

Lost & Found in the Proposed Sustainable Development Goals – A view from WEDO

Introduction

Two months after the end of the Open Working Group (OWG) on Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and its adoption of the [proposed SDGs](#) by acclamation, the proposal has officially moved to the 69th General Assembly and will be a main basis for integrating the SDGs into the future development agenda. What does that mean for women's human rights, gender equality, sustainable development and environmental justice? WEDO offers a quick analysis of the SDGs from our unique perspective working on that **nexus** – looking at **climate, disasters, women's rights and urbanization**.

WEDO is pleased to see that three of its priority stand-alone goals have been included in the final report, recognizing the importance of specifically addressing climate change (Goal 13), sustainable cities and human settlements (Goal 11) and gender equality (Goal 5). Over the course of the OWG, WEDO and its many allies in the [Women's Major Group](#), as well as other major groups, networks and coalitions such as CAN and Communitas, advocated for specific text and concepts within each of those goal areas, and for the issues to be integrated throughout the suite of goals.

In many cases, the final goals and targets fell short of expectations, in particular in regard to ensuring human rights, means of implementation, accountability (especially for private sector), systemic change, and substantive integration of ideas in multiple goals. Some Member States advocated for a smaller number of goals to make the whole package more accessible, and in moving to shrink the number of goals would suggest to integrate issues throughout. Some Member States would also then say that because the SDGs are a package, then a concept need only be in one goal, so “delete, delete, delete” – leaving a noticeable hole in the substance. It is positive that all 17 goals remained in the final outcome. Further, the SDGs should be a holistic set only considered together in order to maximize impact and avoid the isolated silo approach that would take the “sustainable” out of the SDGs and look more like the MDGs. But, the likely truth is that many countries will focus in on 1 or 2 goals, while looking at the others, and thus integration of key ideas is essential to ensure the SDGs will not fail. Other aspects, such as the means of implementation, financing, indicators and also monitoring and accountability mechanisms remain to be defined, but they must be defined together with a set of far-reaching goals and targets.

The key concepts of each goal should be understandable and relevant to real people worldwide. But achieving sustainable development cannot be done on Twitter, so “tweetable” goals and targets are laughable. Communications around the agreed goals is what is important for buy-in by people on the ground, not the oversimplification of an immensely complex agenda before it is written and agreed.

The SDGs should own their role to inspire and encourage all levels of governments and all stakeholders to think of sustainable development holistically so that leadership is inclusive and diverse; processes and budgets are participatory and gender-responsive; norms of over-consumption, wealth accumulation and discrimination are changed; and economic models are rethought to ensure redistribution and well-being. That is what will support efforts to combat climate change, achieve women's human rights and promote the well-being of all people of all ages.

General Remarks

The idea of ‘sustainable development’ must not be lost as the SDGs are considered in the post-2015 (sustainable) development agenda to be negotiated in 2015. In leaving out the word ‘sustainable’, the General Assembly still fails to portray post-2015 as a **sustainable** development agenda; it comes across as a development agenda that includes a set of SDGs by indicating in the [GA Resolution](#) that the SDGs will be integrated “into the post-2015 development agenda”.

The Proposed SDGs generally, and Goal 8 specifically (economic growth and decent work), missed the opportunity to frame progress and efforts in terms of decent work, human rights and sustainable economic development. The current focus on sustained growth (with a mention of ‘sustainable growth’) obscures the importance that many developed countries do not need blanket economic growth, and instead need redistributive policies – via fiscal and monetary reform to promote greater equality in terms of income, opportunity, gender. Sustainable growth is contradictory to sustainable development in the current era where climate change, environmental degradation and social and income inequalities are the result of growth-focused efforts, and particularly the actions by the profit-oriented corporate sector.

The SDGs remained focused on GDP, missing the opportunity to promote development and use of alternative indicators that capture the social, economic and environmental impacts of consumption and production and that help to understand well-being. This can still be rectified in the post-2015 negotiations, especially as Member States will consider multiple inputs, including from the Intergovernmental Committee of Experts on Sustainable Development Financing, as well as inputs from civil society into the events of the President of the General Assembly.

Means of Implementation are one of the weakest points, as the structure for MoI was contentious throughout the process. Several colleagues have written pieces assessing the MoI and other aspects of the SDGs, including [Third World Network](#), [Campaign for People’s Goals](#) and the [Women’s Major Group](#).

