



**Women's Major Group Recommendations for Accountability, Monitoring, and Review of the
Post-2015 Agenda
May 18th, 2015**

Member States, UN agencies, and civil society organizations are channelling unprecedented resources and energy towards a new sustainable development agenda that aims to lift billions out of poverty and deprivation, while realizing their human rights, ensuring gender equality and women's empowerment, protecting our environment, and creating a more just and equitable world. Members of the Women's Major Group in particular have worked to ensure that women's human rights, gender equality, and women's empowerment are reflected in a standalone goal on gender equality and mainstreamed throughout the Agenda, including the remainder of the goals, targets and indicators; in the political declaration, and in the means of implementation framework.

As with any commitments they undertake, States are accountable to the people within their borders for implementing the Post-2015 Agenda, as are other development actors such as international financial institutions, the private sector, and civil society. All States also have Extraterritorial obligations, as enshrined in the Maastricht principles, to ensure that their economic and financial policies meet economic, social and cultural rights and do not hinder the right to development. Robust, transparent and participatory monitoring and accountability mechanisms can improve the **credibility, ownership and effectiveness** of the Post-2015 Agenda for people and for states, and make the entire process more transformative and responsive to peoples' needs and for the sustainability of our planet. As the Secretary-General has said, a new paradigm of accountability is in fact "the real test of people-centred, planet-sensitive development."¹

Although the SDGs will not be legally binding, robust monitoring and accountability should be an integral part of the Agenda, not an optional add-on. The lack of a systematic and well-defined accountability architecture has been commonly identified as a key reason for some major shortfalls in achieving the MDGs, including commitments under MDGs 3 (gender equality), 5 (maternal health), and 8 (the global partnership).² States should recognize that by participating in accountability mechanisms for the political commitments under the new goals—including by rigorously monitoring progress, correcting setbacks, hearing from civil society and constituencies affected and addressing their concerns—they are helping to ensure implementation at all levels.

¹ UN Secretary-General, *The Road to Dignity by 2030: Ending Poverty, Transforming All Lives and Protecting the Planet* (2015)

² CESR and OHCHR, *Who Will Be Accountable? Human Rights and the Post-2015 Development Agenda* (2013).

Accountability for the Post-2015 Agenda is a matter of universality, not conditionality. Unlike the MDGs, which applied primarily to developing States, the Post 2015 is a universal agenda and therefore provides an entry point for meaningful monitoring and accountability of domestic implementation by countries at every income and development levels and mutual accountability between states and with other development actors for global partnerships for development. **The principle of Common but Differentiated Responsibilities (CBDR) is essential for political legitimacy, as well for the balance, coherence and impact of the Financing for Development Agenda and for comprehensive realization of post-2015 development Agenda.**

The Women's Major Group firmly believes that States and the people who live within their borders will benefit from effective accountability. Indeed, as we have seen with other accountability structures such as in the human rights system, if this architecture is sufficiently well designed and inclusive, it will:

- **Promote acceptance and adoption** of the Post-2015 Agenda with national level authorities, people, and civil society organizations;
- **Facilitate dialogue**, the sharing of experiences, and requests for assistance between countries of all income levels, as well as other development actors; and
- **Increase implementation** of the Post-2015 Agenda, improving the lives of billions of people in all their diversities around the world.

This position paper will enumerate the key principles of accountability that the Women's Major Group would like to see reflected in an accountability structure for the Post-2015 Agenda. It will then go on to provide recommendations on that architecture, including regarding review mechanisms at the national, regional, and international levels; systems for data collection, and private sector accountability.

