

Human rights, gender equality and sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) in the context of international sustainable development.

RESPONSE TO THE REPORT OF THE HIGH LEVEL PANEL (HLP) OF EMINENT PERSONS ON POST 2015 – 11 JUNE 2013

Dutch civil society organizations working in the field of gender equality, human rights, sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) and sustainable development¹ have had dialogues² with the Dutch ministry of Foreign Affairs on The Netherlands' role in the post 2015 agenda discussions, and its leadership on the above mentioned themes. The same civil society organizations hereby present some of their views on the High Level Panel (HLP) report and their recommendations for next steps.

Introduction: Strengths and weaknesses of the Report

We are particularly pleased to see the HLP's illustrative stand-alone goal on Empowerment of Women and Girls, and Achieve Gender Equality; its recognition of access to sexual and reproductive health and rights as a fundamental human right (p2-3); its recognition of the concerns of women and girls and young people as a cross-cutting issue in all goals (p17); its recommendation that young people must be active participants in decision-making (p17); its recommendation that indicators be disaggregated in various dimensions, including by gender, geography, age, and ethnicity (p58); and the mentioning of gender budgeting (p62).

A universal and holistic approach to poverty reduction and sustainable development.

The HLP succeeds in addressing clearly the crucial elements to development and poverty reduction that the MDGs ignored. Such as a **human rights based approach** to development, gender equality, conflict and instability, and political and social rights including freedom of speech and access to justice. The HLP presents a **universal and holistic approach to sustainable development and personal well-being**, through a focus on economic, social, and environmental aspects of sustainable development. The report stresses the necessity to **change consumption and production patterns**. At the same time it highlights the importance of eradicating poverty, and of human rights and gender equality for realising sustainable development. The High Level Panel explicitly presents **social exclusion as unacceptable**. The report calls for a "data revolution" which implies disaggregation of data, taking into account the needs of the most excluded and addressing **inequalities**.

Missed opportunity to address underlying causes of poverty and inequalities.

The report does not adequately **address the root causes of poverty**. Its fragmented and inconsistent incorporation of human rights, coupled with the prominence it gives to market- and private business-driven development, prevents the report from meeting the stated aim of proposing a truly "transformative shift". The proposed agenda remains primarily committed to a vision of development driven by classic forms of economic growth and market forces. The report states that economic growth will need to add value and be sustainable and inclusive. Nevertheless, it fails to countenance the **requirements for radical change** in the functioning of global value chains which re-create poverty and ill-being. In particular, it does not address **reducing income inequality** between and within countries.ⁱ There are welcome efforts to define new ways of measuring income inequality, but **gender and other social inequalities are invisible within these measures**.ⁱⁱ

The report states that "Countries are not being told what to do: each country is being asked what it wants to do, on a voluntary basis, both at home and to help others in meeting jointly identified challenges." (p.7). The post 2015 agenda should not be an à la carte menu with the **risk that national targets are not ambitious enough, especially in the field of SRHR and gender equality**. We also have concerns about the monitoring systems for the implementation of this agenda: the Panel acknowledges that these need to be inclusive, transparent and sound but does not give suggestions, with the risk that this will be an agenda without **sound implementation, funding and accountability mechanisms**.

¹ The networks and its members of Share-Net, WO=MEN Dutch Gender Platform, Women in Europe for a Common Future (WECF) and Rutgers WPF.

² On 18 February 2013, the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Share-Net, WO=MEN Dutch Gender Platform, WECF and Rutgers WPF held a Roundtable discussion on the Netherlands' position on Gender Equality, Human Rights, SRHR and sustainable development in the post 2015 agenda discussions. See [discussion paper](#) and [document with results](#).