Lost in the proposed goals: Human rights; women’s human rights; sexual rights and comprehensive sexuality education; rights to land unqualified by ‘national law’; inspirational aspirational targets; ambitious climate change action; strong means of implementation; a new economic and development paradigm; private sector accountability; reiteration of the role of the state (public sector finance and programs); focus on sustainable development over sustained economic growth

Found in the proposed goals: Nods to gender equality; a climate change goal; resilience; inclusive cities and settlements; mention of participatory planning in human settlements and participatory decision-making in peace and accountability; right to water in the chapeau; recognition and value of unpaid domestic and care work (falls short of redistribution); goal on inequality; some interlinkages of issues across the goals (glimmers of hope)

A more detailed view from the nexus (with commentary on specific targets):

Women’s rights and gender equality

The proposed goal 5 on gender equality and women’s empowerment primarily reflects the unfinished business of the Millennium Development Goals, but nonetheless, a standalone goal on gender equality is welcomed in the SDGs. As a women’s rights and feminist organization, and member of the Women’s Major Group, WEDO laments that the goal itself mentions women’s empowerment but not women’s human rights. Sexual rights and

comprehensive sexuality education are both missing from the document, denying persons from exercising their full rights but also robbing adolescents of the opportunity to make informed choices. Throughout the document, indications for financing to specific programs or for instituting new practices such as gender budgeting are missing, which can impede passing and implementing of specific legislation.

- Means of Implementation (MOI) Target 1.b references gender-sensitive policies. As the prevalence and effects of poverty strike women disproportionately, these policies must include economic policies that shift the current model to be able to meet the goal of ending poverty
- The poverty target 1.1 unfortunately neglects to mention the ways in which poverty uniquely affects women
- An explicit target on universal access to comprehensive sexuality education is missing, and as WMG colleagues have said, “sustainable development can only occur when girls and boys alike understand their bodies, know their rights, and have the necessary skills to negotiate important aspects of their lives”.
- Recognizing and valuing unpaid care and domestic work in Target 5.4 is an important step but misses its full potential by not aiming for redistribution.
- Sexual rights are missing and the reference to sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights is qualified by specific documents, missing the continuing advancement in this area critical to women’s exercise of rights
- Reforms to give women equal rights to economic resources also need to guarantee rights to land, rather than simply access to ownership and control over land; and the qualifier “in accordance with national laws” allows discriminatory laws to remain in place (Target 5.a)
- The WMG proposed MOI target 5.c bis, adapted from agreed [CSW 58 text](#), since there was no finance MOI in the drafts leading up to the final document: *“By 2030 secure significant financial public resources across all sectors to ensure all national and sectoral plans and policies to achieve gender equality, the empowerment of women and the realization and enjoyment of women’s and girls’ human rights are fully costed and adequately resourced, including through domestic resource mobilization, progressive taxation, gender-responsive budgeting, allocation and increased priority to gender equality in official development assistance”*. It was not taken on by Member States, but without financing for specific programs and organizations that foster women’s empowerment and assist with the full realization of women’s human rights, legislation and policy in this vein could go unimplemented.
- Target 6.2 highlights the unique needs of women and girls for improved sanitation, which has specific health and safety ramifications, thus linking several goal areas.
- Goal 7 on energy fails to integrate women and girls anywhere; localized energy that is safe, sustainable, renewable and socially and environmentally sound is an important development tool for communities and women should and do play a role in all levels of sound energy generation, distribution and use.
- Goal 9 on infrastructure and industrialization, along with many others, fails to mention women, girls, or gender entirely. Creating infrastructure that is gender-sensitive is important in achieving safe living conditions that respond to the specific housing, transportation and employment needs of women. Due to the long life of infrastructure and its role in shaping patterns of work, leisure, education, commerce, inclusive development of the infrastructure must be a focus.
- Women’s transportation needs are included in 11.2, which is fairly inclusive in recognizing some of the groups whose needs must be considered in transportation planning; however, without the reference to

improved mobility, it could leave marginalized groups with access to transportation but still too far/inconvenient/expensive in terms of accessing decent work and other opportunities.

