



Women's movements' engagement in the SDGs: lessons learned from the Women's Major Group

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ABSTRACT

The Women's Major Group's role is to assure effective public participation of women's non-government groups in the United Nations (UN) policy processes on Sustainable Development, the post-2015 development agenda, and environmental matters. It works alongside eight other 'Major Groups' representing different elements of civil society. This article focuses on the role of the Women's Major Group in the negotiations of the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which enabled women's rights and feminist organisations to participate in the process. The article assesses the ways in which this model of civil society participation in a UN process offers a route for feminist activism and women's movements to influence international development agendas and policy processes effectively. The next challenge is to ensure that women's rights organisations will participate in the planning of national implementation processes and adjusting national indicators to reflect the gender dimension in each of the goals.

KEYWORDS

Gender equality; Women's rights; 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development; SDGs; policy advocacy

El papel del Grupo Principal de las Mujeres consiste en asegurar la efectiva participación pública de grupos no gubernamentales de mujeres en el proceso de formulación de políticas para el desarrollo sostenible de la ONU, esto es, la agenda de desarrollo post-2015; y para asuntos medioambientales. Dicho grupo trabaja conjuntamente con otros ocho "Grupos Principales" que representan a distintos elementos de la sociedad civil. El presente artículo se centra en el rol desempeñado por el Grupo Principal de las Mujeres en las negociaciones establecidas con el propósito de forjar la Agenda 2030 para el Desarrollo Sostenible de la ONU, proceso que facilitó la participación de organizaciones en pro de los derechos de las mujeres y de organizaciones feministas. Además, valora las maneras en que este modelo de participación de la sociedad civil en un proceso de la ONU abre una vía para que el activismo feminista y los movimientos de mujeres influyan eficazmente en las agendas de desarrollo internacional y en los procesos de definición de políticas. El siguiente reto es asegurar que las organizaciones por los derechos de las mujeres intervengan en la planificación de procesos nacionales de implementación y en la precisión de indicadores nacionales, a fin de que la dimensión de género se vea reflejada en cada uno de los objetivos.

Le rôle du Groupe majeur des femmes (*Women's Major Group*) est de veiller à la participation publique efficace des groupes non gouvernementaux de femmes aux processus de formulation de politiques générales des Nations Unies en matière de développement durable, à l'agenda de développement post-2015 et aux affaires environnementales. Il travaille aux côtés de huit autres «groupes majeurs» qui représentent différents éléments de la

société civile. Cet article se concentre sur le rôle du Groupe majeur des femmes dans les négociations autour de l'Agenda 2030 des Nations Unies pour le développement durable, qui a permis aux organisations féministes et de défense des droits de la femme de participer au processus. Cet article évalue les manières dont ce modèle de participation de la société civile à un processus des Nations Unies offre une voie permettant à l'activisme féministe et aux mouvements de femmes d'influencer efficacement les ordres de jour pour le développement international et les processus de politiques générales. Le défi suivant est de veiller à ce que les organisations de défense des droits de la femme participent à la planification de processus de mise en œuvre au niveau national et à l'ajustement des indicateurs nationaux pour traduire la dimension genre dans chacun des objectifs.

Introduction: from the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

In order to achieve and amplify the distinct voice of women's rights and feminist organisations in the policy process, the United Nations (UN) Sustainable Development process agreed in 1992 to give an own 'observer space' to women, called the Women's Major Group (WMG). The WMG is a self-organised group for all women's rights and feminist organisations wanting to promote gender equality and human rights in sustainable development policies (see www.womenmajorgroup.org/about-us, last checked by the author 11 January 2015). Its role is to assure effective public participation of women's non-government groups in the UN policy processes on Sustainable Development, the post-2015 development agenda, and environmental matters. It works alongside eight other 'Major Groups' representing different elements of civil society.¹

The UN General Assembly is very restrictive with regard to civil society participation, and the MDGs,² which preceded the SDGs, were evolved with minimal input from the many social groups whose participation in implementation was critical, and whose support for the goals and targets was often lacking. The MDGs – including Goal 5's focus on reducing maternal death and improving reproductive health services – did bring some real progress for women's livelihoods and social position. But did they bring progress for women's rights? The voices of women's rights and feminist movements were hardly heard at the yearly reporting on MDG progress – or lack of it. However, outside the formal reporting process, the women's rights and feminist movements (in company with other social justice movements) have drawn attention to the fact that the MDG targets were mostly technical and quantitative in nature, and this inevitably led to mostly 'cosmetic' improvements, instead of addressing the root causes of gender inequality and discrimination (see www.womenmajorgroup.org/strengthening-gender-justice-and-human-rights-to-achieve-sustainable-development/#more-1923, last checked by the author 15 January 2016).