Transformative development paradigm - *recommendations*

- **Focus on change that is both sustainable and gets to the heart of problems: changing underlying power relations, structures and systems, such as those resulting from patriarchal norms.** Transformative change can only be realized if an analysis of root causes is done before addressing the symptoms. For example, in achieving gender equality, a focus on eliminating discrimination on the basis of sexual identity and addressing masculinities and the role of boys and men is needed. Addressing harmful social and cultural norms and behaviours that negatively impact power relations is needed.
- **Integrate existing human rights agreements and institutions in the post 2015 agenda, and expand upon existing national, regional and international human rights councils and institutions in favour of meaningful accountability processes.** Call upon existing human rights institutions to vouch for effective accountability.
- **Commit to specific targets to allocate resources for advancing women's rights and gender equality in the post 2015 development agenda.** As the MDG process has seen, limited financing has been a major barrier to advancing women's rights and empowerment.
- **Focus on marginalized people and letting the most excluded people participate equally in decision making in areas that affect them in order to respect, promote and fulfil the rights of those most in need.** Marginalized people include disabled people, indigenous people, people with diverse sexual orientations and gender identities, young people in all their diversities, and people from communities most affected by HIV (young people, sex workers, drug users, men who have sex with men and LGBTQI people, and people living with HIV). It is important to recognize these different groups as inherently heterogeneous to avoid overly generalizing their needs and priorities.
- **Address the role that the financial and trade systems, and transnational corporations play in food insecurity, poverty and inequalities of women worldwide.** We recommend "*corporate accountability*" with instruments for loss and damage to redress the negative impacts on women.
- **Repair the wrong impression given by the HLP panel report that the ILO decent work agenda and global social protection floor agenda are a luxury which developing countries cannot afford.** It is our obligation to the memory of the thousands of women textile workers who have died in recent years that the decent work and social protection floor are clearly set as goals for all countries worldwide.

Gender equality and women's rights - recommendations

- **Use the term “gender equality” consistently.** This will create the opportunity to address structural and underlying causes, and to involve both women and men as agents for change. We are pleased to see that one of the identified cross-cutting issues in the report relates to strengthening women's rights (page 17). The empowerment of women and girls is recognized as a precondition for fair and sustainable development, as well as to realize their own rights. However, the terminology applied by the HLP is inconsistent and lacks clarity. “Girls and Women” as a cross-cutting issue places emphasis on women, both as problem holders and as responsible for solving the problem(s). We therefore plead for engaging both women and girls and boys and men, to empower women and girls and strengthen their rights sustainably.
- **Include a gender analysis to the overall agenda to demonstrate and address patriarchal norms and unequal power relations, and make the integration of gender in the goals and targets more specific.** According to the HLP “gender equality is integrated across all of the goals, both in specific targets and by making sure that targets are measured separately for women and men, or girls and boys, where appropriate” (page 17). However, the concrete proposals by the HLP are meagre. Gender is only mentioned under goal 1, 6 and 8, and mainly in the sense of “must apply to everyone, regardless of gender”. Thus, nothing is said about addressing underlying causes which create and perpetuate inequalities on the basis on gender. Gender equality is one of the pre-requisites for sustainable development, and as such specific efforts to achieve gender equality in all goal-areas needs to be aimed at, and thus would need specific targets, at least one or more specific gender targets per goal. See below for an example of our analysis on *gender inequality and fragility* in the report (a.o. related to proposed goal 11).
- **Explicitly include the stimulation of new forms of “masculinities” (understandings of manhood), together with men and boys, women and girls.** More attention should be given to the positive roles men and boys can play and are playing in improving gender equality. Addressing women's rights and stimulating women's empowerment are crucial, but will not be enough. We need to take into account the engagement of young and adult men. For
- **Include a specific target on addressing the underlying causes of gender inequalities.** The targets under the proposed goal 2 address some of the key structural

barriers to women's and girls' human rights and gender equality, which go far beyond those included in the original MDGs. However, to be more ambitious in addressing the underlying causes of gender inequalities, we propose a specific target. This will generate more specific attention to transforming roles and relations which perpetuate inequality. “*Elimination of discrimination against women in political, economic, and public life*” (target 2d) may open up space to address underlying causes of discrimination as well. We would however recommend a strengthening of the wording of target 2d, because ending discrimination is just a first step towards equality, and not enough to assure women's and girl's empowerment in all areas of society. Alternative wording could be “*ensuring gender equality in political, economic and public life.*”

