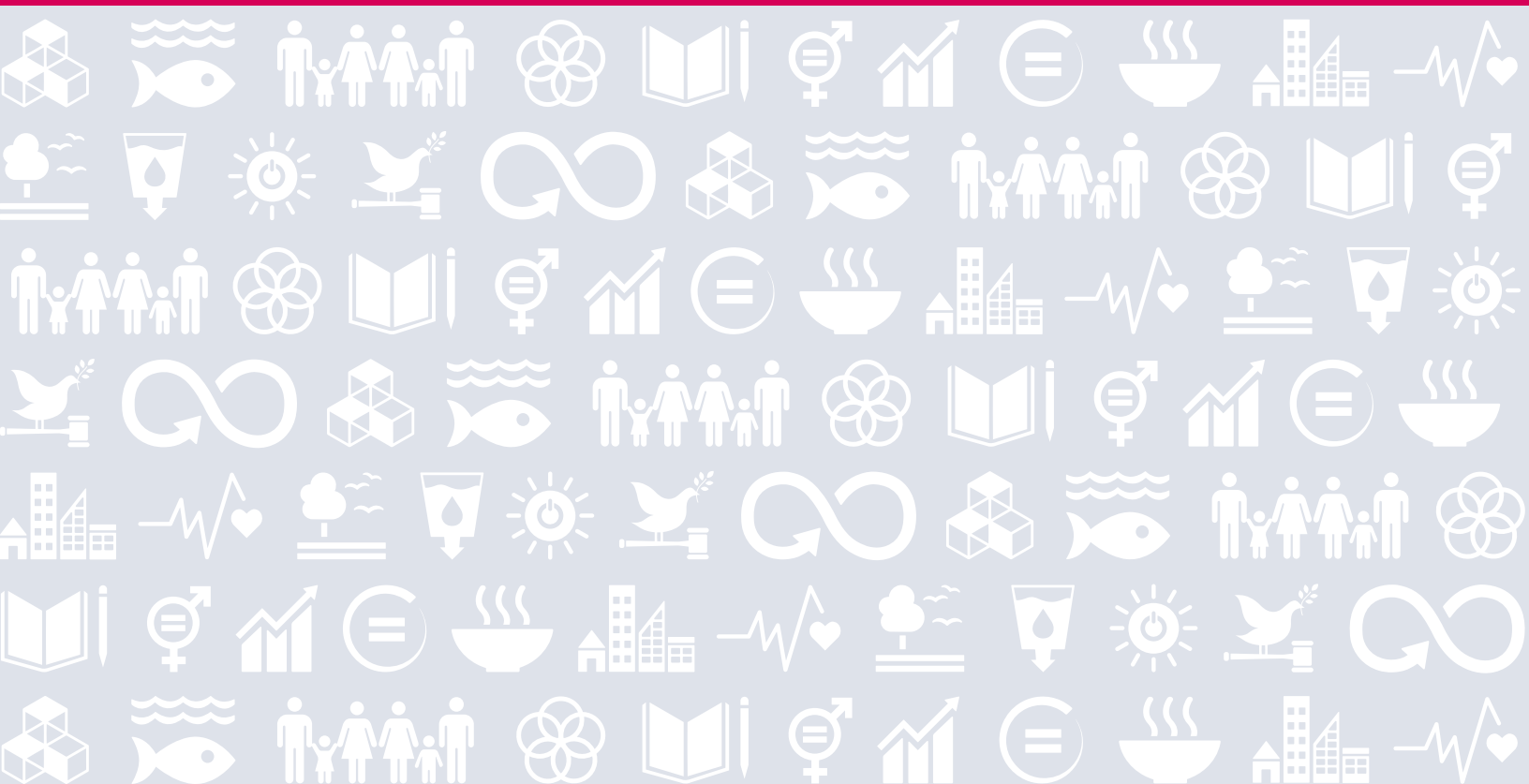




# POWER LESSONS

**Women's Advocacy  
and the 2030 Agenda**



### **The International Women's Health Coalition**

advances the sexual and reproductive health and rights of women and young people, particularly adolescent girls, in Africa, Asia, Latin America, and the Middle East. IWHC furthers this agenda by supporting and strengthening leaders and organizations working at the community, national, regional, and global levels, and by advocating for international and US policies, programs, and funding.

IWHC builds bridges between local realities and international policy by connecting women and young people in the Global South to key decision-makers. In doing so, IWHC brings local voices to global debates and in turn, makes global processes and policies more understandable and actionable at the local level.

**[www.IWHC.org](http://www.IWHC.org)**

### **Authors:**

Susan Y. Wood, Director of Program Learning and Evaluation

Katherine Austin-Evelyn, formerly Program Officer for Learning and Evaluation

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# Executive Summary

In September 2015, the 193 member states of the United Nations General Assembly adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Comprised of 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and 169 related targets, the “2030 Agenda” tackles a range of global challenges, including eradicating poverty, reducing inequalities, addressing climate change and promoting peace. If implemented successfully, this new agenda could transform the lives of women and girls all over the world.

In the three years leading up to the adoption of the 2030 Agenda, the Women's Major Group (WMG), comprised of more than 600 women's organizations and networks from around the world, undertook an intensive advocacy effort to put women's rights at the core of this new development agenda. The WMG wanted the SDGs to include a comprehensive gender equality goal, but also sought to ensure that women's rights would be featured across all the goals. They were successful on both fronts—achieving even more than most of them had expected at the outset. The 2030 Agenda includes a stand-alone gender equality goal with targets on critical issues affecting women's lives, such as gender based violence, sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights, harmful traditional practices, property and inheritance rights, and unpaid care work. In addition, gender equality is mainstreamed across all of the new development agenda. How was this groundbreaking result accomplished, and what can the women's movement and other actors learn from this experience?

To answer these questions, the International Women's Health Coalition (IWHC), in collaboration with other members of the WMG, carried out a retrospective evaluation of the role of the WMG in shaping the 2030 Agenda. It sought to examine the following questions: What did the women's movement achieve, which strategies were most successful, and what did they learn from the process? This report outlines the findings of the evaluation; in particular, it documents the advocacy strategies utilized by the WMG and distills lessons learned, in the hope that these can inform and strengthen future women's rights advocacy.

The evaluation found that the WMG achieved most of its objectives because the members recognized the need to agree on a common set of priorities for inclusion in the SDGs. They successfully organized to influence the intergovernmental negotiations process, beginning the process early—initially at the regional level—which helped the WMG to prioritize demands and develop unified positions. They built a transparent and inclusive approach to information sharing and decision-making with the various strands of the women's movement at local and global levels. They built a cross-movement, cross-sectoral alliance across a full range of issues affecting women. They identified gaps in their own expertise and

worked collectively to share knowledge and build capacity. They analyzed opportunities for advocacy, painstakingly mapped and identified allies in government and within UN agencies, and consistently interacted with delegates during months-long negotiations to influence language in UN documents. The WMG also utilized position papers, public events, visual messaging and social media to communicate their positions, often relying on creative approaches to sustain interest and energy. They recognized that robust participation of advocates, especially from the Global South, would be critical and raised funds for them to come to New York for the negotiations. They took advantage of existing features of the process, such as the “major group” system that had been created more than twenty years earlier to facilitate civil society participation, and a structure for governmental negotiations that made it easier for women’s organizations to engage with supportive governments and make headway with others. And they sought to link global to local advocacy by communicating through the diverse WMG membership to women activists around the world.

It is this last point that especially resonates as women’s rights advocates seek to advance implementation of the 2030 Agenda. This evaluation made clear that the SDGs will only be realized—and make a real difference for women and girls—if women’s organizations at national and local levels are able to hold their governments accountable. Those interviewed stressed the need to maintain a cross-sector approach, and they urged donors to take this into account. They saw a continuing need for global coordination and an ongoing role for the WMG: following what governments are doing at the global level and informing activists at the regional and national levels. Implementing the Agenda requires tracking meaningful change at the national level, as well as globally, and women’s rights advocates will need to participate in measuring progress. As they did throughout the negotiations process, women’s rights advocates can use existing and emerging mechanisms to hold governments accountable, including annual meetings of the UN High Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development, established to monitor progress on the SDGs, and other intergovernmental meetings and processes.