The MDG evaluation also showed the lack of understanding of the inter-linkages between the MDG goals, in terms of both causes and solutions, and lack of recognition that all MDG goals had gender dimensions, which were mostly not taken into account by donors and implementers. One example is the multiple dimensions of poverty, not

just based on lower levels of salaries and income for women, but on a combination of obstacles from gender-based discrimination, gender-based violence, and insecurity, to unpaid burden of care and domestic work, and legal and customary barriers regarding access and control over resources, which were not taken into account in the simplified measurements and solutions designed for reaching the MDG 1 goal.

In contrast, the dynamic between activists and 'official' state and international development processes has been very different in the SDG processes. As a result of the active participation of the WMG in the SDG process, and the important advocacy gains obtained for gender equality and women's rights, the participation in the WMG grew from 200 women and feminist groups in 2012, to its current level of over 800 groups involved through the open email information lists in 2015–16.

This article considers the experience of the WMG in the Agenda 2030 and SDG processes so far, and assesses the ways in which this model of civil society participation in a UN process offers a route for feminist activism and women's movements to influence international development agendas and policy processes effectively. It draws on my experience in advocating for prioritising women's rights and priorities in policies and legislation at national, European Union, and UN level, since I joined the global women's movement in the preparations of the Fourth UN Conference on Women in Beijing 1995, and went on into the MDGs, Sustainable Development and Climate policy processes.

Sustainable development and the WMG: the start

The involvement of the WMG in the SDG and Agenda 2030 processes has its roots in the Sustainable Development process and the 1992 UN 'Earth Summit' in Rio de Janeiro, where civil society was seen as key to the implementation of the outcome declaration known as Agenda 21. Article 23.2 laid out the thinking behind the Major Groups and their role in facilitating civil society participation:

One of the fundamental prerequisites for the achievement of sustainable development is broad public participation in decision-making. Furthermore, in the more specific context of environment and development, the need for new forms of participation has emerged. This includes the need of individuals, groups and organizations to participate in environmental impact assessment procedures and to know about and participate in decisions, particularly those which potentially affect the communities in which they live and work.

The goal of the Major Groups was expressed in Article 23.4 of Agenda 21, as 'moving towards real social partnership in support of common efforts for sustainable development'.³

When it became clear that women's sexual and reproductive rights would be under fire at the UN Conference on Sustainable Development in Rio de Janeiro in 2012,⁴ many new and feminist groups became active in the WMG to influence the negotiations and ensure that the Rio+20 outcome document included support for sexual and reproductive health and rights, in the strongest possible wording.

Not only was this aim achieved, but furthermore, women's movements and feminist groups advocated successfully for an entire chapter in the Rio+20 outcome document on 'Women and Sustainable Development', as well integrating gender concerns into all other chapters. The most important outcome was that all governments agreed that the Sustainable Development Goals would be merged with the post-2015 development agenda process. The Rio+20 outcome document clearly stated the need for strong participation of civil society, major groups, and other stakeholders (see paragraphs 48, 68, 244), and the WMG was seen as the mode through which women's movements could give input and shape the SDGs.

The Major Groups model and participation of women in the SDGs: some challenges

The SDG WMG does not represent a unique model of women organising themselves in their own space for the purpose of engaging in a UN process. In fact, different similar models have evolved since the first Rio conference in 1992, and can be found in various contexts over the past ten years or so. The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) has its own WMG, while the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) has a Women and Gender Constituency (<http://womengenderclimate.org>, last checked by the author 11 January 2016). In addition, the regional economic commissions of the UN are increasingly accepting self-organised participation by various civil society groups, including women and feminist groups. The Asia-Pacific region is the most advanced; in its Regional Civil Society Engagement Mechanism (see www.asiapacificrcem.org/about-rcem/, last checked by the author 15 January 2016), it has a space for women and feminists, but also for the LGBT community, for migrant workers, and for landless farmers.

A few months before the Rio+20 summit, a number of women's organisations partly linked to the UN Development Programme and focused on UN Headquarter Processes, created a new alliance called the Post-2015 Women's Coalition. When after the Rio+20 summit it became clear that the official 'space' for women and feminist organisations to participate in the SDG/post-2015 negotiations would be the WMG, the coalition – most of whom became engaged through the WMG at policy advocacy level – decided to focus more on 'outside' activities. Today, most of the coalition organisations continue to be active through the WMG space, but also organise their own activities, such as their own reports, and their own contribution to the 'High Level' debates organised by the President of the General Assembly.

