

A TRANSFORMATIVE STAND-ALONE  
GOAL ON ACHIEVING GENDER  
EQUALITY, WOMEN'S RIGHTS AND  
WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT:  
IMPERATIVES AND KEY COMPONENTS





# A TRANSFORMATIVE STAND-ALONE GOAL ON ACHIEVING GENDER EQUALITY, WOMEN'S RIGHTS AND WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT: IMPERATIVES AND KEY COMPONENTS



**IN THE CONTEXT OF THE POST-2015  
DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORK AND  
SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS**

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

As the leading organization with a global mandate to promote gender equality, women's rights and women's empowerment,<sup>2</sup> the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women) calls for a specific commitment to **achieving gender equality, women's rights and women's empowerment** in the post-2015 development framework and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), as well as robust mainstreaming of gender considerations across all parts of the framework. To make a difference, the new framework must be transformative, by addressing the structural impediments to gender equality and the achievement of women's rights.

The need for such a framework is grounded in the commitment by UN Member States to gender equality and advancing women's rights. These commitments are enshrined in global treaties, most notably the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW); in policy commitments such as the Programme of Action agreed by 179 countries at the 1994 International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD), the Fourth World Conference on Women in 1995 and the resulting Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, and, more recently, the outcome of the 2012 United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20); in relevant outcomes of the General Assembly (GA), including the Millennium Declaration which led to the creation of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs); in the resolutions of the Security Council and the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC); and in the agreed conclusions of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW), including, most recently, on the elimination and prevention of all forms of violence against women and girls at CSW 57.<sup>3</sup>

Central to this universal normative framework is the recognition that the achievement of gender equality, women's rights and women's empowerment is relevant in every part of the world; it is everyone's responsibility; and it pertains to every policy area. The global priority given to gender equality and women's empowerment in fact led to the inclusion of a stand-alone goal on gender equality and women's empowerment in the MDGs and the mainstreaming

of gender considerations into other goals through some targets and indicators. The central importance of gender equality and women's empowerment in the MDGs has since been reaffirmed in several UN General Assembly resolutions<sup>4</sup> and, more recently, through the Rio+20 outcome document which states that: "We recognize that gender equality and women's empowerment are important for sustainable development and our common future. We reaffirm our commitments to ensure women's equal rights, access and opportunities for participation and leadership in the economy, society and political decision-making."<sup>5</sup>

Any new framework must build on these commitments and must have at its core a strong focus on achieving gender equality, women's rights and women's empowerment. It must build on, and expand, the priority given to promoting gender equality and women's empowerment in the MDGs, with a specific focus on realizing women's rights. At the same time, it must avoid the shortcomings of the MDG framework which, from a gender perspective, include the failure to address the structural causes of gender inequality (including addressing issues such as violence against women, unpaid care work, limited control over assets and property, and unequal participation in private and public decision-making), thus missing opportunities to fully address gender-based discrimination.

For gender relations to be transformed, the structures that underpin them have to change: women and girls should be able to lead lives that are free from

violence; they should see the expansion of the full range of human capabilities and have access to a wide range of resources on the same basis as men and boys; and they should have a real presence and voice in the full range of institutional fora (from private to public, from local to global) where decisions are made that shape their lives and the functioning of their families and societies. Without attention to these issues, the risk is that gender-based inequalities in power that block the realization of women's rights are rendered invisible: the structural causes of gender-based discrimination are left unchanged and transformation in gender relations, which is a necessary condition for gender equality, is not achieved.

Looking ahead to the post-2015 development framework and the SDGs, a comprehensive approach is needed. To be transformative, this approach should be universal; should address the structural foundations of gender-based inequality, including in the three dimensions of sustainable development – social, economic and environmental; and should ensure accountability through robust monitoring frameworks and timely and reliable statistics. Through a transformative stand-alone goal, the post-2015 development framework and the SDGs should capture and have targets on the core catalytic factors for achieving gender equality, women's rights and women's empowerment. In addition, gender-specific targets should be integrated into other goals in order to ensure meaningful achievement of those goals by addressing the specific areas of gender-based discrimination that limit prospects for eradicating poverty, creating sustainable consumption and production patterns, promoting transparent and accountable governance, ensuring access to high quality education and health care, and ensuring sustainable water and energy access while protecting the environment.

In order to address the structural causes of gender-based discrimination and to support true

transformation in gender relations, we propose an integrated approach that addresses three critical target areas of gender equality, women's rights and women's empowerment:

- Freedom from violence against women and girls. Concrete actions to eliminate the debilitating fear and/or experience of violence must be a centrepiece of any future framework.
- Gender equality in the distribution of capabilities – knowledge, good health, sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights of women and adolescent girls; and access to resources and opportunities, including land, decent work and equal pay to build women's economic and social security.
- Gender equality in decision-making power in public and private institutions, in national parliaments and local councils, the media and civil society, in the management and governance of firms, and in families and communities.

Under each target area, a set of indicators is proposed to monitor change. These are based on internationally agreed standards and have been chosen on the basis of their relevance, methodological soundness, measurability and understandability. In some cases, the indicators are based on existing data, but, in others, they will require new or improved data collection on neglected issues. The post-2015 development framework can be a driver of progress in the area of statistics.

As discussions continue about the shape of the post-2015 development framework, this paper offers clear direction, including on policies that are necessary to effect meaningful and lasting transformation in gender power relations, so that women's and girls' rights can be secured everywhere.





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