

DISCUSSION PAPER

# THE SDGs AND FEMINIST MOVEMENT BUILDING



No. 27, December 2018

**GITA SEN**

The UN Women discussion paper series is a new initiative led by the Research and Data section. The series features research commissioned as background papers for publications by leading researchers from different national and regional contexts. Each paper benefits from an anonymous external peer review process before being published in this series.

Gita Sen is a Distinguished Professor at the Public Health Foundation of India, and General Co-coordinator of the Southern feminist network, Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era (DAWN).

The paper draws on written documents, as well as my knowledge and experience derived from direct and intensive involvement in the processes over the critical period from before 2012 until now. I have benefited from comments from Shahra Razavi, Silke Staab, members of the Expert Advisory Group for the report and anonymous reviewers. Any errors or misinterpretations of events are mine alone. A shorter version of the paper is forthcoming in a Special Issue of *Global Policy*.

© 2018 UN Women. All rights reserved.

ISBN: 978-1-63214-143-9

The views expressed in this publication are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily represent the views of UN Women, the United Nations or any of its affiliated organizations.

Produced by the Research and Data Section  
Editor: Tina Johnson  
Design: dammsavage studio

DISCUSSION PAPER

# THE SDGs AND FEMINIST MOVEMENT BUILDING



No. 27, December 2018

**GITA SEN**



# TABLE OF CONTENTS

---

SUMMARY/RÉSUMÉ/RESUMEN	i
------------------------	---

---

ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS	ii
----------------------------	----

---

1. INTRODUCTION	1
-----------------	---

---

2. THREE KEY DRIVERS OF FEMINIST MOBILIZATION	3
---	---

---

3. BACKGROUND AND CONTOURS OF WOMEN'S MOBILIZATION IN UN SPACES, 1970s TO 1990s	5
---	---

---

3.1 The 1970s	5
---------------	---

---

3.2 The 1980s	7
---------------	---

---

3.3 The 1990s	8
---------------	---

---

4. GROWING BACKLASH AND REACTION: THE GRITTY 2000s	10
--	----

---

---

5. MOBILIZING AROUND THE SDGs	13
-------------------------------	----

---

5.1 The socio-economic, ecological and political environment	13
--	----

---

5.2 Feminist mobilizing for Rio +20: The role of the WMG	14
--	----

---

5.3 Mobilizing after Rio +20: 'Post-2015' processes and mandates	15
--	----

---

5.4 Means of implementation of the SDGs: Mobilizing through the WWG/FfD	16
---	----

---

5.5 Women's Rights Caucuses for Cairo +20 and Beijing +20	17
---	----

---

5.6 UN agencies' role in relation to feminist mobilizing on the SDGs	18
--	----

---

5.7 Summing up: Effectiveness and inclusiveness of feminist mobilizing for the SDGs	19
---	----

---

6. ISSUES FOR THE ROAD AHEAD	21
------------------------------	----

---

---

REFERENCES	23
------------	----

---

# SUMMARY

The contours and effectiveness of all social organizing, including feminist mobilization, at any level—local, national, regional or global—depend on three key drivers: (i) issues and environment; (ii) institutions; and (iii) the processes of movement building. These drivers often have very different antecedents in a particular context. Hence, their effects may be synergistic, working to amplify the impact of each, or they may be at odds with each other and work at cross-purposes. Their interaction governs how issues are perceived, how opportunities and challenges are defined, how interests are framed and how they guide the shaping and building of alliances as well as their ruptures. The paper applies this analytical framework to examine how feminists have engaged with the negotiation and formulation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) over the last few years.

The paper views the whys and hows of feminist engagement with the SDGs in a broader context: the key UN-related processes from the time women began getting involved with them in the 1970s. This contextual analysis for the period from the 1970s up to 2010 illuminates a central argument of the paper, namely that feminist movement building is not a simple volitional act but is enmeshed in the fluxes and changes of its external environment and institutions. This historical background sets the stage for a more in-depth discussion of the recent period of the

SDGs. Such a historical analysis not only provides a sense of perspective but also locates recent advances and setbacks within a longer timeframe. Given the long history and persistence of gender inequality and violations of girls' and women's human rights, such a perspective is essential for a more balanced understanding of where we need to go and how to advance more sustainable transformations.