There exists constructive and – depending on the stage of policy negotiations – very close co-ordination between all these groups involved with UN processes. Each of them would have a unique analysis of the strengths, weaknesses, and challenges of this type of model of civil society participation in UN processes. From the perspective of the WMG in the SDGs, this experience has shown that a women's rights-focused grouping can be a driving force for the active participation of progressive and global South-based

civil society organisations (CSOs). Yet there are debates about the impact of this model on the outcomes.

Questions of commonality and difference

Critics have argued that having several CSO groups each representing a different interest group potentially weakens civil society activism by separating socially progressive voices from each other on issues they agree on, and potentially highlighting differences between them. But the counter-argument is that in processes where only one type of civil society has the lead role, specific demands for gender equality and women's rights are often relegated to a secondary level. In the SDG process, the WMG co-operated closely with like-minded groups from indigenous peoples, trade unions, and environmental and development non-government organisations (NGOs).

The justification for separate spaces to allow women's rights groups and organisations to participate in policy processes partly depends on the size of the policy process. For the SDGs and the climate negotiation processes which took place in Paris at the end of 2015, tens of thousands of people are involved in one way or another, both participating in their own right in various ways, and representing many millions of other people. But in some other policy processes, with a narrower and more technical focus, such as the Financing for Development process, working as one larger civil society grouping may make more sense. An active women's working group exists for the Financing for Development process (see <http://wwgonffd.org>, last checked by the author 11 January 2016), but there has been one position and co-ordination group from CSOs towards the policymakers, in which the women and feminist organisations were actively engaged and often figured as the CSO representatives when statements were being made to policymakers.

Challenges to women's and feminist participation in the SDG/post-2015 process

Since 1992, it has been a continuous struggle to maintain the space for women's rights and feminist organisations in the UN process on sustainable development. Again and again the WMG and other civil society groups have had to get re-commitments from governments to be allowed to participate fully, and to keep the ways of working together (in the language of the UN, 'modalities'), as progressive as possible. At the best times, the WMG and other Major Groups have had access to all meetings, including informal negotiations, not only as observers but also with allotted speaking slots in all sessions, as well as the right to comment on the negotiation documents, to have our comments published on the UN website, and to present key recommendations with keynote speakers in the plenary sessions.

A continued challenge has been to make the best use of this space obtained for women and other civil society groups. Since most of the negotiations for the SDG process took place in New York, finding funds to bring Southern women's organisations to the USA has been one of the major challenges. The women's rights and feminist organisations are generally much smaller and less well funded than other CSOs in the development sector, with annual budgets a hundred or thousand times smaller than for large organisations

such as Oxfam or CIVICUS, for example. The secretariat for the UN process (UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs) has often received some dedicated funding from donor countries to allow two representatives of each of the nine 'Major Groups' to travel to New York once or twice a year. But with the negotiation process moving into a monthly meeting schedule, there was no longer sufficient funds to bring Southern representatives to all meetings with the limited support of the UN. At the same time, the WMG has always had as a guiding principle to prioritise the participation of women's rights and feminist organisations from the global South.

Issues of translation and access

Another challenge has been, and continues to be, the funding for multi-language communication. All the main positions and publications of the WMG are translated, often on a voluntary basis, into different languages including Spanish, French, Arabic, Russian, and Portuguese. But the day-to-day communication via the email list-serves remains predominantly in English, thus creating a barrier of participation for groups from non-English-speaking regions, and especially for grassroots women's groups.

Before going on to give an account of women's rights and feminist advocacy in the SDG process, the next section gives information on the governance arrangements of the WMG.

Governance of the WMG

Since the year 2000, the WMG has always elected co-facilitators at regular intervals, often based on the thematic focus of the upcoming year's policy agenda. The co-facilitators serve as the main contact person with the UN secretariat (see www.womenmajorgroup.org/about-us/partners-and-support/, last checked by the author 13 January 2016). Their role is to share information with the member groups, and to organise their most effective participation in the policy process, despite the reality of limited resources. When, after the Rio+20 Summit in 2012, the Sustainable Development Process merged with the Millennium Development Process, the co-facilitators organised new elections in which they proposed an increased number of co-facilitators, not only 'global', but also 'regional' in focus. This strategy aimed to cover amongst the co-facilitators as much as possible the many thematic topics of the SDGs, as well as improving communication in different languages.

