**Gender Equality and Women's Rights in the Post-2015 Development Framework**

**Expert Panel at 57th session of the Commission on the Status of Women**

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There are multiple, overlapping processes that are all winding their way toward imagining what the UN's future development agenda will look like. It has been very challenging to engage strategically in this maze of meetings especially given very limited resources for women's groups to participate meaningfully.

This afternoon I will share some insights from just three processes toward Post 2015 that I have engaged in over the past year as a representative of DAWN, which is a third world feminist network, and in collaboration with global networks like the Women's Major Group and the Women's Coalition for Post 2015. The three engagements are:

1. An Expert Group Meeting on Gender Equality in Post 2015 convened by UN Women in November 2012;
2. Asia Pacific Regional Dialogue on Post-2015 convened by DAWN, Asia Pacific Gender and Macroeconomic Network and UN Women's Regional Office also in November 2012
3. The 20-year review of the UN Conference on Environment and Development or Rio+20 in June 2012, which was an important stepping-stone toward 2015.

At the **Expert Group Meeting** we agreed that the post-2015 development agenda must move us well beyond current MDG Goal 3.

(a) It must be situated in a human rights framework, with the full realization of women's rights as a goal in and of itself.
(b) It must include the elimination of all forms of gender-based discrimination, including sexual and gender based violence against lesbian, bisexual and transgender people.
(c) It must tackle macroeconomic policies at the global and national levels such as fiscal, monetary, trade and investment policies that are often key barriers to development.
(d) It must address deeper structural issues of power, accountability, sharing of resources and decision making.

At the **Asia Pacific Dialogue** we drew on a recent report of the Asian Development Bank that named technological progress, globalization and market-oriented reform as the drivers of inequality in the region.[1]

[1] Asian Development Bank. 2012. Asian Development Outlook 2012. Manila: ADB.

(a) So despite experiences of continuing (if slower) growth in the region during a period of global economic instability, the evidence shows us that there is no automatic link between economic growth and improved development outcomes.[2] Also the idea that growth will increase women's equality does not hold. In fact we can point to many examples that growth has been based on women's inequality.

(b) Despite the reduction in poverty rates in two countries – India and China – women continue to be more likely to live in poverty than men. For the Asian region, the proportion of workers in vulnerable employment among women workers ranged from 41% in West and Central Asia to over 80% in South Asia.[3]

(c) To address this we need coherent economic policies that generate living wage employment and that tackle gender discrimination in the labour markets; we need social protection systems that include support that women need for their reproductive work that is often unpaid or underpaid; we need progressive tax reforms and a financial transaction tax to finance basic social security and health care, including comprehensive sexual and reproductive health services.

So while both the Expert Group Meeting and the Asia Pacific Dialogue were clear about the links between human rights, sustainability and the macroeconomic policy environment why is it that governments at **Rio+20** were resistant to addressing these inter-linkages? Most states concentrated on what they considered their 'big ticket' items of finance, trade and aid with little interest to incorporate a gender analysis into these macroeconomic issues.

(a) **Gender and agriculture**: Reference is made to the critical role that rural women play in food security through traditional sustainable agricultural practices including traditional seed supply systems. However these are under severe threat unless governments stop prioritising export oriented agribusiness. Why were such wrong-headed policies not addressed in Rio+20? Will the Post 2015 agenda be any different? Will governments address the root causes of the food crisis including corporate control over food production and speculation in agricultural commodities?

(b) **Gender and climate change**: It's widely recognized that those living in poverty, the majority of whom are women, are disproportionately affected by climate change. This is true because women have disproportionate responsibility for providing food, fuel and water for their households - all areas that are affected by climate change. There is also broad recognition of the critical role that women

[2] "The Future Asia Pacific Women Want" Outcome Statement from the Regional Dialogue on Sustainable Development and the Post-2015 Development Agenda, Convened by Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era (DAWN) and, Asia Pacific Gender and Macroeconomic Network (APGEM) in collaboration with United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific from 3-5 November 2012, Bangkok.

[3] Sen, Gita. (forthcoming) "Addressing Risks, Vulnerabilities and the Need for Social Protection in the Post-2015 Development Agenda: Challenges and Pointers".

play in actively building resilience and in reducing emissions. So given this common understanding why were governments at Rio+20 resistant to addressing the linkages between gender and climate change?

(c) **Gender and work**: A reference is made to women's "unpaid work" but a failure to recognize the unequal and unfair burden that women carry in sustaining care and wellbeing. Development is not sustainable if care and social reproduction are not recognized as intrinsically linked with the productive economy and reflected in macroeconomic policy-making.

(d) **Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights**: In the power struggles over global economic justice issues at Rio+20 sexual and reproductive health and rights was treated like a poker chip. There is no acceptable reason to trade women's and young people's sexual and reproductive rights and health. The Post 2015 Agenda must challenge the narrow MDG agenda and affirm women's fundamental rights to bodily autonomy and integrity. In the words of my sisters from the Pacific (unveil t-shirt) "My body is not your political battleground." Not now, and not in 2015.

On this road to 2015 we need to reclaim as the basis the agreements from the key development conferences of the 1990s when the linkages between gender and all three pillars of sustainable development were acknowledged. Governments even acknowledged the threats to sustainability and women's rights. For example, the negative effects of structural adjustment programmes on women, especially in terms of cut-backs in social services, education and health and in the removal of subsidies on food and fuel. Today there is no mention of the impacts on women's rights of damaging practices such as agribusiness, monoculture, land grabs, and commodity speculation that played a significant part in the food crisis.

Why are these failed policies not being challenged? Is it because they are succeeding for some? We have to ask ourselves who is benefiting from policies that undermine human rights and sustainability of the planet?

The Post 2015 Agenda must be relevant to current realties in the context of multiple, converging crises including the financial crisis, economic recession, food, climate and biodiversity crisis.

(a) It must give us the handles to move away from the failed international financial and trade institutions and make significant structural changes in the global development architecture.

(b) It is time to confront the inequitable distribution of assets and property whether between those who hold land, financial, and intellectual property and those who do not, between those who decide over global economic governance policies and those who do not, and between those who control their bodily integrity and yet have little responsibility for the care of future generations and those who do not

have bodily integrity and yet are expected to fulfil obligations to feed and nurture others.

(c) The human rights framework is helpful in addressing these structural inequalities. While there is a lot of talk about a rights-based approach to development there are no substantial investments in women's human rights as a goal in itself. The Post 2015 framework must be based on the universality and indivisibility of human rights taking into account intersecting inequalities and ensuring non-discrimination based on gender, age, class, caste, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender identity and abilities.

The human rights instruments have been available to us for more than 50 years and yet we have been slow in integrating this approach into policies and programs in a meaningful way. For example it would be helpful to use the human rights framework to regulate and hold corporations accountable or to look at how ODA supports international commitments to gender equality and women's rights.

(d) Centrally important in the advancement of gender equality and women's rights is the active participation of women's organizations at national, regional and global levels. Their continued funding and engagement in the Post 2015 process is critical. Who else will ensure that governments don't suffer from amnesia and begin to seriously address the structural transformations that are required for gender, economic and ecological justice?