- Goal 10 on inequalities misses stronger language that would empower women and create enabling conditions for development, participation, leadership, specifically on women's tenure/access/rights to land.
- Target 11.1 failed to mention land rights/land tenure in relation to housing, an omission that can further marginalize persons without tenure/rights to land, many of whom are women, people with disabilities, ethnic minorities, migrants, among others.
- Target 11.7 on safe, green, public spaces is in line with the proposals of WEDO and the WMG with its references to women, children, older persons and persons with disabilities; a focus on safe and green space also positively links to addressing climate change, promoting community/social cohesions, improving health and addressing issues of safety/GBV.
- None of the proposed targets mention budgets, particularly gender budgeting, to support inclusive planning and development. WEDO and the WMG had recommended an ambitious target under Goal 11 that could be applied elsewhere - to promote use of public funds, long-term thinking and inclusive development based on non-fossil fuel technology: "*devise **institutionalized** financing mechanisms that increase and ensure transparent and accountable investment and public financing, with specific provisions for integrating gender equality, to ensure long-term investments in equitable and sustainable services and low-carbon development for settlements*".
- The climate MOI target, 13.b, references the capacity building of women and other groups for effective climate change planning; however, the phrasing appears limited to LDCs.
- Gender-responsive and rights-based language is absent from Climate Goal 13 (better language exists from the [CSW58 paras 34 and tt](#), and elsewhere).
- Target 17.18 on disaggregated data will be crucial in assessing the impact of the SDGs in the years to come.
- And, Goals 12, 14, 15 and 16 fail to make any mention of gender or women, with goal 14 also very weak on community participation/leadership.

Climate Change

It was a grand struggle to include climate change as a stand-alone goal. While the goal is weak, it is there - showing that climate change is one of the foremost challenges of our time – of any time. Debate in the OWG raged about whether to tie the goal to the UNFCCC or not, since it is the legal body to negotiate action on climate change. From WEDO's perspective, the negotiation, legal framework and accountability is absolutely imperative. But, the UNFCCC is focused on reducing emissions and it cannot and will not be the place to make ambitious and necessary progress to incorporate a rights-based set of actions integrated into multiple policies to build resilience in all communities that will support mitigating and adapting to climate change. Additionally, the UNFCCC is currently looking at action beginning in 2020, and the SDGs will be able to influence action during the crucial 2015-2020 time period.

Climate is not mentioned in goal 3 on health, goal 4 on education, goal 5 on gender equality, goal 6 on water, goal 9 on sustainable infrastructure, goal 10 on inequalities, goal 12 on sustainable consumption and production, goal 16 on peaceful and inclusive societies, goal 17 on MOI and global partnerships—and it could have made a reasonable appearance in all of these places. The argument to mainstream climate change rather than have a standalone goal would have left the SDGs severely lacking adequate references to climate change.

- WEDO welcomes the mention of climate change in the chapeau but believes the chapeau should have stronger language on CC, that addresses the existential nature of the crisis, e.g. a recommendation of the WMG stated, “*affirm a commitment to urgent action to address the causes and consequences of the crisis, which is already an existential challenge to many communities, **and especially to women and girls in those communities***” (and this is due to marginalization, gender roles in many cases). The chapeau should also have addressed slow-onset climate change.
- Throughout the document, targets beg for qualifiers to indicate “environmentally and socially sound” technology/research/programs, or to drive gender-responsive policies and actions for institutional evolution (e.g. in 13.2) - both of these are elements that are crucial in engendering a rights-based and sustainable future.
- "urgent action" is strong in the title of Goal 13, but the reference to UNFCCC in the footnote undermines the SDGs as a standalone document.
- Both Goals 1 and 13 had openings to address leadership of women, the range of impacts (from slow-onset to extreme), as well as to mention women specifically, which could then impact how programs are designed and where the funding is directed – but failed to do so.
- However, Target 1.5 does make specific reference to challenges that climate change presents the poor and most vulnerable, and given that women are the majority of the world’s poor, this does indicate action to address women particularly. But actions must be done *with* people and communities, not *to* them.
- Goal 13 would have been enhanced by specifying that even within countries, not all people will suffer the same consequences of climate change; women and girls, those living in poverty or with disabilities, and older persons are all especially vulnerable to effects of climate change in many places due to gender roles and entrenched norms. WEDO regrets that the outcome document language of target 13.1 does not make specific reference to vulnerable groups at all, nor does it reference the leadership and knowledge of women.
- Importantly, Target 1.4 ensures access to "ownership and control over land" which is important in terms of recourse when disasters/climate change strike, or in terms of landgrabbing by corporations or government, as well as in terms of maintaining livelihoods; however the target does not specify rights to but rather rights to access and does not mention productive resources specifically.
- Goal 2 on ending hunger makes specific reference to the effects climate change on food systems as well as the special nutritional needs of women and adolescent girls. But, in 2.4 there is risk that the "resilient" practices will not be "agro-ecological" and will instead be based on GMOs or other untested technology; or require agreements with large corporations and agribusiness, denying women, Indigenous Peoples and communities rights to seeds and other inputs and resources.
- Target 2.3 misses *how* the productivity will be doubled, representing similar risks as 2.5, but it does mention women; while it references secure and equal *access* to land, other productive resources and inputs, knowledge, it misses secure *rights*.
- In the MoI 2.a, research/technology should be environmentally sound and socially sound to avoid exacerbating inequalities or contributing further to climate change.
- Education target 4.7 offers an interesting opportunity to link education, gender equality, and sustainability. It addresses sustainable development & sustainable lifestyles and human rights and gender equality, and while it doesn’t reference climate change (as WEDO had advocated), it could do so

