

**Rio+20 Intersessional  
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on behalf of the Women's Major Group**

I am Anita Nayar representing a network of feminist activists & academics from the global South called Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era. On behalf of the Women's Major Group, I would like to raise five priority actions toward Rio+20:

1. Twenty years ago the global women's movement secured over 172 references to women and an entire chapter on women in Agenda 21. I was a youth activist at that time, inspired by the sustainable development paradigm and that it cannot be realized without gender equality. Today I see a radical regression, as there is little to no mention of women in the inter-governmental process leading up to Rio+20.

So our **first call** to action is for governments to reaffirm that gender is crosscutting in development processes and that gender equality and women's human rights are vital to achieving sustainable development. As we frame the proposed Sustainable Development Goals, we simply cannot let these two processes fall back on separate tracks.

2. But how do we realise the promise of sustainable development in the midst of coping with repeated crises? There is an urgent need to change mindsets and to realise that limitless economic growth does not equate with wellbeing or sustainability. New indicators and data show us that what counts for wellbeing is more equal societies<sup>1</sup> and some developing countries are achieving these well-being indicators with very low carbon emissions.<sup>2</sup>

So our **second call** is to recognize the unequal and unfair burden that women carry in sustaining our collective wellbeing. We therefore need indicators of the time women spend on performing unpaid or underpaid work in order to value social reproduction and reflect it in macroeconomic policy making.

3. We must also realise that in times of economic crisis and in the absence of social insurance systems, women's unpaid labour acts as a stabilizer and increases their burden.

So our **third call** is for a universal social protection floor<sup>3</sup> that entails basic social security and health care including comprehensive sexual and reproductive health services. This is critical especially for women living in poverty who are locked into precarious reproductive work and in many places are deprived of their bodily,

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<sup>1</sup> See Pickett and Wilkinson <http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2009/mar/13/the-spirit-level>

<sup>2</sup> See Social Watch <http://www.socialwatch.org/node/13774>

<sup>3</sup> See [Social protection floor: for a fair and inclusive globalisation](#) from the [Social Protection Advisory Group](#) chaired by USG Michelle Bachelet.

reproductive and sexual rights. We simply must respond to the demands of the 99% and pursue policies that favour human rights and social provisioning over profit.

4. Such a human rights-based approach would also monitor, regulate and hold corporations accountable for their ecologically and socially unsustainable practices. This means protecting small farmers from financial speculation and land grabbing including for large scale agrofuel plantations; banning technologies such as geo-engineering and GMOs and subjecting any new technologies to comprehensive assessments including their environmental health implications; phasing out nuclear energy and seeking fresh and up-scaled financial resources to provide essential energy access to women in developing countries and shift the world to renewable energy.

So our **fourth call** is to halt the privatization and commodification of our commons and protect women's rights to land, water, energy and other resources, as well as to food, health, education and employment. This will benefit all of humankind.

5. Finally, we are seeing a disturbing return to neo-Malthusian arguments linking population with the food and climate crises. Let me share two examples from contributions to the Zero Draft for Rio+20. Some UN agencies claim "*early stabilization of world population would make a crucial contribution to realizing sustainable development.*"<sup>4</sup> Demographers claim that "*slowing population growth, makes many environmental problems easier to solve and development easier to achieve.*"<sup>5</sup> These arguments represent a serious regression from the Rio, Cairo and Beijing agendas.

So our **fifth call** is to recover this consensus that "the major cause of the continued deterioration of the global environment is the unsustainable patterns of consumption and production, particularly in industrialized countries, which are a matter of grave concern and aggravate poverty and imbalances." Rio+20 must be clear that policy responses to population reaffirm the Cairo principles to prioritise women's and girls sexual and reproductive rights and health in the context of fulfilling sustainable livelihoods, meeting basic needs, protecting their rights, and creating an enabling environment for their empowerment, leadership and political participation.

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<sup>4</sup> See [Joint Submission](#) by UNFPA and the Population Division

<sup>5</sup> See The [Laxenburg Declaration](#) on Population and Sustainable Development