own right. We call on the global community to recognise it as such and prioritise the lives and life chances of women and girls.

The post-2015 development agenda must be based on the principles of non-regression, progressive realisation and non-discrimination. It must be firmly rooted in human rights obligations and commitments from the UN conferences of the 1990s and the gains made through their follow up processes at regional and global levels.² It must also address the causes of poverty, proactively addressing increasing inequalities within and between countries, the feminization of poverty and food insecurity, discrimination and violence based on sexual orientation and gender identity, HIV status, commodification of natural resources, threats to food security and sovereignty, global health, climate change, biodiversity loss, and environmental degradation. It is essential that it recognises the specific needs created by migration, forced migration, and refugee crises, as well as the impact that arguments based on religion, culture and tradition are having on achieving gender equality. For these ambitious goals to be met, the framework must also identify and secure long-term sustainable and predictable funding mechanisms. Further, fundamental shifts in the organisation of power, wealth and resources must be prioritized throughout the post-2015 development framework.

It is imperative that the new development framework “measures what we treasure” and does not treasure only what it is able to measure. The limitations in the first MDGs reflected the wider issues of data availability and quality. While we recognise the limitations in data collection, we know that there are sufficient existing data sources to allow for more robust targets and indicators; and where there are not, investment in developing new indicators and data generation systems should be made.

Finally, a standalone goal on gender equality and women’s human rights must be transformative and truly address the root causes of gender inequalities and the social and cultural norms that lead to violations of women’s human rights, reduce women’s and girls’ life chances and result in their on-going subjugation.

We urge the Open Working Group to recommend specific targets and indicators on the following issues:

Recommended Goal: Achieve Gender Equality and the Full Realization of Women’s Human Rights

- 1. Ending all forms of violence including sexual and gender based violence:** This target should call for the prevention and elimination of all forms of violence against women and girls (including transgender women), rape and sexual violence, early and forced marriage, Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting and other harmful practices, and forced pregnancy. It should specifically recognize the crucial role women play as human rights defenders and provide an enabling environment for women human rights defenders to be able to carry out their work in accordance with international human rights standards.
- 2. Guarantee access to justice:** This target should aim to end impunity for discrimination against women and violations of women’s human rights, including in conflict settings. It should

² This includes implementation of already agreed upon international agreements such as the 1993 Vienna Human Rights Declaration and Programme of Action; the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) including General recommendation No. 27 on older women and protection of their human rights; the ICPD Programme of Action (ICPD PoA) and the Key Actions (ICPD+5), the Beijing Platform for Action (BPfA); the 2001 World Conference Against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance Declaration and Programme of Action; the 2007 Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples; and the 2006 Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

aim to eliminate barriers to justice for women and girls, including by ensuring that multiple systems of law, where they exist, comply with international human rights law.

3. **Guarantee socioeconomic equality and economic justice for women and girls:** This target must commit to specific actions to address the root causes of the feminisation of poverty and economic inequality between women and men, and redress existing inequalities and power imbalances, including inequalities in women's and girls' unpaid care work. It requires legislative and social changes to ensure that women have equal rights and equal access to wealth, services and resources such as education, technology; women's human rights to own land and property; and their access to, and control of economic, productive and natural resources.
4. **Guarantee women's political autonomy, participation and full citizenship:** A target on women's participation in all areas of public life and at all levels of political leadership that ensures women's equal representation and engagement across the broad spectrum of formal and informal decision-making institutions and in the public and private spheres. It should also look at affirmative measures and funding to increase and strengthen the quality women's and girls' roles and influence or impact in decision-making, as well as promoting women's voices in the media.
5. **Guarantee women and girls sexual and reproductive autonomy, including their sexual and reproductive rights:** Targets that call for: the removal of punitive laws, such as those criminalizing abortion, HIV transmission, same-sex partnerships, or sex work to eliminate stigma and discrimination associated with HIV; addressing social, legal and policy barriers to services, such as discriminatory laws, parental or spousal consent requirements, stigma, social and cultural norms; enact laws to protect and fulfil sexual and reproductive rights; provide universal comprehensive sexuality education which promotes values of respect for human rights, tolerance, gender equality and non-violence to all adolescents and youth, in and out of school; ensure that SRH services, including maternity care, contraception, access to safe abortion, prevention and treatment of STIs, non-discriminatory HIV/AIDS services, are part of essential services in conflict, climate change and other emergency settings.
6. **Governance for Gender Equality:** This should address budget allocations for achieving gender equality, monitoring systems that include the collection of sex and age-disaggregated data across all sectors; and training on gender equality for service providers across all sectors

Gender Equality and Women's Rights under other goal areas:³

7. **Health:** Targets that address women's universal access to quality health services; universal health care and coverage, with indicators that measure equity, accessibility, affordability, acceptability and quality of services, and the inclusion of sexual and reproductive health services in essential benefits packages; comprehensive sexuality education; access to information and methods for HIV prevention and care; improved social and environmental determinants of health, including water and sanitation, food sovereignty and security, and nutrition, energy, and pollution; legal guarantees of rights within health care settings, including the rights to informed consent and confidentiality; policies to address legal, policy and social barriers to health care; and community-based monitoring and accountability mechanisms that assess women's and adolescents participation in demanding quality health services and budgetary allocations to health, including sexual and reproductive health and rights.

³ Each sustainable development goal area will have specific relevance to gender equality and women's rights. Included here are highlights. Please see other submissions by the Women's Major Group at http://womenrio20.org/policy_statements.php for further suggestions.

- 8. Environmental justice:** A target that calls for the reformation of unsustainable economic policies that cause long-term damage to people's lives, economies and the environment and are a barrier to social development, that recognises women and girls as key social, environmental and economic actors contributing to transforming production and consumption patterns towards sustainable development, and that protects rights of ethnic minorities and ensures their access to traditional subsistence resources.
- 9. Right to food and nutrition, clean water and sanitation:** These targets refer to women and girls' needs and priorities in strategies to address food security/ sovereignty and nutrition, water security and sovereignty, and sanitation.
- 10. Girls' rights:** Targets and indicators that specifically measure how girls and young women are differentially impacted by issues that affect adolescents and young people, in order to ensure girls' rights are recognized, their needs prioritized, and their voices amplified. These include measurements of girls' equal access to quality education, employment and training; access to health services, including sexual and reproductive health services; freedom from violence, including child, early and forced marriage; guarantees of girls' safety and investments in safe spaces and developing girls' social and economic capital and empowerment; and meaningful involvement of girls, and young people, in identifying, implementing and monitoring solutions for sustainable development.
- 11. Ensuring women and girls' human right to quality education and lifelong learning:** A target that calls for guaranteeing gender equality in the provision of educational services, including young and adult women's education aimed to develop their whole potential as human beings to fully exercise their citizenship and their working life.
- 12. Ensuring a robust accountability framework:** establish measures and mechanisms to track political, programmatic and financial accountability for commitments made, at national, regional and global levels, as well as the fulfilment of commitments made by other actors. This includes tracking health sector system strengthening and budgets to ensure sexual and reproductive health information, education and services receive priority attention.

Finally, the WMG is deeply concerned that recommendations on gender equality and women's rights, particularly their sexual and reproductive health and rights, that have garnered wide support from member states and civil society in previous Open Working Group Sessions have not been fully reflected in Co-Chair reports and other statements to date. We call for explicit and strong language on gender equality and women's rights to be included in the OWG8 outcome statements, in the summary report of this meeting, and in the Open Working Group's report to the General Assembly later this year.