if it is linked to 13.3. Further, sustainable development and living as topics are opportunities to educate all, especially future generations about personal responsibility for environment/climate change and also for civic responsibility and holding governments and corporations to account for actions.

- Goal 6 on water is a missed opportunity for explicit climate links and for the impacts of climate change on water access and water quality, but 6.4,5,6,a,b can all support readying for adaptation to climate change, and possibly mitigate loss and damage. Participation of local communities in water and sanitation management should also ensure equal participation of women within those communities.
- Goal 7 on energy lacks ambition, and multiple targets could have been strengthened; there is no mention of lowering GHG emissions--a missing link that would have been critical in a set of goals with strongly mainstreamed climate change issues.
- "Modern energy" in 7.1 is problematic and requires definition, besides being socially and environmentally sound; and increasing renewables (7.2) without dramatically reducing fossil fuel use or subsidies is not going to solve the crisis.
- Target 7.a should include explicit mention of public finance; as it is, the focus is on private, and thus profit-seeking, investments.
- Target 13.3 would have been improved by acknowledging the needs of women and other vulnerable groups in terms of capacity building, adaptation, and mitigation strategies.
- The additional MOI target, 13.b, especially its reference to the capacity building of women and other groups, is welcomed.
- Goal 11 incorporates climate change into 11.4 and 11.b, and while 11.2 on transport doesn't include "low-carbon", it is sustainable and refers to expanding public transport. Goal 11 could be strengthened by an additional MOI on how to finance resilient cities and ensure investment is accountable and transparent.
- Goal 12 is not specific to climate change in 12.4 but it references "environmentally sound"; and 12.c addresses fossil fuel subsidies and restructuring taxation, which has potential for transformative impacts, but depends on the indicators about *how* the restructure would happen (see 12c comments in Cities below).

Disaster Risk Reduction

DRR was integrated within the SDGs to an extent, and at the last moment, a reference to the "forthcoming Hyogo Framework" in 11.b (cities and settlements) ensured a direct link between the two processes. In many cases, DRR is integrated together with climate change.

- Target 1.5 addresses building resilience of the poor and those in vulnerable situations, which is important as they are the ones most affected and most likely to suffer long-term effects of disasters; and this is applicable to all types of settlements.
- Target 2.4 talks both about implementing "resilient agricultural practices" and about "strengthening capacity for adaptation to climate change, extreme weather...other disasters," both elements which are crucial to addressing hunger in a world affected by climate change (but which must also be environmentally and socially sound).

- Resilience and DRR are best integrated into Goal 11 on Cities and Settlements, explicitly and implicitly. Both MOI targets 11.b and 11.c mention resilience – 11.b in terms of resilience to disasters as a result of integrated policies and plans toward inclusion, resource efficiency, mitigation and adaptation to climate change and resilience to disasters – with an aim for “holistic disaster risk management at all levels”; and 11.c in terms of resilient buildings with local materials. These general statements will provide an opening for explicit links to the HFA2 currently being negotiated.
- Resilience and DRR are also explicitly and implicitly integrated in Goal 13 on climate change, although clearly in terms of disasters and hazards that are climate-induced or climate-exacerbated.
- It is important that 14.2 addresses strengthening resilience of marine and coastal ecosystems because environmental resilience is a key ingredient in community-wide resilience to disaster, as well as to mitigating effects of climate change.
- DRR and resilience are notably missing from Goal 6, where resilient water supplies are especially important given potential contamination; in Goal 7, where resilient energy supply and infrastructure would better withstand disturbances and support emergency medical needs; in Goal 15 addressing resilience would enhance the terrestrial ecosystems for their own sake, as well as for their human services.

Sustainable Cities and Human Settlements

Starting from a point where Member States showed little support for a stand-alone goal and cities and settlements, the goal itself is a real win. Overall the language of the goal is good, especially the reference to climate change related disasters and climate change adaptation policies in target 11.4 and 11.b. The goal could have been strengthened with an MOI target on the financing of sustainable cities and settlements, including gender budgeting.