Effective advocacy by women’s rights organizations and movements was essential to achieving a broad and ambitious set of goals for sustainable development. Now it will require strong, supported and funded women’s rights organizations to hold governments accountable for their commitments to an Agenda with the potential to transform the lives of women and girls.

This evaluation made clear that the SDGs will only be realized—and make a real difference for women and girls—if women’s organizations at national and local levels are able to hold their governments accountable.



# SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

1 NO POVERTY



2 ZERO HUNGER



3 GOOD HEALTH AND WELL-BEING



4 QUALITY EDUCATION



5 GENDER EQUALITY



6 CLEAN WATER AND SANITATION



7 AFFORDABLE AND CLEAN ENERGY



8 DECENT WORK AND ECONOMIC GROWTH



9 INDUSTRY, INNOVATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE



10 REDUCED INEQUALITIES



11 SUSTAINABLE CITIES AND COMMUNITIES



12 RESPONSIBLE CONSUMPTION AND PRODUCTION



13 CLIMATE ACTION



14 LIFE BELOW WATER



15 LIFE ON LAND



16 PEACE, JUSTICE AND STRONG INSTITUTIONS



17 PARTNERSHIPS FOR THE GOALS



# 1. Introduction

In September 2015, world leaders convened at the United Nations to adopt the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The Agenda includes a set of 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and 169 related targets, which aim to tackle a range of global challenges, from eradicating poverty and reducing inequalities within and between countries, to protecting biodiversity and addressing climate change, from promoting peaceful societies to providing access to justice for all.

In the three years leading up to the adoption of the 2030 Agenda, the Women's Major Group (WMG) comprised of more than 600 women's organizations and networks from around the world, undertook an intensive advocacy effort to enshrine women's rights at the core of this new development agenda. The WMG wanted the SDGs to include a specific and comprehensive gender equality goal, but also sought to ensure that women's rights would be featured across all 17 goals. They were successful on both fronts—achieving even more than most of them had expected at the outset.

## How was this done, and what can the women's movement and other actors learn from this experience?

To answer this and related questions, the staff of the International Women's Health Coalition (IWHC), in collaboration with other members of the WMG, carried out a retrospective evaluation of the role of the WMG in shaping the 2030 Agenda. The evaluation sought to examine the following questions: What did the women's movement achieve, which strategies were most successful, and what did they learn from the process? IWHC conducted in-depth interviews and focus groups with key stakeholders, including WMG members, allied activists, and staff members of the UN, government missions and donor organizations. The evaluation took place from September 2015 to July 2016. (For more on the methods methodology, see Appendix 1.) This report outlines the findings of the evaluation. In particular, it documents the advocacy strategies utilized by the WMG and distills lessons learned in the hope that these can inform and strengthen future women's rights advocacy at the national, regional and global levels.

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## From MDGs to SDGs to the 2030 Agenda

The 2030 Agenda replaces the Millennium Declaration and the eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)—the blueprint that guided development priorities from 2000-2015.<sup>1</sup> In May 2012, in preparation for a new development agenda to succeed the MDGs, the Secretary General of the UN, Ban Ki-moon, released a report outlining guiding principles in which he emphasized gender equality as a central concern.

Whereas governments from the Global North were inclined to let the Secretary General of the UN take the lead on an updated framework for development, governments from the Global South were adamant that any new development agenda needed to be negotiated by all governments in an “inclusive and transparent intergovernmental process,” and that the venue for this should be the UN General Assembly, in which all governments participate. In June 2012, the world’s governments gathered in Rio de Janeiro to mark the twentieth anniversary of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (also known as the “Earth Summit”).<sup>2</sup> They saw the Rio+20 Conference as an opportunity to create a process for developing the new Sustainable Development Goals and negotiated a detailed agreement (“The Future We Want”) for doing so. Specifically, they established an “Open Working Group (OWG) on the SDGs” of the General Assembly, which started meeting in January 2013.

Meanwhile, the Secretary General tasked a High Level Panel comprised of 27 leaders from civil society, the private sector and government with providing advice on the new global development framework. The High Level Panel held global and regional consultations with diverse stakeholders and in May 2013 released a report titled “A New Global Partnership: Eradicate Poverty and Transform Economies through Sustainable Development.” The report called for a stand-alone goal on gender equality and a target to “ensure universal sexual and reproductive health and rights” under a proposed health goal. Despite this early signal of the importance of including gender equality and women’s rights, governments meeting in the General Assembly—who were determined to drive the process—were not yet persuaded to include gender equality as a central feature of the new agenda.

From January 2013 through July 2014, the OWG held 13 sessions at the UN in New York, eight of which focused on discussion of 26 thematic clusters, including poverty eradication, youth, education and culture, gender equality and human rights. The remaining five sessions identified and narrowed the priority issues in order to develop the proposed SDGs. In July 2014, following marathon negotiations, the OWG adopted a proposal for 17 goals and 169 targets. These included a standalone gender equality goal with nine targets—a truly comprehensive goal—as well as “gendered” targets across the other 16 goals. The gender goal and targets—and especially the targets of reproductive rights and sexual and reproductive health services, information and education—were hard fought but ultimately agreed by consensus.

The OWG submitted its report to the General Assembly in September 2014, which adopted it, making it the main basis for formulating the final 2030 Agenda. At this stage, a whole year of negotiation remained, focused primarily on a “Political Declaration” to frame the SDGs, the means of implementation of the new agenda, and mechanisms to review progress. During this time, there was a very real possibility of goals being stripped out or watered down.

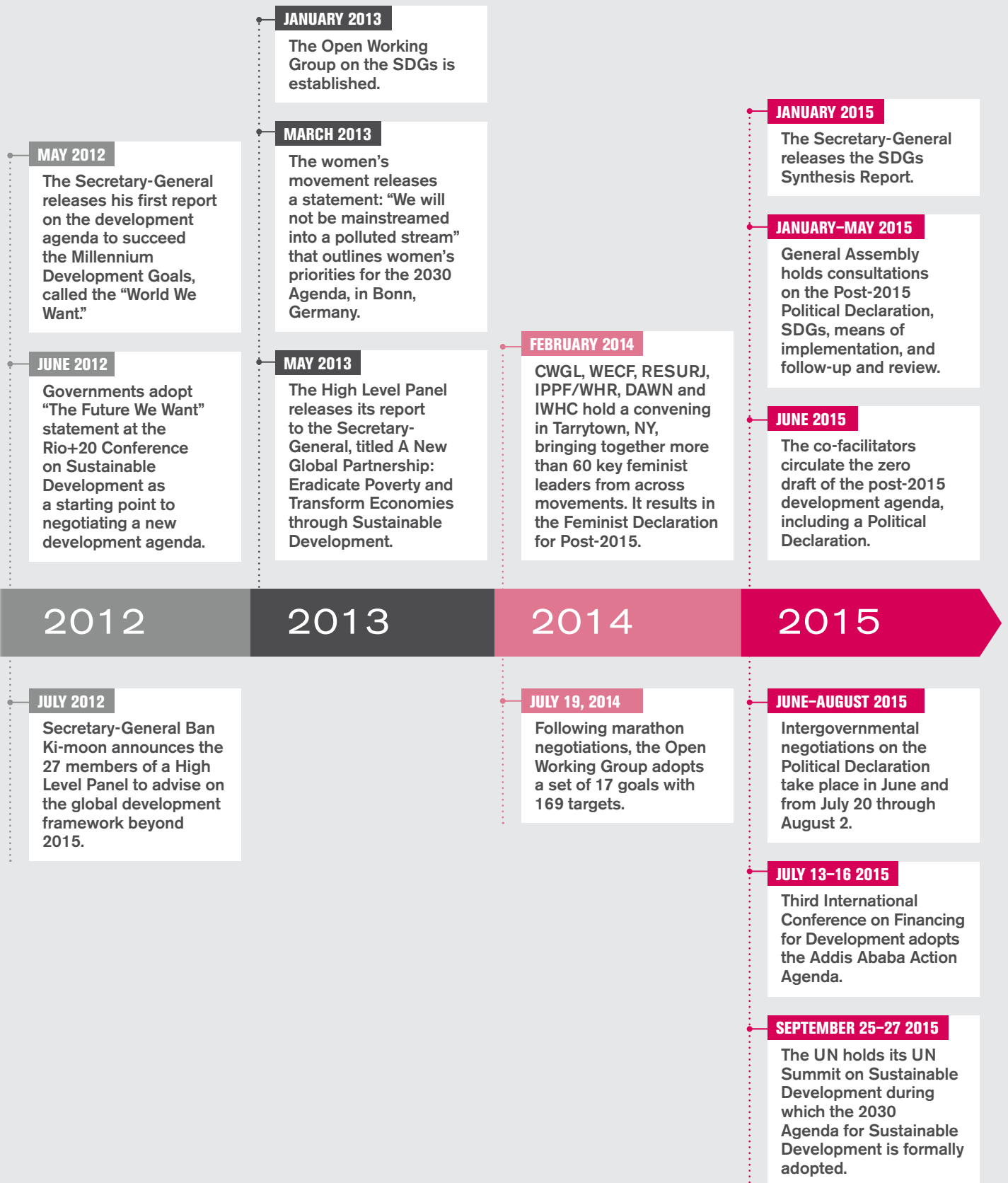
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1 See <http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/>

