

DISCUSSION PAPER

DELIVERING DEVELOPMENT JUSTICE?

Financing the 2030 Agenda for
Sustainable Development



No. 10, March 2016

TESSA KHAN

FOR THE EXPERT GROUP MEETING IN PREPARATION FOR THE 60TH SESSION
OF THE COMMISSION ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN

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.

In preparation for the 60th session of the Commission on the Status of Women in 2016, UN Women convened an expert group meeting on ‘Women’s empowerment and the link to sustainable development’ with a particular focus on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development for realizing substantive gender equality, women’s rights and empowerment. This background paper was produced for the expert group meeting by Tessa Khan, on behalf of the Asia Pacific Forum on Women, Law and Development.

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SUMMARY

The “supremely ambitious and transformative vision” embodied in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development includes a goal to achieve gender equality for all women and girls and a re-commitment to governments’ human rights obligations. At the same time, governments have agreed to a range of strategies for financing the Agenda that arguably undermine their ability to fulfil women’s human rights and advance a just and gender-equitable model of development. This paper critically evaluates this potential contradiction with a focus on the key financing strategies of trade and investment liberalization, sovereign debt resolution, international private finance, and public-private partnerships, as well as the role of the global partnership for development. Recommendations are made to better align financing targets with the objective of supporting the enjoyment of women’s human rights. Finally, the paper reflects on the inherent limitations in the 2030 Agenda and the need for an urgent shift to a model of development justice.

RÉSUMÉ

La « vision extrêmement ambitieuse et transformatrice » consacrée dans l’Agenda 2030 pour le développement durable comprend un objectif portant sur la réalisation de l’égalité des sexes pour toutes les femmes et de toutes les filles et invite les gouvernements à renouveler leur engagement en faveur des droits de l’homme. Dans le même temps, les gouvernements ont convenu d’une série de stratégies en faveur du financement de l’Agenda qui compromettent incontestablement leurs capacités à respecter pleinement les droits fondamentaux des femmes et à promouvoir un modèle de développement juste et équitable en matière d’égalité des sexes. Le présent document se livre à une évaluation

critique de cette contradiction potentielle, en mettant l’accent sur les principales stratégies de financement de la libéralisation du commerce et des investissements, le règlement de la dette souveraine, la finance privée internationale et les partenariats public-privé, ainsi que le rôle du partenariat mondial en faveur du développement. Des recommandations sont également formulées aux fins d’une meilleure harmonisation des cibles de financement avec l’objectif de promotion de l’exercice des droits fondamentaux des femmes. Enfin, le document analyse les limites inhérentes à l’Agenda de 2030 et traite de la nécessité de passer rapidement à un modèle de développement axé sur la justice.

RESUMEN

La “visión sumamente ambiciosa y transformadora” plasmada en la Agenda 2030 para el Desarrollo Sostenible incluye un objetivo que consiste en alcanzar la igualdad de género para todas las mujeres y niñas y el compromiso renovado con las obligaciones de derechos humanos por parte de los Gobiernos. Al mismo tiempo, los Gobiernos han acordado una serie de estrategias para la financiación de la Agenda que, sin duda, socavan su capacidad de respetar los derechos humanos de las mujeres y promover un modelo de desarrollo justo y equitativo desde el punto de vista del género. Este documento evalúa de forma crítica esta posible contradicción centrándose en las estrategias de financiación clave de la liberalización del comercio y la inversión, la reestructuración de la deuda pública, las finanzas privadas internacionales y las asociaciones público-privadas, así como el papel que desempeña la colaboración mundial en el desarrollo. Se formulan recomendaciones para adaptar mejor las metas de financiación con el objetivo de respaldar el disfrute de los derechos humanos de las mujeres. Por último, el documento refleja las limitaciones intrínsecas de la Agenda 2030 y la necesidad de cambiar urgentemente hacia un modelo de desarrollo con justicia.

1.