Key Principles of Accountability for the Post-2015 Agenda

The Women's Major Group considers that there are several key principles underlying accountability architecture for the Post-2015 Agenda. States must ensure that this accountability structure is:

- ***Universal:*** Accountability for the Post-2015 Agenda should be about ensuring universality, and grounded in the principle of Common but Differentiated Responsibilities (CBDR). All states—high-, middle-, and low-income—and other development actors should be held accountable to their commitments in the Post-2015 Agenda, and any review mechanisms established to monitor the implementation of the Post-2015 Agenda should ensure that all states participate.
- ***Open, democratic, transparent, and participatory:*** Those affected by development—in particular women of all ages, girls, and people from other marginalized groups and their representative organizations—should have the primary voice in holding states and other

actors accountable to development commitments. They should be involved in the design, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of all development programs that affect them. With this in mind, people and civil society organizations should play a key role in any review mechanisms created to monitor implementation of the Post-2015 Agenda, including at national, regional, and global levels. This includes ***well-resourced and equipped independent civil society accountability mechanisms***.

- ***Human rights-based:*** States must ensure that they are implementing their development commitments in line with their international, regional, and national human rights obligations under relevant laws and treaties. Information from reviews and expert assessments issued by human rights bodies—including the UN Human Rights Council and treaty monitoring body system—should guide state implementation of the Post-2015 Agenda.
- ***Data-driven, evidence-based, and verifiable:*** Monitoring and evaluation of implementation of the Post-2015 Agenda should be based on disaggregated data collected by the state and verified by independent experts, including civil society organizations.
- ***Regular, timely, and results-oriented:*** The process of holding states accountable to their development commitments should occur regularly and often enough to ensure adequate monitoring of implementation. Accountability processes should be focused on ensuring results—namely, the full implementation of the Post-2015 Agenda in line with human rights obligations.
- ***Promotes joint or mutual accountability:*** States and others involved in global development partnerships should be able to hold each other accountable for development commitments and respect Extra-territorial obligations for the enjoyment of social, economic and cultural rights. This mutual accountability should include non-state actors, particularly international financial institutions, who should be held accountable to the roles they play in implementing the agenda.

Architecture of Accountability for the Post-2015 Agenda

The accountability architecture for the Post-2015 Agenda must be multifaceted and reflect the key principles outlined above. Accountability for the Post-2015 Agenda requires that states develop and monitor **human rights-based indicators** and create a **strong means of implementation framework**, both of which are covered in other Women’s Major Group position papers. It also requires strong mechanism to review state implementation of the Post-2015 Agenda, including robust systems for collecting data to effectively monitor and evaluate progress. Finally, it requires that non-state actors—including the private sector, international financial institutions, UN agencies, and civil society—are also held accountable to their development commitments.

1. Review Mechanisms for the Post-2015 Agenda

All review mechanisms should be grounded in principles of respect for and protection and fulfilment of human rights and fundamental freedoms, including sexual and reproductive rights, in accordance with the principles of equality and equity, gender equality, **free, prior and informed consent**, transparency, accountability and rule of law. They should create linkages with existing human rights accountability mechanisms, and draw from the best practices used in those mechanisms—such as the Human Rights’ Council’s Universal Periodic Review (UPR)—to inform the HLPF’s own methods of work in this area

An effective set of review mechanisms for the Post-2015 Agenda will create spaces in which States and other actors responsible for the new commitments are answerable to the people and communities whose lives they affect. Review mechanisms will also generate evidence about successful strategies and policies, and call attention to emerging problems that require corrective action. The review architecture for the Post-2015 Agenda can foster dialogue between states and their populations, helping realize the “leave no one behind” principle by providing an effective platform for including and integrating the experiences of all those living in vulnerable situations and historically marginalized, including women and girls of all ages.

The Secretary-General’s Synthesis Report for the first time lays out a framework for review of the Post-2015 Agenda. It calls for three tiers of review—national, regional, and global—that integrate existing mechanisms, such as human rights treaty bodies, and also review of global partnerships, where both recipient and donor countries are monitored on their commitments.³

In line with and building on the recommendations in the Secretary-General’s Synthesis Report, the Women’s Major Group calls for the following structure and modalities of reviews for the Post-2015 Agenda:

a. National-level Monitoring and Review

National-level reviews should be the cornerstone of accountability for the Post-2015 Agenda. As the Secretary-General points out in the Synthesis Report, national-level reviews are the closest to the people affected by development programs, and thus States must place high priority on ensuring robust reviews within their borders.