2 “The Open Working Group on Sustainable Development Goals” <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/owg.html>



## TIMELINE OF POST-2015 PROCESS



In January 2015, the Secretary General released his Sustainable Development Goals Synthesis Report, which provided a high level summary of the debates on the Post-2015 process at that stage.<sup>3</sup> The first draft of the Report failed to capture the commitments to reproductive rights and gender equality made by the OWG. Later drafts were improved.

From January to August, governments met monthly at the UN to negotiate what has come to be known as the 2030 Agenda. The final weeks of negotiation were intense, especially on issues of the right to development, “common but differentiated responsibilities,”<sup>4</sup> climate change and financing for and the means of implementation of the SDGs. Gender equality and sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights were also fiercely debated, but ultimately were affirmed.

On September 25, 2015, 193 governments met at the United Nations and formally adopted the 2030 Agenda.<sup>5</sup> The Major Groups, including the Women’s Major Group, could pause after more than three years of intensive organizing, to take stock of what had been gained and what could not be achieved.

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## The role of civil society and the Women’s Major Group

At the time governments adopted the Millennium Declaration in 2000, women’s rights organizations were deeply engaged in the five-year reviews of two paradigm shifting conferences of the 1990s: the 1994 International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) and the 1995 Fourth World Conference on Women (FWCW).<sup>6</sup> Women’s rights organizations fought intense battles in 1999 and 2000 to reaffirm and build on the commitments to women’s human rights contained in those documents. Consequently, women’s rights activists only realized in late summer 2000 that the draft Millennium Declaration ignored the principal agreements made at the ICPD—reducing those broad commitments to sexual and reproductive health and rights to a single goal to lower maternal mortality. Similarly, the extensive gender equality agenda elaborated at the FWCW in Beijing was expressed in one sentence committing to promote gender equality and women’s empowerment, without a word about women’s human rights. Unable to change this, they were also unable to affect the subsequent drafting of the MDGs, despite a massive letter writing campaign to the UN Secretary-General and heads of UN agencies in 2001. UN technocrats proceeded to develop the MDGs behind closed doors, with no input from civil society and limited engagement with governments from the Global South.

The narrowly defined MDGs contributed to redirecting investments away from women’s rights and toward interventions that would show progress on the MDGs alone, e.g. reducing maternal mortality ratios or achieving gender parity in education.<sup>7</sup> This not only undermined achievement of the goals overall, but also drove a wedge between development and human rights, which women’s rights groups had fought hard to link.

Women’s rights organizations learned a hard lesson from the MDGs and vowed never to be left out again. Working through diverse networks and coalitions and commencing well in advance of the Rio+20

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3 “The Road to Dignity by 2030: Ending Poverty, Transforming All Lives and Protecting the Planet Synthesis Report of the Secretary-General On the Post-2015 Agenda.” December 4, 2014. [http://www.un.org/disabilities/documents/reports/SG\\_Synthesis\\_Report\\_Road\\_to\\_Dignity\\_by\\_2030.pdf](http://www.un.org/disabilities/documents/reports/SG_Synthesis_Report_Road_to_Dignity_by_2030.pdf)

4 This term dates from the 1992 Earth Summit and refers to the common responsibility of states to protect the environment, while also recognizing that some states have contributed more to environmental damage and have differing abilities to prevent and reduce it.

5 Transforming our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/post2015/transformingourworld/publication>

6 The International Conference on Population and Development was held in 1994 in Cairo and the Fourth World Conference on Women was held in 1995 in Beijing. <http://www.unfpa.org/publications/international-conference-population-and-development-programme-action>

7 “The Power of Numbers: A Critical Review of MDG Targets for Human Development and Human rights Overview.” <http://www.cesr.org/downloads/Overview.power.of.numbers.pdf?preview=1>

Conference, they developed their priorities for sustainable development and the Post-2015 agenda. Much of this work was done at the regional level. Some of it coincided with parallel processes leading up to the twenty-year reviews of the ICPD and the FWCW. Several coalitions formed with the purpose of influencing the Post-2015 agenda broadly, including the Post-2015 Women's Coalition,<sup>8</sup> or with a specific issue focus, such as environmental justice, youth perspectives, health or human rights. Not all of these took up gender equality as priority.

Once it became clear that the Rio+20 process would be formative for setting the Post-2015 development agenda, the "Major Groups," and specifically the "Women's Major Group" (WMG) (see Box 1), became the obvious vehicle for women's rights organizations to play a central role in the process. The Major Groups go back to the 1992

Earth Summit in Rio, when they represented key constituencies.<sup>9</sup> In the process of developing the SDGs, civil society organizations utilized existing Major Groups to gain access to the negotiations and influence the outcomes, a level of engagement by civil society that was unprecedented for a UN headquarters-based intergovernmental negotiation process.

The WMG joined other human rights and social justice movements to fight for an agenda that would not only foster more equitable distribution of resources, wealth, and power, but also advance gender equality and women's rights. The WMG also supported the movement to halt environmental degradation and climate change.<sup>10</sup> By September 2015, when governments formally adopted the 2030 Agenda, the WMG could celebrate that much, although not all, had been won. An assessment of how the WMG and its allies influenced this far-reaching agenda and the most significant lessons for future advocacy is the subject of this report.

### BOX 1: THE WOMEN'S MAJOR GROUP (WMG)

The WMG is made up of more than 600 women's organizations and networks from around the world. As a UN facilitated group, it is meant to be inclusive of all who choose to participate. The WMG is led by "Organizing Partners" (OPs) that rotate periodically. In 2011 there were two OPs: Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era (DAWN) and Women in Europe for a Common Future (WECF), with support from other organizations, such as the Women's Environment & Development Organization (WEDO) and the Global Forest Coalition. From Rio+20 onwards the WMG became intensively engaged in the Post-2015 process. During this time, the OPs succeeded in broadening the membership of the WMG to include more diverse sectors and interests. In 2014, the members of the WMG decided to make the leadership more inclusive by establishing regional OPs. The WMG OPs for the rest of the Post-2015 process consisted of five regionally based NGOs and three international NGOs: Women Environmental Programme (WEP), Nigeria; Global Forest Coalition (GFC), Netherlands and Paraguay; Forum of Women's NGOs of Kyrgyzstan; Equidad de Género, Mexico; Asia Pacific Forum on Women, Law & Development (APWLD), Thailand; Women's Environment & Development Organization (WEDO), USA; Women in Europe for a Common Future (WECF), Netherlands; International Women's Health Coalition (IWHC), USA.