An open call for nominations to participate in the election process was launched, and a representative group of women's rights and feminist organisations joined the selection committee (see www.womenmajorgroup.org/nominations-for-women-major-group-wmg-organising-partners-now-open-2/, last checked by the author 8 February 2016) including from organisations previously not engaged with the WMG. In total, eight co-facilitators were elected, with two based in New York and the other six spread across all UN regions jointly with expertise covering all 17 SDG thematic areas (see www.womenmajorgroup.org) bringing in new organisations: Women Environmental Programme (WEP), Forum of Women's NGOs of Kyrgyzstan (FKW), Asia Pacific Forum on Women, Law and Development (APWLD), International Women's Health Coalition

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(IWHC)) as well as building on the experience of some of the organisations involved as WMG co-ordinators in the Rio+20 process (Women in Europe for a Common Future (WECF), Women's Environment & Development Organization (WEDO), Global Forest Coalition (GFC) (see Table 1).

WMG experience of advocacy in the SDG/post-2015 process

January 2013 to December 2013: Stock-Taking

The SDG negotiations started in January 2013 with a monthly meeting of negotiators, which continued until December 2013. This first period was the so-called Stock-Taking period on the SDGs. The nine Major Groups, including the WMG, had obtained from the country co-chairs (Kenya and Hungary) the commitment that they would start each negotiation day with a one-hour exchange with the Major Groups and other stakeholders from civil society. Each month, the Stock-Taking meeting addressed different themes, including poverty, jobs, food, oceans, health, cities, gender equality, etc. (see <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/post2015/owg>, last checked by the author 13 January 2016). The daily one-hour sessions with the co-chairs had two to four keynote presentations focused on the themes of the negotiation week, followed by a number of interventions from the floor. The WMG raised funds to be able to propose women's rights and feminist speakers to attend the monthly negotiations, and to be keynote speakers on their topics of expertise. Thus each month, several women representatives shared their expertise with the co-chairs, with a focus on formulating possible targets for SDGs.

The WMG published all the presentations on the website of the UN, and shared them with all negotiators. Each day, the WMG organised meetings with government negotiators to explain their priorities and the gender dimensions of the themes being addressed in the stock-taking phase. At the end of seven months of stock-taking, the co-chairs presented a 'Zero-Draft' as an outcome, which included a first outline of goals and targets for the SDGs. This included many of the priorities of the women's rights and feminist groups, but also excluded specific language on women's rights and sexual rights which groups had proposed to include.

Throughout the eight months of Stock-Taking, there was time to consult with leading feminist economists based in the economic South to underpin the proposed targets with evidence and examples, showing how current economic and finance policies practised by countries in the global North undermine women's rights in many countries in the global South, for example women's textile workers rights. The WMG supported the G77 proposal to have additional targets dealing with the means to implement the SDGs, including language on debt restructuring and relief for developing countries. The WMG advocated for language on decent jobs, social protection floors, and a 'living wage' for all – in contrast to what it sees as a 'starvation' Target 1.1 of each person living on US\$1.25 per day (now US\$1.95). The WMG recalled the unacceptable inequalities, with 1 per cent of the richest individuals in the world owning as much as the other 99 per cent (Seery 2014), and therefore asserting that SDGs need to promote redistributive policies and tax justice.

Table 1: Current 'organising partners' of the Women's Major Group

	APWLD	GFC	IWHC	KFW-NGOs	WECF	WEDO	WEP
Regional focus	Asia-Pacific	Global and Latin America	Global and USA	Central Asia	Global and Europe	Global and USA	Africa
Thematic focus areas	GE, women's rights, poverty, employment, trade, finance, migration	GE, women's rights, climate policies, forest policies, indigenous peoples	GE, women's rights, sexual and reproductive health and rights	GE, women's rights, trade, finance, development policies	GE, women's rights, women's control and transformation of energy, water, sanitation, food sectors, women's health and environmental pollution	GE, women's rights, environmental and climate policies, disaster risk reduction	GE, women's rights, peace and conflict resolution, rural development, water, sanitation, energy
Other coordinating roles	Regional civil society participation mechanism, UN ESCAP, civil society groups, UN Women	Civil society groups, Convention on Biological Diversity (UN CBD)	Civil society groups, UN Population Fund	Civil society groups, Global Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation	Civil society groups, UN Environment Programme, UNECE, World Health Organization-Europe	Women civil society constituency, climate negotiations, UNFCCC	Regional civil society participation, UN ECA, AMCOW

Notes: GE, gender equality; KFW, Kreditanstalt für Wiederaufbau; UN ESCAP, UN Economic & Social Commission for Asia & the Pacific; UNECE, UN Economic Commission for Europe; UNECA, UN Economic Commission for Africa; AMCOW, African Ministers' Council on Water.