In order to create robust reviews at the national level, states must first develop national-level targets and indicators, in line with global-level targets and indicators, tailored to their particular circumstances. In line with these national-level targets and indicators, states should create a **national action plan** for implementation of the Post-2015 Agenda, taking into account the state’s particular circumstances but also providing ambitious benchmarks that reflect the state’s human rights obligations. These national plans will have two distinct advantages. First, they will promote national-level support for the implementation of the Post-2015 Agenda by showing how these universal goals translate into national-level changes. Second, these action plans will provide further

³ UNSG Synthesis Report, para. 149.

mechanisms for civil society participation, transparency, and accountability. **As part of these national action plans, states should establish a new body or appoint an existing body or bodies that is dedicated to conduct monitoring and review of implementation of the Post-2015 Agenda.** To be an effective accountability mechanism it must be lead at the Head of State or senior Ministerial level and be multi-sectoral, drawing on the oversight powers of a range of public institutions, including parliament, parliamentary committees, national human rights institutions, ombudsmen, and others. It should also have the remit to coordinate with regional and global accountability bodies.

States should prepare reports at least once each year on their progress in implementing their national action plans and the Post-2015 Agenda overall. During the preparation of these annual reports, states should consult with and include the views of a wide range of civil society organizations involved in implementing or monitoring the Post-2015 Agenda, with a particular emphasis on women's rights organizations and those representing marginalized groups. These reports should then be delivered to the national-level monitoring and review mechanism(s).

The national-level mechanism(s) appointed or created to monitor and review the Post-2015 Agenda should be representative of the people and independent from state agencies that have the main task of implementing the Agenda. The national-level review mechanisms may vary from state to state, depending on national contexts. For instance, national parliaments, if adequately representative, could serve as the bodies for monitoring and review, in conjunction with expert review bodies that can provide additional feedback, including on the parliament's progress in implementing the Agenda.

Finally, in line with targets under proposed Goal 16 of the Open Working Group's outcome document, states should ensure that all individuals, including environmental and human rights defenders, have **access to strong justice systems in line with human rights standards**, including for remedy and redress for violations of their rights in the implementation of development programs. In cases where national mechanisms are exhausted, regional and international human rights mechanisms can play an important role in responding to violations and seeking justice for human rights defenders.

b. Regional-level Monitoring and Review

GA Resolution 67/290 calls for the establishment of regional preparatory meetings, in order to provide regional inputs to the work of the HLPF. The WMG recommends that these regional preparatory meetings have a critical role in the follow up and review architecture for the post-2015 development agenda and should be used to:

- Share experiences, best practices and lessons learned in implementation among countries with similar development backgrounds and histories;
- Identify regional-level trends and challenges, as well as strategies to address them, including through cross-border approaches;

- Facilitate south-south and triangular cooperation to accelerate implementation, as well as other means of implementation; and
- Identify regional-level priorities for the HLPF

Moving forward states may consider transforming these meetings into periodical reviews at the regional level. These regional reviews should also have robust mechanisms for the participation of civil society organizations, other constituencies and major groups, similar to those described for a global review mechanism below.

c. Global-level Monitoring and Review

A global-level review is a key site for reinforcing the accountability of national governments to their populations, as well as fostering mutual accountability between states for their respective responsibilities in meeting their global commitments and Extra-territorial obligations. It will allow states of all income levels and from all regions to talk to each other about implementation of the Post-2015 Agenda—including as part of global partnerships—as well as assess cross-border challenges that are caused by individual countries' policies or programs.