8 The Post-2015 Women's Coalition is an international network of feminist, women's rights, women's development, grassroots, peace and social justice organizations. It was initiated by a group of organizations connected previously through the Gender Equality Architecture Reform (GEAR) Campaign and other international advocacy efforts focused on the realization of women's rights and gender equality.

9 The nine Major Groups, which have functioned since the first Rio conference, are: Women, Children and Youth, Indigenous People, NGOs, Local Authorities, Workers and Trade Unions, Business and Industry, Scientific and Technological Community and Farmers. Add Reference.

10 "Global Development Plan Signals a Turning Point for Women and Girls." September 8, 2015. <https://iwhc.org/2015/09/global-development-plan-signals-a-turning-point-for-women-and-girls/>





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## 2. The Advocacy Outcomes: What Did the Women's Movement Want and What Did It Get?

Women's rights organizations, primarily operating with and through the WMG, made a stand-alone goal on gender equality and a gender mainstreamed agenda possible. They achieved a stand-alone goal that is comprehensive and addresses most of the priority issues identified by the women's movement. Moreover, the successful mainstreaming of gender means that most of the 17 goals include targets on issues that are critical to the lives of women and girls. Not all of the WMG's priorities were addressed, however. Below is a closer look at how women's movement advocacy is reflected in Agenda 2030.

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### **What did women want: A comprehensive stand-alone gender equality goal and gender mainstreamed agenda**

Women's rights activists knew from the start that they wanted the new development agenda to go beyond the MDGs. One WMG member said:

*The strategy in order to make sure that gender equality was pervasive throughout the new agenda was always two-pronged. We always wanted to look at it holistically so that gender was integrated throughout the entire agenda, but it was really important still to have a strong stand-alone gender equality goal.*

They wanted a “stand-alone” gender equality goal, but had learned from the MDGs that having a goal would not be enough. It would have to be comprehensive. Many activists felt that MDG 3, with a target narrowly focused on eliminating gender disparity in education, was inadequate. So they fought hard to make sure that the new gender equality goal would include targets on critical issues affecting women’s lives, such as gender based violence, sexual and reproductive health and rights, harmful traditional practices, property and inheritance rights, and unpaid care work.

Women also knew that a stand-alone gender goal, even a comprehensive one, would not be sufficient. They recognized that the other goals of the agenda would also affect the lives of women and girls and wanted to see a gender lens applied to the entire agenda, including such issues as climate change, peace and security, and of course education and health. So they organized to identify and articulate what they wanted to see in the SDGs and, later, in the Political Declaration of the 2030 Agenda.

Women had been meeting at regional levels, as well as in the processes leading up the 20th anniversaries of the conferences in Rio, Cairo and Beijing, to discuss priorities and strategies for the Post-2015 agenda. Then in March 2013, DAWN on behalf of the WMG<sup>11</sup>, co-convened a conference in Bonn,<sup>12</sup> together with the International Civil Society Centre, Beyond 2015, CIVICUS, Social Watch and other partners, at which women’s organizations from all over the globe issued the statement, “We Will Not Be Mainstreamed Into a Polluted Stream: Feminist Visions of Structural Transformations for Achieving Women’s Human Rights and Gender Equality in the 2015 Development Agenda.”<sup>13</sup> It called for “deep and structural changes to existing global systems of power, decision-making and resource sharing. This includes enacting policies that recognize and redistribute the unequal and unfair burdens of women and girls in sustaining societal well-being and economies, intensified in times of economic and ecological crises.” (See Box 2 for a summary of the key points in the statement.) Many interviewees point to this document as the baseline agenda of what women wanted to see in the next development agenda.

Also in 2013, WMG members drafted a 140-page document, “Gender Equality, Women’s Rights and Women’s Priorities: Recommendations for the Proposed Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the Post-2015 Development Agenda,” which contained substantive information and analysis of climate justice, SRHR, and economic issues.<sup>14</sup> They produced summary versions as well, determined to get this analysis to diverse stakeholders through multiple channels. This document served as a solid resource for advocates on some of the hottest issues over the final two years of negotiations.

They wanted a “stand-alone” gender equality goal, but had learned from the MDGs that having a goal would not be enough. It would have to be comprehensive.

11 See Box 1.

12 “Advancing the Post-2015 Sustainable Development Agenda.” March 20-22, 2013. <https://icscentre.org/media/conferences/post-2015>

13 “We Will Not Be Mainstreamed into a Polluted Stream: Feminist Statement on the 2015 Development Agenda.” March 22, 2013. <http://www.dawnnet.org/feminist-resources/content/statement-endorsement-we-will-not-be-mainstreamed-polluted-stream-feminist-statement-2015-de>

14 “Gender Equality, Women’s Rights and Women’s Priorities: Recommendations for the Proposed Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the Post-2015 Development Agenda.” September 2013. [http://www.wecf.eu/download/2014/September/FinalReportfulldocument2013-09-16\\_With\\_Covercopy.pdf](http://www.wecf.eu/download/2014/September/FinalReportfulldocument2013-09-16_With_Covercopy.pdf)





## BOX 2: WMG PRIORITIES FOR THE POST-2015 DEVELOPMENT AGENDA

- Prioritize gender equality and women's human rights
- Ensure meaningful participation of social movements in development policies and programs
- Use human rights architecture as its basis
- Reform monetary, financial and trade rules in line with human rights obligations
- Prioritize public financing and promote democratic financing mechanisms, including long-term support for civil society organizations
- Recognize that there are ecological limits to the 'growth' paradigm
- Phase out and impose moratoria on harmful economic activities that affect the health of people and the environment, particularly in the areas of mining, nuclear energy, and chemicals
- Respect and build upon principle of equitable sharing of atmospheric space
- Promote safe and sustainable energy solutions
- Reverse the environmental and social impacts caused by food insecurity, soil degradation and land grabbing on affected communities
- Prevent the unsustainable technological and market based fixes that attempt the large-scale manipulation of the earth's climate
- Re-orient national agriculture toward local women-led and small-holder agro-ecology practices
- Affirm the human rights of women, girls and people with diverse sexual orientations and gender identities to bodily integrity and eliminate all forms of discrimination and violence
- Guarantee women's equitable access to and control over resources that promote fair asset redistribution regarding the use of land, ocean, credits, technology, intellectual and cultural property
- Guarantee sexual and reproductive rights and universal access to sexual and reproductive health services
- Promote equitable distribution of care work between men and women, recognize that care work is linked with a productive economy, guarantee universal access to public care services, and regulate to ensure decent working conditions and income for care providers
- Ensure equitable and universal access to formal and popular education that includes comprehensive sexuality education, gender equality, human rights and environmental sustainability
- Ensure universal and affordable access to social protection and public services including housing, education, water and sanitation, health care and unemployment benefits

Adapted from "We Will Not Be Mainstreamed into a Polluted Stream: Feminist Visions of Structural Transformations for Achieving Women's Human Rights and Gender Equality in the 2015 Development Agenda." <http://www.dawnnet.org/feminist-resources/content/statement-endorsement-we-will-not-be-mainstreamed-polluted-stream-feminist-statement-2015-de> at the March 2013 Bonn Conference ("Advancing the Post-2015 Sustainable Development Agenda." March 20-22, 2013. <https://icscentre.org/media/conferences/post-2015>)

## What did women get: WMG advocacy reflected in the 2030 Agenda

Looking now at the 2030 Agenda, how many of the WMG priorities were addressed? The SDGs include a stand-alone goal on gender equality, Goal 5—a major victory. It is progressive and comprehensive, going well beyond MDG 3.