The feminist movement is no stranger to adverse economic, social and political environments. Many of the current cohorts of feminists came of age in the mid-1980s and 1990s when neoliberal economic and social policies and ideologies were gaining ground. Since then, the world has grown increasingly difficult, with many opponents and structures inimical to advancing women's human rights. While playing a watchdog role for the implementation of the SDGs, feminist mobilizing must keep its attention on the bigger picture.

The paper argues that the ability of feminist organizations to hold their own in this fierce world, to defend human rights and to advance economic, ecological and gender justice requires not only clarity of vision and a track record of analysis and advocacy but also stronger communications skills, greater organizational resilience and effectiveness, and the ability to build and nurture effective alliances in which younger people play strong roles.

# ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

CPD	Commission on Population and Development
CSW	Commission on the Status of Women
CSO	civil society organization
DAWN	Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era
FDI	foreign direct investment
FfD	Financing for Development
GEAR	Gender Equality Architecture Reform
HLP	High-Level Panel
ICPD	International Conference on Population and Development
IMF	International Monetary Fund
MDGs	Millennium Development Goals
NGO	non-governmental organization
ODA	overseas development assistance
OWG	Open Working Group
PPP	public-private partnership
SC 1325	Security Council Resolution 1325 on women, peace and security
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SRHR	sexual and reproductive health and rights
TNC	transnational corporation
UN	United Nations
UN Women	United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women
UNCED	United Nations Conference on Environment and Development
UNCTAD	United Nations Conference on Trade and Development
UNCTC	United Nations Centre on Transnational Corporations
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNIFEM	United Nations Development Fund for Women
WEDO	Women's Environment and Development Organization
WHO	World Health Organization
WID)	women in development
WMG	Women's Major Group
WSSD	World Summit for Social Development
WTO	World Trade Organization
WWG/FfD	Women's Working Group on Financing for Development

1.

# INTRODUCTION

This paper draws on experiences of feminist engagement with United Nations (UN) processes to make the argument that there are three fundamental drivers of whether and how women's organizations can participate effectively in shaping policies and monitoring their implementation. These drivers are (i) issues and environment, (ii) institutions and (iii) processes. The paper applies this analytical framework to examine how feminists have engaged with the negotiation and formulation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) over the last few years.

It is useful to view the whys and hows of feminist engagement with the SDGs in a broader context: the key UN-related processes from the time women began getting involved with them in the 1970s. This contextual analysis for the period from the 1970s up to 2010 illuminates a central argument of the paper, namely that feminist movement building is not a simple volitional act but is enmeshed in the fluxes and changes of its external environment and institutions. A brief look at this historical background sets the stage for a more in-depth discussion of the recent period of the SDGs. Such an approach will, we hope, lend needed perspective and balance over-enthusiasm about the past or excessive pessimism about the present and future.

The formal basis for the SDGs was laid at the UN Conference on Sustainable Development held in Rio de Janeiro in June 2012, which was the occasion of the 20-year review (Rio +20) of the original UN Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED), also held in Rio. The paper focuses on femi-

From the perspective of gender equality and women's human rights, the period included two other related processes: the 20-year reviews of the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) (Cairo +20) in 2014 and of the Fourth World Conference on Women (Beijing +20) in 2015. The paper explores the challenges and opportunities posed by this coincidence of different processes, given that feminist organizations were engaged in all of them. Based on this analysis, it identifies the institutional mechanisms and types of movement building that hopefully can advance the agenda towards realizing gender equality and women's human rights in the years ahead.

Two more 20th anniversaries that ought to have received greater mainstream attention were those marking the World Conference on Human Rights (Vienna +20) in 2013 and the World Summit for Social Development (WSSD) (Copenhagen +20) in 2015. As discussed later, the relative silence surrounding these highlights significant South versus North tensions on

预览已结束，完整报告链接和二维码如下：

[https://www.yunbaogao.cn/report/index/report?reportId=5\\_21962](https://www.yunbaogao.cn/report/index/report?reportId=5_21962)