A global review should provide a sense of overall progress and common challenges in creating an international policy environment conducive to the fulfilment of the new goals highlight issues that require joint action, and share lessons learned across countries and regions. Furthermore, it should allow space for examining the effectiveness and impact of partnerships, particularly those involving the private sector and international financial institutions, whose role in the implementation of the new commitments must be subject to rigorous scrutiny to guard against potential adverse human rights impacts.

As stated in the General Assembly resolution 67/290, the High Level Political Forum (HLPF) will serve as the venue to “follow up and review progress in the implementation of sustainable development commitments.” A core mechanism for the HLPF’s work on follow-up and review should be **universal peer review** that builds on existing mechanisms such as the African Peer Review Mechanism and the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) at the Human Rights Council. This voluntary, state-led review could help to incentivize action to implement the post-2015 development agenda, at the national level, regional level and globally by increasing pressure on countries internally and among peers to show positive results.

The Women’s Major Group endorses the [proposals](#) of human rights organizations, led by the Center for Reproductive Rights, Amnesty International, the Center for Economic and Social Rights, and Human Rights Watch, that the universal peer review of the HLPF have the following characteristics:

- A culture of universal participation
- An interactive dialogue that reviews each State’s progress in implementing the Post-2015 Agenda
- Review of every State three times between 2016 and 2030

- Comprehensive reporting that feeds into reviews, including member state reports that are developed through national accountability processes; reports from major groups, recognized constituencies and rights holders; as well as *United Nations reports*, summarizing the assessments of UN agencies as well as the outcomes of other relevant reviews
- Sufficient support and meeting time for the HLPF, including sufficient meeting time to conduct 40-50 reviews each year and an adequately staffed, permanent secretariat; and
- Open, participatory, and transparent modalities and a meaningful role for the major groups and recognized constituencies, and rights holders
- A web of effective monitoring and accountability where the HLPF review should be complemented and informed by efforts at the national and regional levels, as well as global thematic review bodies that are mandated to look at overall progress and bottlenecks on specific goals

It is essential that the global review mechanism produce specific recommendations to support and accelerate progress as required.

d. Civil society engagement & modalities for participation

Civil society organisations must be involved at every stage of the accountability process, including as representatives on the accountability mechanism, key witnesses at any hearings or evidence-gathering sessions, and have the ability to publicly respond to reports or statements relating to the post-2015 framework. The meaningful participation of civil society will enable governments to better understand the issues being faced by particular populations or in key regions, and will contribute to the development of better policy and programming to support the government in achieving its targets.

At the global level, the WMG proposes that follow-up and review modalities for post-2015, and particularly the HLPF, ensure the enhanced participation of civil society through Major Groups and other organized civil society constituencies, rather than simply the more generic term “stakeholders,” which could encompass a wide range of non-governmental actors. Civil society should be held to high standards of accountability and transparency. Like the major groups, other civil society constituencies that participate in the HLPF should be self-organized around a common set of principles, with governance and decision-making measures that are public, transparent and understandable. Further, they should be coalitions or networks that represent broad and diverse civil society organizations from both developed and developing countries. Individual organizations, including membership organizations or international organizations, should not be considered constituencies for these purposes. Such requirements for official participation of other constituencies in the HLPF on the same basis as major groups will help to ensure equitable participation for all. It is through such groups of organized civil society that the voices of those people on the ground who are most affected by development policies can be raised and heard by decision-makers.

2. *Data Collection for the Post-2015 Agenda*

Accurate, timely, and disaggregated data collection and use is essential to assessing the implementation of the Post-2015 Agenda and the effectiveness of sustainable development programs. If comprehensive and in line with global goals and human rights obligations, data on the implementation of the Post-2015 Agenda can help assess what projects are succeeding, where there are still gaps in progress, and who is being left behind. **At a minimum, data should be disaggregated by age, sex, gender, geography, income level, race and ethnicity to ensure that sustainable development programs are inclusive of people in all their diversity.**

The Women's Major Group calls on states **to establish strong bodies to collect data on all targets and indicators as proposed in the SDGs.** Data should be quantitative and qualitative, assessing both development outcomes and processes by which those outcomes are achieved, in order to ensure conformance with human rights obligations. Furthermore, data must be ethically gathered, ensuring free prior and informed consent, with full confidentiality guarantees, in particular where data relates to stigmatized or marginalized groups. The collected data should then serve as the basis for national reports on progress in implementing the Post-2015 Agenda and be made available to all, providing a foundation for all levels of monitoring and review.