But the stand-alone goal was not all. From the start, women's rights groups focused on the bigger picture of gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls being vital to the entire agenda. And they succeeded. As one WMG member said:

*Because the process was so long, it's easy to forget how challenging it was in the beginning to really get across the importance of a stand-alone gender goal and gender integrated throughout, and that's the huge win. That's basically what we achieved.*

One UN Ambassador noted,

*We have this Goal Five, but we have an overall political priority set up on equality, and reducing inequality, respecting human rights, and that goes for women's, girl's rights as well, their human rights as well.*

The WMG and its allies fought hard for the inclusion of some very contentious issues, including sexual and reproductive health and rights. The final Agenda contains a specific target on sexual and reproductive health under the health goal (Target 3.7) and on sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights under the gender goal (Target 5.6). In the words of a UN Ambassador,

*One of the [most contentious] was some formulation about sexual and reproductive rights and health, I think it's what we call target 5.6 now, and there was a big push-back from some member states with very conservative views.*

There was wide agreement on how difficult this was. One WMG member commented:

*Obviously, anytime that we were speaking about sexual reproductive health and rights was difficult. And that's part ...of crises that we're seeing on human rights, ...[on] women's bodily autonomy and integrity, and our ability to put that into a process this large was always going to be difficult. And we came in informed on that, we came in prepared, but it was difficult along the way. I think that we managed to get some good language in. Was it anywhere near where we need to be? No, but will we keep working for that? Of course.*

Sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights were not the only critical issues perceived as contentious by some governments that the WMG fought hard to see included. Goal 5 and the broader agenda address many of the issues that women had prioritized three years earlier: recognition of the burden of women's unpaid care work, women's right to own property and to inherit, women's right to be free from violence, and the imperative to end harmful practices, including child, forced and early marriage.



But the WMG did not stop there, going beyond those issues often seen as directly pertaining to women's rights and well-being. Even while they fought to secure the comprehensive gender equality goal and specific gender targets, they pushed hard on financing, climate justice, inequalities, peace and security, and other issues that were still pending. Some Member States assumed that the WMG would be satisfied once a clear focus on gender equality was secured in the Agenda, and were perplexed as to why they "were continuously unhappy." Activists spoke about how hard they had to work to challenge those expectations and to make clear that the entire Agenda was of concern to women.

In the end, they saw many of these other priorities reflected in the 2030 Agenda. One WMG member commented on these wins:

*Climate change was incredibly difficult, and for someone like me from a small island state, it's ridiculous.... So we were trying to make these arguments very early about something that we know is core to sustainable development. So climate change, obviously, it was a hard fought goal. It got in, so we have goal 13 now; that's incredibly important.*

*The oceans goal was very tough to get in. Goal 16 was very tough in terms of peace and security, obviously because it's one of those things that governments find very, very tough to speak about.*

Another victory was Goal 10, on inequalities. As one activist said:

*And one of our wins that we see is that, as we saw the drafts going along...the language of redistribution started to crop in. I remember when I first started this work, I was told redistribution isn't a word we could even use. Yet, now, it's actually in the narrative of the new agenda 2030. The last goal was goal 10, which is the inequalities goal.*

Box 3 presents some of the key targets across several of the SDGs that reflect women's priorities.<sup>15</sup>

But the WMG did not stop there, going beyond those issues often seen as directly pertaining to women's rights and well-being. Even while they fought to secure the comprehensive gender equality goal and specific gender targets, they pushed hard on financing, climate justice, inequalities, peace and security, and other issues that were still pending.

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<sup>15</sup> "Agenda 2030: A Feminist Analysis of the Post-2015 Development Agenda." September 30, 2015. <http://www.resurj.org/news/agenda-2030-feminist-analysis-post-2015-development-agenda>

### BOX 3: WOMEN'S PRIORITIES REFLECTED IN THE SDGS

The WMG and other stakeholders were able to secure a stand-alone goal on gender equality (Goal 5), with commitments to empower all women and girls in this goal and across the SDGs. Gender equality objectives are contained in targets within goals on Ending Poverty (Goal 1); Food Security (Goal 2); Health and Well-being (Goal 3); Education (Goal 4); Water and Sanitation (Goal 6); Employment and Decent Work (Goal 8); Reducing Inequalities (Goal 10); Peace and Justice (Goal 16), and Means of Implementation (Goal 17). Specific targets that will play a critical role in advancing gender equality include the following:

- End all forms of discrimination against women and girls, eliminate discriminatory laws, policies and practices, and adopt policies and legislation to promote gender equality (Targets 5.1, 5.c and 10.3)
- Double the agricultural productivity and the incomes of small-scale food producers, particularly women, indigenous peoples, family farmers, pastoralists and fishers, including through secure and equal access to land, other productive resources and inputs, knowledge of financial services, markets and opportunities for value addition and non-farm employment (Target 2.3)
- Eliminate all forms of violence against women and girls (Target 5.2)
- Recognize and value unpaid care work performed by women and provide public services and social protection to reduce their burden of work (5.4)
- Ensure that education promotes gender equality, that all girls complete primary and secondary education, that women have equal access to tertiary and vocational education and eliminate gender disparities in education (Targets 4.7, 4.1, 4.3 and 4.5)
- Protect women's rights to economic resources, including ownership and control over land and other forms of property and inheritance (Targets 1.4 and 5.a)
- Ensure universal access to sexual and reproductive health care services, including for family planning, information and education, and the integration of reproductive health into national strategies and programs (Target 3.7)
- Reduce maternal mortality (Target 3.1)
- End HIV/AIDS (Target 3.3)
- Eliminate all harmful practices, such as child, early and forced marriage and female genital mutilation (Target 5.3)
- Ensure reproductive rights (Target 5.6)
- Achieve full and productive employment and decent work for all women and men, including for young people and persons with disabilities, and equal pay for work of equal value (Target 8.5)
- Protect labor rights and promote safe and secure working environments of all workers, including migrant women (Target 8.8)
- Promote the rule of law at national and international levels, and ensure equal access to justice for all (Target 16.3)
- Provide legal identity for all including birth registration (Target 16.9)
- Promote and enforce non-discriminatory laws and policies for sustainable development (16.b)
- Enhance capacity-building support to developing countries to increase the availability of high quality, timely and reliable data disaggregated by income, gender, age, race, ethnicity, migratory status, disability, and geographical location (17.18)

## Where were the shortfalls?

While the 2030 Agenda reflects many of the priorities of the women's movement, not all of the issues important to women were included. And on some of the most important issues, language was watered down, as discussed below.

One of the areas of disappointment was that the language on human rights was not as strong as had been hoped by the WMG and their allies in the human rights movement. One government interviewee remarked:

*And we ended up with this kind of weird dynamic I think, in the last month especially, where we had a very good paragraph on gender and that was broadly accepted. But we were then having to fight about basic rights language. So gender was okay and the importance of the gender dimension to development was acknowledged, but we were getting the usual arguments about universally recognized human rights and people pushing back against an open list for discrimination grounds and things like that, and we ended up having a very difficult fight. It was a weird dynamic—that gender was ahead of the basic human rights conversation.*

Human rights organizations engaged in the SDG process, establishing their own Human Rights Caucus. They also actively participated in the WMG and other major groups. Nevertheless, the opposition to making human rights a key pillar within the 2030 Agenda was strong. Many governments opposed the inclusion of human rights, not wanting the 2030 Agenda to reinforce international human rights instruments that are binding. They rejected the argument that human rights are universal and indivisible, applying to all people equally. Some governments' antagonism to human rights stemmed from their hostility to recognizing the rights of LGBT<sup>16</sup> people. On sexual rights, little progress was made in the 2030 Agenda, which does affirm the ICPD and FWCW agreements of the 1990s, but not more. One WMG member commented:

*For someone who works on sexual rights and on sexual orientation and gender identity and expression, we lost. And that's an ongoing challenge, and it's something that we will continue to do in our work.*

Indeed, one of the government interviewees said that opposition to sexual rights, and specifically LGBT rights, may have been why the human rights discussion was so difficult, saying:

*The rampant homophobia and anti-LGBT sentiments among many member states—it is toxic. It affects even 15-year development plans... because I think we were able to make an argument when we're talking about gender, we're talking men and women, and women's empowerment so then they went, 'Ah! Ok, so human rights is this shell that the gay people are hiding under so we're going to attack human rights' and that sort of thing. It was a difficult thing....I'm sad that we weren't able to dive more into human rights of LGBT people.*

Many WMG members expressed the concerns that the 2030 Agenda fails to make significant changes to global power structures and systems. Issues such as trade and financing for development were not tackled as rigorously as many had wished.