- **Consistent use of the term Gender Based Violence (GBV).** The terms violence against women and girls (VAWG) and gender-based violence (GBV) are both used in the report (including proposed target 2a). We prefer the term GBV: GBV is the result of gendered power inequalities that exploit distinctions between males and females, among males, and among females. It puts less emphasis on women as victims and men as perpetrators, and more on a phenomenon related to the gender of both victim and perpetrator.
- **Include the elimination of the discriminatory legal categorization of adult women as minors in the proposed target on ensuring the equal right of women to own and inherit property, sign a contract, register a business and open a bank account.** Unless this is achieved, it will not be legally possible in many countries for women to sign a contract, register a business or open a bank account—in effect rendering the target as it is currently articulated unachievable. Concomitantly, this target is also the appropriate context for calling for ensuring women's equal right to passing on their citizenship to their children.
- **Develop a target which protects women's rights, and rights of women small farmers, and prioritizes their rights when faced by pressures such as land grabbing from investors and corporations.** We are concerned that the report gives privilege to business over the rights of women, as illustrated in target 1b, *which states 'Increase by x percent the share of women and men, communities and business with secure rights to land, property and other assets.'* It presupposes a false equivalency of human rights and private company privilege. In many cases, violations of women's and community rights to land, food, water, are exacerbated by privileges given to private businesses.

Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) – recommendations

- **Include sexual and reproductive health and rights as a stand-alone goal and integrate SRHR in the other goals.** We are pleased to see the HLP's recognition of universal sexual and reproductive health and rights. It is however narrowly presented as a target under illustrative goal Ensure Healthy Lives. Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights are key in eliminating poverty and realising sustainable development. We therefore continue to support the Netherlands' strategy to advocate for a stand-alone goal on sexual and reproductive health and rights and integration of SRHR in the other goalsⁱⁱⁱ.
- **Define universal sexual and reproductive health and rights and maintain a comprehensive approach.** The HLP has not defined or specified universal sexual and reproductive health and rights – not in the narrative nor in the target. We fear that the target will be subject to misinterpretations and that important aspects will be lost. "Universal Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights" provides a comprehensive approach for access to sexual and reproductive health services and to respect, protect, and fulfil sexual and reproductive rights of all individuals. This comprehensive approach needs to be maintained in the post 2015 agenda^{iv}. SRHR are well defined in international agreements such as the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development.
- **Adequately address inequalities and social barriers concerning sexuality of young people in realizing SRHR.** The HLP panel report has not adequately addressed inequalities and social barriers such as patriarchal gender norms and taboos concerning sexuality of young people in realizing SRHR. The post-2015 framework needs to firmly address the structural causes of poverty and the slow progress in realising sexual and reproductive health and rights, by combating (gender) inequalities, inequities, discrimination and stigmatisation, but also by removing the legal, political and social barriers currently blocking access to universal sexual and reproductive health and the fulfilment of sexual and reproductive rights.
- **Integrate a holistic approach when addressing young people's needs and rights.** When addressing young people's needs, the HLP emphasizes access to employment. Other rights and needs of young people are less visible in the report and therefore we advise a holistic approach. Even though the HLP presents young people as a cross-cutting issue, their specific SRHR needs have not been adequately addressed. The HLP report states that young people need access to SRHR (p17), however this recognition has not been translated into the illustrative goals and targets.
 - **Under illustrative goal 2 on "Provide quality education and lifelong learning" access to comprehensive sexuality education or human rights education should be included,** that contributes to the empowerment of adolescents and young people to make informed decisions about their lives, including their sexual and reproductive lives.
 - **Under illustrative goal 4 on "Ensure healthy lives" a distinction needs to be made between quality health services and quality youth-friendly health services especially regarding SRH.**^v
- **Include reaching zero new HIV/AIDS infections as a target.** The post 2015 agenda should not only strive for "reducing the burden of disease from HIV/AIDS", it should be ambitious in having zero new HIV/AIDS infections.