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February 2014 to July 2014: negotiating the Zero-Draft

From February 2014, the negotiations on the Zero-Draft of the SDG goals and targets took place for a week each month, leading to the final proposed set of 17 goals and 169 targets which were submitted to the UN General Assembly, and agreed in July 2014. Again, during this period of the process, women's rights and feminist groups were one of the most active groups of civil society, contributing to each of the negotiation weeks with proposals for text to each of the 17 goal areas, and particular focus on Goal 5 on Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women and Girls. From the start of the SDG process, a number of countries such as the UK had stressed that for them keeping the number of goals limited was their main priority, and that not all countries would be able to have their preferred topics as a stand-alone goal. The WMG opposed this view, and argued for a comprehensive, integrated development agenda, not a narrow, specialised agenda.

Next, a number of countries suggested that gender equality did not need a stand-alone goal, and could be mainstreamed throughout the other goals. As the UN agencies had received instructions from the Secretary-General that they were not allowed to advocate openly for their priority areas – which meant that UN Women was not supposed to push for a stand-alone 'gender goal' – it became the role of the WMG to be loud and vocal in promoting a dual strategy of both a stand-alone goal on gender equality and women's rights, as well as specific gender-equality targets in other goals.

A group of countries got together and got more and more countries to sign on to a 'gender group statement', in which they called for prioritising gender equality as a stand-alone goal and in other targets. There was a lot of opposition from a number of countries including Saudi Arabia and a number of African countries to the use of the term 'gender equality', which they alleged was really aimed at promoting transgender and gay rights. Strong statements from the pro-gender-equality group of countries were important in keeping and strengthening the gender-equality goal, and gender-equality language in the targets of other goals.

Until the very end of the negotiations, even when it was quite certain that the stand-alone goal on gender equality – eventually numbered Goal 5 – would be confirmed, the WMG advocated for the term 'women's rights' to go into the title of the goal, but concessions were made to the other side, and instead 'empowerment of women and girls' was used in the title.

The WMG also advocated strongly to get the full recognition of women's reproductive health and rights and sexual rights into both Goal 5 and Goal 3 – the 'health goal'. This was not fully achieved; 'sexual rights' were not included in the SDGs, but both goals retain a reference to 'sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights'. It is very important to have it in both, to recognise that this is a major health issue, as well as a key women's rights issue.

The WMG furthermore advocated for language that expressed the multiple dimensions of poverty, in addition to gender inequalities as a root cause of poverty, also other inequalities based on discrimination on grounds of race, ethnic minority status, sexual orientation, class and caste, among others. To come to internal agreements on the positions to promote, the WMG had agreed internally that those women's and feminist groups with expertise on a certain topic would be given the lead to propose the most progressive

language available. Particularly in the case of economics, finance, and trade, this was often new ground for many of the organisations based in the wealthy 'economic North'.

August 2014 to September 2015: the preamble and final negotiations

The Zero-Draft of the SDGs had been negotiated in a new setting where countries grouped not in the usual main groups of European Union, G77, etc., but in groups of two, three, or four to jointly fill 70 negotiation seats. After the General Assembly approved the SDGs in Zero-Draft form, the next phase of the negotiations took place in the usual UN setting with the usual political groups. This phase ran from August 2014 to September 2015. Member states also decided to maintain the Kenyan Ambassador to the UN, Macharia Kamau, as co-chair, but instead of Hungary, the Ambassador of Ireland, David Donoghue, joined as a new co-chair for this last phase of the policy negotiations.

The goals and targets already having been agreed on, this next phase focused on the preamble. The preamble negotiations focused on whether to summarise the 17 goals into six key principles – which did not include gender equality as a priority area. The WMG presented arguments for a broader set of principles. In the end the six principles, which had already been used in the Secretary-Generals report on post-2015, were retained in the preamble, but, also, a longer set of references including to a number of priorities of the women's and feminist movements (a full paragraph on gender equality, references to sexual and reproductive health and human rights, among others).