- While Goal 5 is not specific to cities, the call for women’s full and effective participation at all levels, recognizes that women can and should be leaders in cities, in countries, and in global fora.
- Several goals and targets address “local” or “community” issues, such as 6.b regarding local water and sanitation management; “at all levels” in 14.3 and local processes in 15.9 and all levels for financing in 15.b, and finally with sustainable consumption and production (goal 12) on minimizing adverse impacts on the poor and affected local communities of inefficient fossil fuel subsidies in target 12.c.
- In many sets of comments during the OWG process, WEDO suggested the addition of the word “resilient” in the title of Goal 11, and this language in the title now especially strengthens the connection between sustainable cities and disaster risk reduction.
- In a truly ambitious and transformative agenda, housing should be accessible but also equitable, the concept of which was not included in target 11.1. The target should have also been strengthened insisting upon a gender-sensitive and participatory approach to housing development, as well as especially ensuring land rights.
- Target 2.3 fails to highlight the importance of local markets in small-scale food production.
- Specific language on the importance of local-level sustainable energy production in 7.b would have made this goal more transformative.
- A reference in 9.1 to accountability in infrastructure development would also have gone a long way towards protecting the rights or local communities and the most vulnerable.

- 13.2 missed an opportunity to include local policies, strategies, and planning in climate change adaptation and mitigation.
- In 15.4, there is a missed opportunity to take into account sustainable use practices of local communities of mountain ecosystems and the biodiversity therein.
- 15.c could have included free, prior and informed consent and the promotion of traditional knowledge of indigenous groups and local communities as a means to combat poaching and trafficking of protected species.
- WEDO welcomes the reference to women’s transportation needs in 11.2 but would have preferred that this target be more ambitious by prioritizing low-carbon transportation, as well as by ensuring participation in planning and development.
- The final wording of target 11.3 overlooks the importance of reducing urban sprawl and environmentally sound human settlement planning, which are crucial to have.
- Target 11.5 missed an opportunity to mainstream climate change by failing to mention climate change-induced disasters specifically, of which water-related disasters are only part.
- WEDO welcomes all of target 11.7, with reference to “safe, inclusive and accessible, green and public spaces” – as it integrates women’s needs, resilience to disaster and climate change and supports livable cities. By including “green” (advocated by WEDO and the WMG), it supports linkages with improved health, biodiversity, safety and addressing climate change and gender-based violence.
- The outcome document language of target 11.8 leaves room for approaches that are not necessarily environmentally conscious and socially just, both critical elements for an ambitious and transformative sustainable development agenda.
- WEDO welcomes the reference to climate change mitigation and adaptation in MOI target 11.b
- The final version of MOI Target 11.c leaves room for approaches not that are not necessarily environmentally conscious and socially just, thus presenting the same issues as those of target 11.8
- The WMG and WEDO proposed several additions to the text that would have strengthened Goal 11. The final text misses an opportunity to enhance the agency of local communities and increase sustainability and improve livelihoods at the same time, which the WMG recommended in the following alternate MOI target: *“support low-carbon urban development and sustainable infrastructure utilizing local content and materials, especially for least developed countries, including through increasing and ensuring transparent and accountable investment, public financing and technical assistance and through implementation of social and environmental safeguards”*.
- An additional MOI paragraph, 11.c bis, would have made the goal more ambitious by taking the first steps to address how sustainable cities and human settlements should be funded: *“devise institutionalized financing mechanisms that increase and ensure transparent and accountable investment and public financing, with specific provisions for integrating gender equality, to ensure long-term investments in equitable and sustainable services and low-carbon development for settlements”*.
- Goal 16 was particularly contentious during the final hours of OWG13 and unfortunately remains problematic in some areas. The fact that the final language reflects the need for local institutions to be accountable and effective, however, is essential to making cities and local governments actors in the post-2015 agenda

Annex: Proposed Sustainable Development Goals (as of 19 July 2014)

Goal 1. End poverty in all its forms everywhere

Goal 2. End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition, and promote sustainable agriculture

Goal 3. Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages

Goal 4. Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote life-long learning opportunities for all

Goal 5. Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls

Goal 6. Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all

Goal 7. Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable, and modern energy for all

Goal 8. Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all

Goal 9. Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization and foster innovation

Goal 10. Reduce inequality within and among countries

Goal 11. Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable

Goal 12. Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns

Goal 13. Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts*

*Acknowledging that the UNFCCC is the primary international, intergovernmental forum for negotiating the global response to climate change.

Goal 14. Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development

Goal 15. Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss

Goal 16. Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels

Goal 17. Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development