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# **Reproductive and Sexual Rights: Charting the Course of Transnational Women's NGOs**

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United Nations Research Institute for Social Development

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## Acronyms

<b>AIDS</b>	acquired immunodeficiency syndrome
<b>CBO</b>	community-based organization
<b>CFFC</b>	Catholics for a Free Choice
<b>CISMU</b>	Women's Health Cross-Sectoral Commission (Brazil)
<b>CLADEM</b>	Latin American and Caribbean Committee for the Defence of Women's Rights
<b>CNDM</b>	National Council of Women's Rights (Brazil)
<b>CNPD</b>	National Commission on Population and Development Brazil)
<b>CRLP</b>	Center for Reproductive Law and Policy
<b>CWPE</b>	Committee on Women, Population and the Environment
<b>DALY</b>	disability-adjusted life years
<b>DAWN</b>	Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era
<b>DISH</b>	Delivery of Improved Services for Health
<b>ECOSOC</b>	United Nations Economic and Social Council
<b>EU</b>	European Union
<b>FGM</b>	female genital mutilation
<b>FPAI</b>	Family Planning Association of India
<b>G-77</b>	Group of 77
<b>HERA</b>	Health, Empowerment, Rights and Accountability
<b>HIV</b>	human immunodeficiency virus
<b>HSR</b>	health sector reform
<b>ICESCR</b>	International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights
<b>ICPD</b>	International Conference on Population and Development
<b>IFI</b>	international financial institutions
<b>IMF</b>	International Monetary Fund
<b>IPPF</b>	International Planned Parenthood Federation
<b>IRRRAG</b>	International Reproductive Rights Research Action Group
<b>IWHC</b>	International Women's Health Coalition
<b>LACWHN</b>	Latin American and Caribbean Women's Health Network
<b>NAF</b>	National Abortion Federation (United States)
<b>NGO</b>	non-governmental organization
<b>NPU</b>	National Population Unit (South Africa)
<b>ODA</b>	official development assistance
<b>PAI</b>	Population Action International
<b>PAISM</b>	Comprehensive Women's Health Program (Brazil)
<b>POA</b>	Programme of Action
<b>PrepCom</b>	Preparatory Committee
<b>RAINBO</b>	Research Action Network for Bodily Integrity of Women
<b>RCH</b>	reproductive and child health
<b>RTI</b>	reproductive tract infection
<b>SAP</b>	structural adjustment programme
<b>STD</b>	sexually transmitted disease
<b>SUS</b>	universal health system (Brazil)
<b>TFA</b>	Target-Free Approach
<b>TNC</b>	transnational corporation
<b>UDHR</b>	Universal Declaration of Human Rights
<b>UN</b>	United Nations
<b>UNAIDS</b>	Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS

<b>UNCED</b>	United Nations Conference on Environment and Development
<b>UNDP</b>	United Nations Development Programme
<b>UNESCO</b>	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
<b>UNFPA</b>	United Nations Population Fund
<b>UNICEF</b>	United Nations Children's Fund
<b>UNIFEM</b>	United Nations Development Fund for Women
<b>UN/NGLS</b>	United Nations Non-Governmental Liaison Service
<b>US</b>	United States
<b>WDR</b>	World Development Report
<b>WEDO</b>	Women's Environment and Development Organization
<b>WGNRR</b>	Women's Global Network for Reproductive Rights
<b>WHO</b>	World Health Organization
<b>WHP</b>	Women's Health Project (South Africa)
<b>WHSMF</b>	Women's Health and Safe Motherhood Project (Philippines)
<b>WSSD</b>	World Summit for Social Development
<b>WTO</b>	World Trade Organization

## Summary/Résumé/Resumen

### Summary

This paper critically examines the role that transnational women's NGOs played in the 1990s in the creation and implementation of international agreements related to reproductive and sexual rights. Its focus throughout is twofold. First, it explores the multiple ways in which reproductive and sexual rights intersect with, and are embraced within, a wide range of health, human rights, social and gender justice and human development issues. Second, it uses this inquiry to rethink the complex political dynamics in which transnational women's NGOs find themselves, as they manoeuvre within a globalizing yet deeply divided and grossly inequitable world. These dynamics encompass a double and precarious positioning. On the one hand, feminist groups have had a major impact at both international and national levels in shifting dominant discourses about reproduction, population and sexuality in a direction that puts the ends of women's health and empowerment above that of reducing population growth. This is a major historical achievement and a mark of the power of transnational women's NGOs. On the other hand, the translation of this discursive shift into effective policies and programmes has been seriously limited by global economic processes and religious and cultural forces whose institutional power is far greater than any that feminist groups could possibly attain at this juncture. It has also been limited, however, by internal divisions and strategic short-sightedness among the women's groups themselves.

The paper assesses recent successes and limitations of women's movements as agents of change in the international arena by focusing particularly on the work of organizations and coalitions active in the field of reproductive and sexual health and rights. Building on previous research, it analyses the "fault lines" between reproductive and sexual health/rights and their necessary economic, social and cultural enabling conditions. Groups seeking to implement reproductive and sexual rights for women and young people have long had to confront macroeconomic, fundamentalist and neo-Malthusian agendas that perpetuate gender, race and class inequalities and thus impede concrete implementation of those rights for the vast majority. Recently, however, the project of transforming these conditions has been complicated by several additional trends. These include: (1) ongoing economic crises that simultaneously call into question *and* provide an occasion for reforming

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