Gender inequality and fragility – recommendations

- **Include a gender analysis to the root causes provoking violence and conflict, and include the crucial role of women leadership in conflict resolution.** There is a strong focus in the report on safety and security, inextricably linked to fragile states and conflict areas. We are pleased the HLP proposes a stand-alone goal to ensure stable and peaceful societies (11). In addition, freedom from violence is recognized under the proposed goal 2 on empowerment of girls and women and achievement of gender equality (p. 34). However, a gender analysis of the root causes provoking violence and conflict - such as unequal power relations - is absent. And while children are mentioned as a vulnerable group, it is remarkable that there is neither a word about the particular risks for women and girls, nor about the crucial roles women leadership can and have played in conflict resolution. This is a missed opportunity.
- **Apply an inclusive analysis of the local security situation.** During conflict, men and women's roles change. Understanding what men and women want for themselves and for their children, as well as understanding what they fear most, helps to gear operations to local needs. Moreover, women expect the international community to support them in their efforts to maintain or obtain economically and politically active roles. Grasping renewed opportunities for women's participation in rebuilding is inevitable for building a stable society. This implies to open a dialogue with women, women's organizations and with men: an inclusive dialogue on all issues relevant in reconstruction, relevant to all citizens.^{vi}
- **All future goals, targets and indicators should apply a gender and conflict-sensitive approach and should build on the indicators for UNSCR 1325 and the Peacebuilding and Statebuilding Goals^{vii}.** Any country-level peace building compacts agreed as part of the New Deal^{viii} should incorporate key commitments and initiatives from UNSCR 1325 National Action Plans, where they exist.^{ix}

ⁱ <http://www.oxfamnovib.nl/pak-ongelijkheid-aan!.html>

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<http://www.kcl.ac.uk/about/kings/worldwide/initiatives/global/intdev/people/Sumner/Cobham-Sumner-15March2013.pdf>

ⁱⁱⁱ Uitkomsten document Rondetafel discussie SRGR/Mensenrechten/Gender Equality and Sustainable Development, 18 februari 2013 – Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, Share-Net, Wo=Men Dutch Gender Platform, Women in Europe for a Common Future, Rutgers WPF.

^{iv} It includes, among other things, access to a variety of modern methods of contraception and to sexual and reproductive health information; education and counselling; comprehensive sexuality education; safe abortion services and post abortion care; treatment of the complications of unsafe abortion, safe delivery services and pre- and post-natal care; and treatment of sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV/AIDS, and other sexual and reproductive health conditions – and the *right* to the highest attainable standard of sexual and reproductive health; ; to bodily integrity; to choose your own partner; to control your sexuality and the number, timing and spacing of your children and the information and means to do so, free from violence, coercion and discrimination and the right to express diverse sexual orientations and gender identities.

^v <http://web.unfpa.org/adolescents/youthfriendly.htm>

^{vi} [An introduction to gender-sensitive \(peacekeeping\) operations. Clingendael, Dutch Spanish seminar 2010](#)

^{vii} OXFAM

^{viii} OECD:

<http://www.oecd.org/dac/HLM%20one%20paper%20PSGs.pdf>

^{viii} The New Deal for Engagement in Fragile States was adopted at the 4th High-Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness held in Busan in December 2011. The New Deal aims to help fragile states move towards sustainable peace and development, and represents the culmination of a multi-year process of reformulating the approach to development assistance in fragile and conflict-affected states.

^{ix} <http://www.cordaid.org/en/news/gender-inequality-and-fragility-post-mdg-framework/>