Other disappointments were language on unpaid care work and on inheritance and property rights that was weaker than that promoted by the WMG. Instead of calling for the reduction and redistribution of women's unpaid care work, the agenda recognizes its value, but fails to call for reducing the amount of time that women spend working in the home and in their families, without pay, affecting their ability to participate equally in society. Language on unpaid care work was further weakened by the addition of the qualifier "as nationally appropriate," which also was used to water down the language on rights to inherit and to own property and land. Said one WMG member:

*The language on women's inheritance rights and women's rights to earn property and land was also watered down by adding a qualifier, in accordance with national laws or national priorities. In the countries where this is really an issue, national laws and priorities are not supportive. It basically let governments off the hook.*

Many WMG members expressed the concern that the 2030 Agenda fails to make significant changes to global power structures and systems. Issues such as trade and financing for development were not tackled as rigorously as many had wished. And while the Agenda addresses poverty and even inequalities, WMG members were disappointed that it did not take on concentrations of wealth or the need for redistribution:

*We lost the fight against concentration of wealth because all this talk is again addressing poverty, but without addressing the concentration of wealth that is causing poverty, it's just lip service. The one percent of population that owns half of the wealth in the world is of course doing all those damages that are not only economic, that are also social and environmental, and we lost that battle; so the way forward is to keep on going after the concentration of wealth.*

WMG members also expressed concern about the lack of clarity about the means of implementation and commitment of resources to make sure the agenda is realized. One said:

*I think FFD (financing for development) and the MOI (means of implementation) for the SDGs are relying far too much on business as usual. If we go about it the way that is envisaged then we are not going to achieve the goals—we can't achieve several of the goals without radical redistribution, so I do think it's inadequate. I think that's been the most disappointing part.*

The same person went on to make a comment that reflected the views of everyone interviewed—that this agenda does create the potential for greater change in the future:

*While some of the commitments made on the ground might be difficult, I do think there is somewhat of a shift in the rhetoric and I think this is partly due to pressure from civil society. I think we are seeing a change around policy and development financing and I do see some glimmers of hope—and at some point it will become clear that these goals will be impossible to achieve without some major changes to the way things are being done...*

And despite some disappointments, all of those interviewed asserted that the 2030 Agenda captures much of what is needed to ensure that sustainable development is realized and that women and girls will benefit. One leading activist said:

*We know that these agreements actually have an impact on people's lives and if they're implemented they can make a real difference. That's why I do it, because I know that at the end of the day if governments do what they say they're going to do then it's better for everyone and it's better for women and girls.*





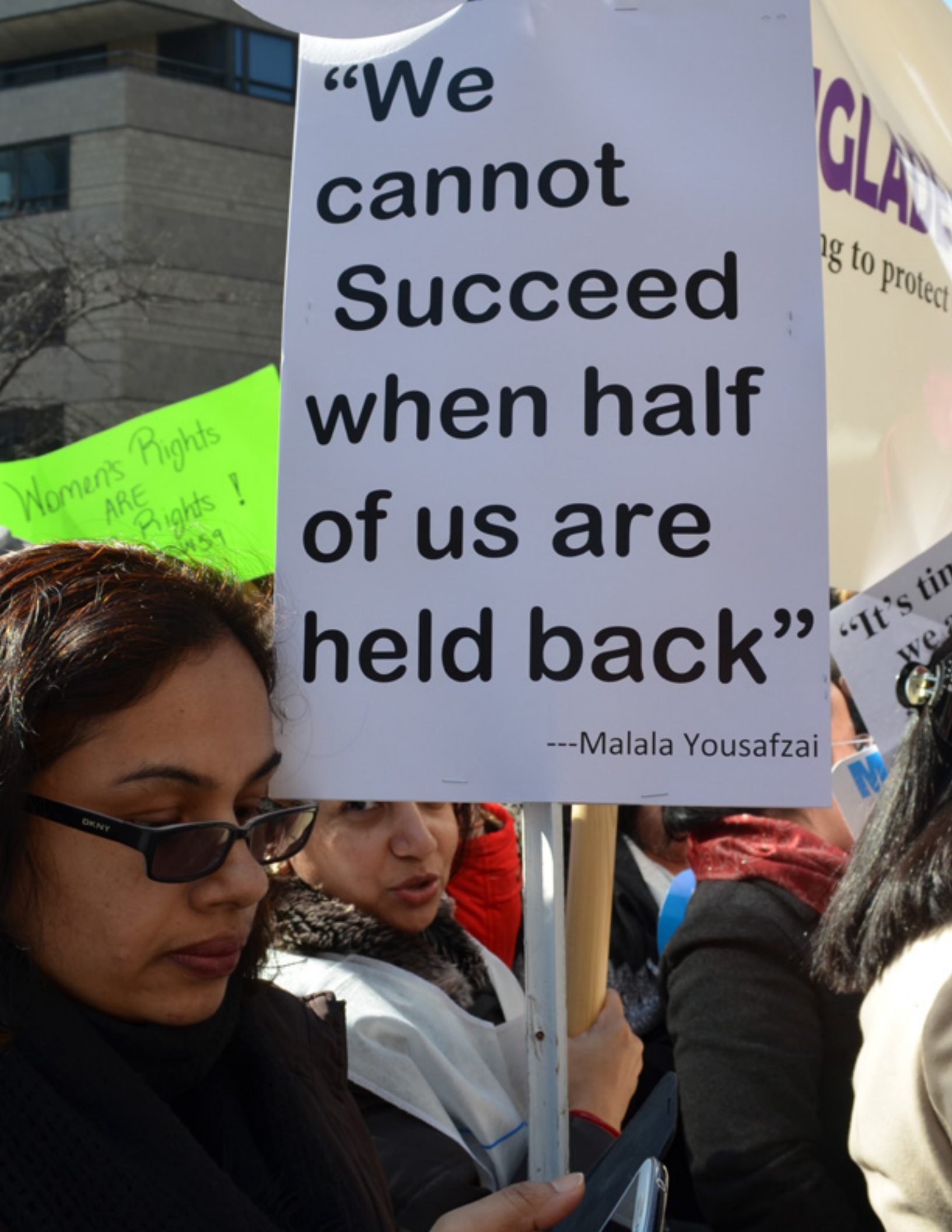
**“We  
cannot  
Succeed  
when half  
of us are  
held back”**

---Malala Yousafzai

Womens Rights  
ARE  
Rights!  
2019

GLAD  
ing to protect

“It’s time  
we



## 3. The Advocacy Process: Successful Strategies, Facilitating Factors and Vexing Challenges

The stakeholders interviewed agreed that the WMG was the most cohesive, responsive, inclusive and knowledgeable of all Major Groups. The UN agency and government mission staff interviewed emphasized that the WMG's advocacy ensured the depth, breadth and quality of the stand-alone gender equality goal. They said that women's civil society organizations should take credit for keeping the pressure on and contributing to the achievement of a comprehensive gender goal, as well as gender being incorporated into several of the other goals. In the words of one of the chairs of the negotiations on the 2030 Agenda:

*The women's groups... were certainly among the most articulate and the most passionate within the civil society family. Obviously, we received language suggestions, whether orally or in written submissions, throughout the negotiations. From when we started... until the end, there was a constant input of ideas, both in the structured sessions and in written form. My colleague and I were very grateful for those. They undoubtedly inspired us. I'm not thinking purely about gender equality and women's empowerment, but many other similarly vital human rights and equality issues.*

Several strategies used effectively by the WMG emerged from this evaluation.