INTRODUCTION

The adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development comes at a time when there is an urgent need to correct the world's economic, social and environmental trajectory. The last decade has been defined by crises, including in global finance, food and energy prices, and in connection to potentially irreversible, catastrophic climate change. By 2013, another two alarming trends demanded attention: sovereign debt crises unfolding in the Eurozone, and a level of global economic inequality without recent precedent. In 2015, the richest 1 per cent of the world's population collectively owned 50 per cent of the world's wealth.¹ While governments express scepticism that the \$3 to \$5 trillion United States dollars that will be required annually to finance the 2030 Agenda can be mobilized², between \$21 and \$32 trillion dollars sits undisturbed in offshore tax havens.³

At the root of all of these phenomena are economic policies that have failed most of the world's population and, most acutely, women and girls.⁴ This is not just because women are disproportionately vulnerable to the human rights impacts of food insecurity and land and natural resource degradation. It is because the prevailing economic model perpetuates, and often relies on, the systematic discrimination and disadvantage experienced by women in order to generate growth. As outlined in subsequent parts of this paper, companies participating in global value chains rely on the devaluation of women's work as a source of competitive advantage, and the rationalization of social safety nets and essential public services is made possible by the availability of women's unpaid labour to fill the gaps in care. Moreover, the very way in which economic activity is defined requires gross undervaluation of women's unpaid work, whether in the home or in family businesses.⁵ Work that is considered "women's work" is not given any economic value, even though without

it economies could not function.⁶ This underpins the ongoing failure to recognize the true value of paid care work or work that is feminized.

Challenging gender inequality therefore requires directly challenging economic policies, institutions and accounting that have entrenched social inequalities and often undermined the regulatory capacity of States. It also requires the adoption of an expansive notion of women's empowerment that goes far beyond the idea that women are economically empowered when, as proposed by the World Bank, they have the agency to compete in markets.⁷ If women's empowerment is to mean anything, it must extend to strengthening women's capacity to exercise real power and control over their own lives and the terms on which they engage with social and economic structures.⁸ This is not possible without substantive equality for women and the fulfilment of their human rights.

The objective of this paper is to consider whether the means of financing the Sustainable Development

1 Credit Suisse 2015.

2 UNCTAD 2015a.

3 Henry 2012.

4 Balakrishnan and Esquivel 2014; UN Women et al. 2014.

5 Waring 1988.

6 Elson 1993.

7 World Bank 2006.

8 Kabeer 2012.

Goals (SDGs) proposed in the 2030 Agenda and the Addis Ababa Action Agenda (Addis Ababa AA)⁹ are likely to support gender equality and the realization of the human rights of women and girls, both of which are clearly articulated as objectives of the SDGs.¹⁰ Indeed, Goal 5 of the SDGs, entitled “Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls”, includes targets on ending all forms of discrimination and violence against women and girls, ensuring women’s full and effective participation in political and economic life, and recognizing and valuing unpaid care and domestic work, among others. This paper focuses its critique on the key financing strategies of trade and investment liberalization, sovereign debt resolution, international private finance and public-private partnerships. Recommendations that are primarily targeted at an intergovernmental level are put forward at the end of each section to better align the proposed financing targets with the objective of supporting women’s human rights.

A consistent pattern that emerges in the analysis is that these financing strategies currently undermine mobilization of domestic resources, particularly in developing countries, and therefore the ability of governments to provide the services, infrastructure and public goods that are necessary for the enjoyment of women’s human rights. This is despite the fact that the 2030 Agenda and the Addis Ababa AA place considerably more emphasis on the role of domestic

resource mobilization as a source of financing for development than the outcomes of previous financing for development conferences or the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).¹⁰

The analysis also highlights additional, related contradictions, including the tension between the financing strategies under consideration and the targets in Goal 17 of the SDGs relating to the preservation of domestic policy space¹¹ and the need for policy coherence for sustainable development.¹² As the United Nations (UN) Secretary-General stated in his Synthesis Report on the Post-2015 Development Agenda, policy coherence for sustainable development requires coherence between the governance and outcomes of international trade, finance and investment architecture on the one hand, “and our norms and standards for labour, the environment, human rights, equality, and sustainability on the other”.¹³

The penultimate section of the paper considers the decline of the global partnership for development, which is framed as consistent with the overall erosion of the role of the State in financing and guiding sustainable development. It concludes by discussing the inherent limitations in the SDGs for achieving the “supremely ambitious and transformative” model of sustainable development that is needed to curtail accelerating inequalities, halt climate change, fulfil women’s human rights and deliver development justice.¹⁴

9 UN General Assembly 2015a, Addis Ababa Action Agenda 69/313. Although the integration of the Addis Ababa Action Agenda into the means of implementation of the 2030 Agenda was strongly critiqued (see, e.g., the collective civil society responses during the Financing for Development ne-

Development conferences is, however, broadly concerned with ensuring that financing for development advances a more fully inclusive and equitable global economic system.

10 Aside from the goal dedicated to gender equality, Goal 5, the 2030 Agenda mentions its ambition to fulfill human rights

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