July 2015: financing for sustainable development

In parallel to the SDG negotiations, a small committee of experts from member states worked on establishing the needed financial resources for implementing the SDGs. This so-called 'Intergovernmental Committee of Experts on Sustainable Development Financing' (ICESDF) presented its report in August 2014 (<https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/4588FINAL%20REPORT%20ICESDF.pdf>, last checked by the author 16 February 2016) From the WMG a small number of organisations were actively engaged, including amongst others Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era and APWLD. It was argued in particular by some of the countries from the global North that if the developing countries insisted on the next Financing for Development Summit, it should be merged with the SDG process and include the lessons from the ICESDF. It was thus agreed that the Financing for Development policy process would merge with the post-2015 process. In parallel to the Post-2015/2030 Agenda intense negotiations, the Financing for (Sustainable) Development (FFD) took place in the period October 2014 till July 2015, culminating in Addis Ababa in July 2015. The Addis Ababa Action Agenda (AAAA), adopted on 16 July 2015, became the main text describing the 'Means of Implementation' for 2030 Agenda and its SDGs. The WMG supported the advocacy work of the Women Working Group on FFD to obtain progressive language on gender budgeting and tax reform, and in the groups criticism of states promoting 'gender equality' mainly for it being 'smart economics' as well as the unchecked role of private-sector funding for SDGs.

Coherence with parallel policy processes

Throughout the processes outlined above, the WMG strived to ensure coherence with the women's rights and feminist positions in other policy processes. More and more new organisations were encouraged to join in the SDG advocacy process. We closely co-operated with the women's rights and feminist groups in the climate negotiations and the FFD process, and of course with those involved in the implementation processes on the Population and Development process (ICPD), the Convention to End All Forms of Discrimination against Women, the Beijing Platform for Action, and the annual sessions of the Commission on the Status of Women which reaches its 60th session in 2016.

In the negotiations on Climate leading up to the Paris Summit in December 2015, closely coinciding with the launch of Agenda 2030 and the SDGs, women's rights and feminist groups advocated strongly to obtain gender-equality guidelines and policies to enable gender equality and women's rights perspectives in the operational and implementation level, including as criteria for allocation of funding from the Green Climate Fund. The Green Climate Fund now has a gender policy and gender equality has become an important aspect in evaluation of funding proposals. At the same time, in the SDG negotiations, it was almost impossible to get a reference to the gender dimension of climate change policies, but a few countries (under the leadership of Iceland) did not give up, and this resulted in Goal 13 containing a last-moment reference to women's involvement in climate actions focusing on least developed countries. The WMG proposals to refer to the gender dimension of energy policies in Goal 7 were unsuccessful, but Goal 6 on water and sanitation did get a specific reference to women and girls in the target on sanitation for all, although not the particular mention of menstrual hygiene promoted by the WMG.

Next challenges: a final word

The adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in September 2015 did not include the definition of a set of global indicators with which to measure the progress on the SDGs and Targets, the next challenge on which the WMG is working. Many of the hard-won gender-equality references in targets are no longer reflected in the indicators. For example, the proposed indicators for the water and sanitation goal no longer reflect the language of the target, which calls for special attention to women and girls. Many proposed indicators are not disaggregated by sex and, as this is a technical process, there is much less possibility for civil society groups to provide input. The challenge will be to ensure that women's rights organisations will participate in the planning of national implementation processes and adjusting national indicators to reflect the gender dimension in each of the goals.

Notes

1. To find out more about all nine Major Groups, see <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/majorgroups> (last checked by the author 11 January 2016). The social groups they cover are:

- Women; Children and Youth; Indigenous Peoples; NGOs; Local Authorities; Workers and Trade Unions; Business and Industry; Scientific and Technological Community; and Farmers.
2. The MDGs were crucial in steering an annual budget of some US\$100 billion in development aid funds, setting priorities, and focusing efforts on eight MDG goals and 21 targets (<http://mdgs.un.org/unsd/mdg/host.aspx?Content=indicators/officialist.htm>, last checked by the author 11 January 2016). That there was an MDG 3 goal on Gender Equality was a last-minute gain, for which we owe thanks to a few committed gender-equality advocates who took part in the closed negotiations in which the MDGs were agreed 15 years ago.
 3. Agenda 21 can be found at <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/Agenda21.pdf> (last checked by the author 11 January 2016).
 4. The Report of the Rio 2012 Sustainable Development Conference can be found at <http://www.uncsd2012.org/content/documents/814UNCSD%20REPORT%20final%20revs.pdf> (last checked by the author 11 January 2016).

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