## Successful strategies

The WMG used diverse and dynamic strategies throughout the process to advance their priorities, including: development of position papers and common messaging; mapping statements and positions of Member States; meetings with delegates and allies to influence language in UN documents; making presentations, hosting side events and developing tactics to be make their messages visible; communications via traditional and social media.<sup>17</sup> In its advocacy work, the WMG aimed to represent the diversity of women's voices and interests at the global, regional and national levels, and to address a range of issues, while also developing common positions and messaging.

### STRUCTURE AND FUNCTION OF THE WMG

One of the keys to success was the way that the WMG organized its work. Many participants in the evaluation pointed to the WMG structure and modes of operation as critical to its effectiveness. Women described its "magic" and portrayed a collective, collegial work environment.

One of the specific elements identified by interviewees was the re-structuring of WMG leadership in 2014 to include regional representation and a breadth of expertise among the Organizing Partners (OPs). (See Box 1.) It was very important to WMG members that voices from the Global South were leading and were heard on all the issues in the Agenda. One member commented, "The inclusion of eight OPs ensures there's a broad regional and issue representation...[This] has given it greater exposure at the regional level."

Most people also cited the transparency of operations and attempts to be inclusive. One interviewee said, "WMG is a unique group, I will tell you that. No matter who you are, you will fit into it. The transparency in operations made this even more unique."

The majority of women said that measures were taken to mitigate hierarchy within the WMG. The eight OPs divided the work and became increasingly efficient during the advocacy process. They aimed to bring people to the UN to engage in the advocacy process in person, as much as funding and logistics allowed. One WMG member said,

*This type of leadership opened up the platform for many women all around the world who said, 'I'm not an advocate, I don't know the UN process, I'm scared of talking to governments, or I'm scared of engaging in this high-level politics.' It became easy because people felt included and valued for their contributions and were able to say 'No, I can do this, I can suggest my language, or I can talk to the only people I know inside, and I can make connections.'*

Those interviewed also stated that the WMG did a commendable job of online organizing, ensuring that people outside of New York were represented virtually, if not in person. Those who could not be in New York to conduct advocacy knew that through the highly active email listserv and other online platforms they could participate in other ways.

But the inclusiveness of the WMG went beyond the important elements of shared decision-making and including as many people as possible. It was a commitment to work across issues effectively

17 "About Us: Women's Major Group" <http://www.womenmajorgroup.org/>



## INCLUSIVENESS AND INTER-LINKAGES WITHIN AND BEYOND THE WMG

Many interviewed expressed the view that the expertise of each individual and organization was respected and utilized within the WMG. Increasingly, the group moved away from existing silos by finding and highlighting inter-linkages and educating each other on their issues.<sup>18</sup> One commented:

*Something like the Women's Major Group, one of its absolute beauties is that you have women who've been following the environmental process for over 20 years. Then you have women who are incredibly strong on the gender program, and then you also have those who've come from financing for development frameworks, and when you bring those all together into a Women's Major Group, you really have a strong constituency that can have real voice, even within a developing development paradigm... but also...when you're working with sensitive issues like SRHR, it's a help.*

Another said:

*This is a story of the beauty of engaging more and more organizations and seeing what the added value is and how different people of different networks work in different ways.*

Of course there were tension points, when people within the WMG did not understand or agree with each other. WMG members spoke of giving each other the space to disagree and of setting aside differences in order to move forward.

The ability of the WMG to work across issues was also noted by external stakeholders. One UN agency staff person observed:

*Women's organizations were working outside their expertise and organizations that were maybe more focussed on health are focussing on other areas. I think a lot of silos have broken down and the SDGs facilitated the cross-cutting nature of gender inequality and other inequalities and this stayed as a strong focus in all of the advocacy.*

The commitment to inclusiveness and solidarity went beyond the internal dynamics of the WMG, through its collaboration with other Major Groups, such as the Major Group for Children and Youth and the Major Group for Indigenous Peoples. This commitment to solidarity strengthened the WMG capacity to speak effectively on a range of issues. WMG members spoke about how they were the only Major Group that was able to make suggestions across the entire Agenda. The same UN Women staff person remarked:

*We observed was that there seemed to be a sharing of ideas and information. We saw other major groups take up gender equality and the WMG take up non-gender related ideas.*

Increasingly, the group moved away from existing silos by finding and highlighting inter-linkages and educating each other on their issues.

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<sup>18</sup> Interviewees used "silos" to describe how people had worked separately previously, not learning about or paying attention to each other's issues.

## STARTING EARLY AND DEVELOPING A UNIFIED AND AMBITIOUS PLATFORM

Many of the WMG members interviewed talked about the importance of early organizing. Some began in 2010, with initial preparations for the twentieth anniversary of the Earth Summit in 2012. One WMG member described the process:

*Way back in 2010, we started to think through what happens toward the end of the MDGs, but also with the Rio+20 process.... We were starting to get really concerned because we were not seeing as many South women's voices in the process. So in 2010, we started to really mobilize and move... linking in with many other feminist organizations and networks both in the economic South, but in the economic North as well. One of the things that we were thinking through was, we've got to be there in terms of influencing the process early, because if you don't get in early, then you're basically just inputting into a process that really has been formed without you.*

Some of the important initial organizing was at the regional level, in the Asia Pacific, Latin America and the Caribbean, and Africa, as described by one activist:

*We started really mobilizing right from the beginning, which was around April in 2012, we started doing consultation meetings. The first, first, first consultations actually happened at the AWID forum in Turkey where we had a small meeting with African women that were participating. It was really to talk about how we want to engage, how we want to mobilize and how we make sure that we capture the voices of African women and the girls and for those then to start informing the Post-2015 process... Then we organized a big regional meeting that took place in Liberia, Monrovia.*

They knew they had to understand the process, figure out who needed to participate—aiming for wide diversity—and determine which governments and UN agencies with which to engage. Some saw that the WMG would be a promising mechanism for engagement and sought to strengthen the feminist presence within it.

As described above, the WMG developed a statement on the Post-2015 Agenda in March 2013 (see Box 2), which was the beginning of a unified platform. Then, in February 2014, more than 60 feminists involved in both the WMG and the Post-2015 Women's Coalition gathered in Tarrytown, New York, for a strategy meeting and agreed to a short, unified platform that covered all the issues.<sup>19</sup> One person involved commented:

*The women's movement pulled something off which a lot of people would have thought wasn't possible, which was to actually develop one single common platform of women's rights. What the women's movement wanted across all the issues. It was not too long. It was just a few pages. It covered every single issue that we knew was in play. That was extremely hard to do.*

A minority of voices did express concern that, despite this early organizing and priority-setting, tensions persisted between the WMG and the Post-2015 Women's Coalition about who should take the lead on different aspects of the process.<sup>20</sup> One donor said:

19 <https://iwhc.org/resources/gender-economic-social-ecological-justice-sustainable-development-feminist-declaration-post-2015/>

20 Beyond 2015 was a global campaign of approximately 1500 civil society organizations aiming to influence the creation of the Post-2015 development framework.

*Early on, conflict between WMG and the Post-2015 Coalition was a problem. Eventually, the two worked it out. Observing it from outside, it seemed that they worked out different roles. The Post-2015 Coalition played more of an “outsider” role and WMG was part of the process, working from the inside on women’s rights. These ‘insider-outsider’ roles seemed to work.*

Furthermore, one donor described how the ICPD twentieth anniversary review, which was unfolding in 2013-2014, diverted the attention of many of the sexual and reproductive rights organizations from paying attention to Post-2015. She also blamed UNFPA for a “lack of leadership” that exacerbated this problem. Another donor agreed that not all the UN agencies were helpful and that a lack of clarity from the UN about the process initially made it difficult for activists to plan.