Acknowledging that this will be a significant challenge for many states, the Women's Major Group calls on development donors to **ensure that they invest in building the capacity of every state to collect and analyze data.**

3. *Private Sector Accountability for the Post-2015 Agenda*

In many countries, private sector actors—particularly transnational corporations and international financial institutions—have wielded disproportionate influence over development-related policies and practices. As such, the myriad green lights given so far to private sector financing and partnerships for sustainable development in the Post-2015 Agenda, without any specific language on evaluation, accountability, transparency and overall governance, is deeply worrying.⁴ Any partnerships for sustainable development **must respect Extra-territorial obligations**, which provide States with guidance for regulation of transnational corporations, other business enterprises and hold inter-governmental organizations accountable for their impact.

As the Post-2015 Human Rights Caucus has pointed out, “while the private sector can play an important role in contributing new resources to achieving sustainable development, **any development cooperation needs to ensure full and continued compliance with human rights standards.** Specific ex ante criteria, based on human rights standards, should be established to determine whether a specific private sector actor is fit for a partnership in pursuit of the Post-2015 goals. These would include whether the private actor has a history or current status of serious

⁴ See Women's Major Group, *Women's "8 Red Flags" following the conclusion of the Open Working Group on Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)* (21 July 2014).

allegations of abusing human rights or the environment, including in their cross-border activities; whether the private sector actor has previous involvement in acts of corruption with government officials; and whether the private actor is fully transparent in its financial reporting and fully respecting existing tax responsibilities in all countries within which it operates. International financial institutions, including those from the North and those emerging from the South, need to properly integrate human rights criteria into their safeguard policies and procedures, and be held accountable for violations of human rights resulting from any harmful policies and practices.”⁵ As a matter of urgency, states should create a binding corporate accountability mechanism to monitor the human rights impacts of private sector activity overall, and particularly in the context of the Post-2015 Agenda.

Conclusions

The Women’s Major Group places a high premium on ensuring accountability for the commitments made in the Post-2015 Agenda, to ensure full and human rights-based implementation of that Agenda. To summarize, a strong system of accountability should include:

- **Robust, transparent, and participatory** monitoring and review mechanisms at all levels.
- **Transparent accountability and reporting mechanisms** for all stakeholders involved in financing sustainable development, including UN agencies, international financial and trade institutions, implementing agencies, transnational corporations, and other relevant actors in the private sector and intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations
- **Human rights-based indicators to measure progress.**
- **A means of implementation framework** that reflects the various types of resources needed to achieve sustainable development
- **Strong systems to collect transparent, disaggregated, and ethically collected** data (quantitative and qualitative)
- **Private sector accountability**, including for transnational corporations, international financial institutions and multilateral development banks
- **Mechanisms to guarantee participation of civil society at all levels**, including the participation of Major Groups and other organized constituencies of civil society at the global levels.
- **Adequate funds for independent civil society participation** in the accountability and monitoring framework.
- **Stronger capacity building and more resources** for the monitoring and accountability of developed country policies that are key to the success of the new development agenda.
- **The need for international action to meet the SDGs**, strong global review mechanisms are necessary, which can be modelled on the UPRs for human rights. Since sustainable development is multi-sectoral, such reviews will require the United Nations to convene the highest level of political decision-making of all key global institutions.

⁵ Post-2015 Human Rights Caucus, *Letter to the President of the General Assembly Sam Kutesa* (20 September 2014).