## BUILDING CAPACITY AND EXPERTISE

Activists consistently spoke about the WMG being the most organized, coordinated and prepared of all Major Groups, able to contribute to any conversation in which civil society was involved and make positive proposals in response to government requests. This required a lot of capacity building within the WMG.

*There’s a lot of education and capacity building within the Women’s Major Group. So for organizations used to working specifically on forests, to start thinking and understand the rhetoric and the reasoning behind the importance of having a strong target or language on sexual and reproductive health and rights, that took some work. Then for others to understand how forests could possibly be related to gender equality also took some work. There was definitely internal learning and points when people didn’t always understand each other, whether from one country or one region, and what the goals were...I found, and everyone else did, we had evaluations from some of the sessions, and often the most valuable was that cross-collaboration and the chance to learn.*

This sharing of information and expertise built the technical knowledge of WMG members and enabled them to provide input to negotiators on a wide range of issues. One activist spoke of undesirable technical language that could have been passed, but was stopped by the women’s movement. She said,

*...We’re going to keep doing that, that’s our role, it is to be in here and to be informed and to do our research and to make sure that we don’t get snowed by the language, and that we can articulate, no matter if you’re a grassroots activist, or whoever you are, that you can take on the technical language, and that you can have wins.*

Activists consistently spoke about the WMG being the most organized, coordinated and prepared of all the Major Groups, able to contribute to any conversation in which civil society was involved and make positive proposals in response to government requests.

While everyone felt proud of the ability of WMG to work across the issues, some felt that they could have done even more to develop their technical expertise, especially on some of the weaker areas, such as financing and trade:

*We were good at rhetoric during the negotiations themselves, but we could've spent more time being strategic about marshalling all of the evidence and expertise. I think we could've just been a bit smarter about not letting UN Women solely shape the narrative on women's rights and about strengthening some of the arguments that were being made, and also looking at the arguments and being more creative. Especially given that the women's movement was fighting for an entire range of rights, we could've challenged the idea that the North can be an ally on SRHR but then is silent on issues of economic justice and call out their incoherence on the contradictions of their positions.*

## FINDING ALLIES AND CHAMPIONS IN GOVERNMENT, THE UN AND BEYOND

The evaluation confirmed the importance of the ability of advocates to identify and work with allied governments. This was complicated at times by the fact that governments supportive of some of the priority issues for women, such as sexual and reproductive health and rights, were not always aligned with the WMG on other critical issues. Nevertheless, the WMG persistently sought allies within government. One person described:

*We needed to be speaking very much to our governments and finding the allies within governments. So of course that's the gender and the women's machineries, they're sometimes called the women's ministries....And for us, I think that's important now in implementation; the lesson learned is they were very strong allies.*

Another important ally was sympathetic staff within the UN agencies, especially UN Women. One WMG member described the process of building an array of alliances:

*And then here in the UN, I would say there are allies in every single UN agency who we've built up relationships with over time, and that's important... I don't like to use the word champions, but those allies who really care about the issue. And they might be in UNDP, they might be in UNFPA, they might be in UN Women. Of course it has to be UN Women.*

A staff person from UN Women shared the view that it was a strategic alliance:

*From the UN Women side we came out very strongly on the stand-alone goal and there was some alignment between us and the WMG, and I think that was quite important to have a similar set of messages between a UN agency and the civil society groups... We would have informal meetings with the WMG and share intelligence on what was going on and then of course we had some more formal events where we would bring together members of the WMG and member states to share information. I think the fact that there were aligned priorities and there was this informal strategic alliance and formal events and opportunities created and set the ground for the success we had.*

The WMG did not stop at identifying these key allies within government and elsewhere; they implemented an effective strategy of persistently, consistently providing inputs to government negotiations.



## ADVOCACY WITH GOVERNMENTS: CONSISTENT CONTACT, PERSISTENT PRESSURE AND CLEAR, CONCISE ASKS

The WMG not only outlined their priorities early and built expertise on a range of issues, they also were strategic about conveying their inputs to government negotiators and UN agency staff. Throughout the process, members of the WMG were speaking constantly to decision makers, seeking access to documents, moderating meetings and speaking on panels. Almost all of the stakeholders cited this strength and WMG members spoke about it with pride:

*We organized a campaign of lobbying where we talked to every government that was present in these negotiations to say, 'This is what we want, and this is why it's so important, because you will not have sustainable development and social justice, economic justice, or even climate justice if you don't address women's rights.'*

*When you've got incredibly busy delegations, they want to have crisp and clean language. And they want to have concrete proposals on the text. It can't just be this rhetoric of change; it needs to be some concrete policy possibilities...And very short and crisp text proposals.*

In addition to providing consistent suggestions on language and on technical issues, the WMG kept up a presence and pressure. As one WMG member recounted,



*At one point in the negotiations, people were saying that Member States were weary of hearing the Women's Major Group talk about our gender goal, and it really was ours. We were very clear that we required a stand-alone gender goal and that goal had to encompass some essential components—it couldn't just pay lip service. And we spoke about it in every single possible venue we could. So having the states say that, we thought, was actually a good thing, because it showed that they were being confronted with this issue.*

Donors, government mission representatives and UN agency staff affirmed that the WMG was a key player throughout the entire Post-2015 advocacy process. UN mission staff felt that civil society got better at producing a unified set of demands towards the end of the negotiations. The proposals were easy to digest, so for Member States who agreed with the WMG positions, the substantive inputs they got were useful for drafting language. One of the UN Ambassadors chairing the process of negotiations leading to finalization of the 2030 Agenda noted:

*The civil society colleagues were there from the beginning...There was a direct dialogue. That was an improvement compared with the previous negotiations. My [co-chair] and I benefited greatly from having direct insight into the views of this wide coalition of interest groups. We also benefited from the dialogue which we were able to launch between the major stakeholders and the delegates. That situation really continued up until the last week of the negotiations.*

Another government mission staff person talked about how useful it was not only to have the technical input, but also the political pressure:

*We know some of the joint statements in relation to gender that were read out very clearly, from a facilitator's point of view, gave us a mandate to build a lot of this in... to be able to generate support among most member states, so they can put this forth in their name, to empower the co-facilitators to make sure that, 'look we couldn't ignore this—this has to be in there.'*

There was not a single negotiation session in which the WMG did not contribute suggested language for a document, even times when there were two, three, even four revisions within one week. From one session to the other, language suggested by the WMG in the previous mark-up appeared in the subsequent official draft.

*We created advocacy documents, we did fact sheets for each of the sessions, and really started to make our name well known. We had our logo and shortly after the Open Working Group started, it became clear that Member States, the UN, and other major groups were all looking at the Women's Major Group as an example and as a model of how to interact with and influence the process.*

One UN agency staff member affirmed that the WMG inspired a change in the way that Major Groups are incorporated into UN advocacy processes, giving the example of the High Level Political Forum on the 2030 Agenda<sup>21</sup> in July 2016, when the co-facilitators invited the Major Groups to speak during the negotiations of the Ministerial Declaration. She attributed this to the precedent set by the WMG in the Post-2015 advocacy process.

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<sup>21</sup> The High Level Political Forum is the UN mechanism for follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda. <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/hlpf>

## INNOVATIVE COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGIES: RED FLAGS AND RAINBOW SCARVES

### BOX 4: TEN RED FLAGS IN JUNE 2015

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Gender equality and the human rights of women and girls must be recognized as a cross-cutting issue critical for the success of the Post-2015 Development Agenda</li> <li>2. Commitments to human rights and inclusivity must be strengthened</li> <li>3. Commitments to civil society and major group participation must be strengthened</li> <li>4. The role of feminist and women's organizations must be recognized and supported</li> <li>5. The role of the private sector must be regulated and its social, economic and environmental impacts assessed and remedied where appropriate</li> </ol> | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>6. The Political Declaration must emphasize commitments to the well-being of people and the planet</li> <li>7. The Vision and the Call for Action need to acknowledge the way in which the current economic model has contributed to inequalities and environmental degradation</li> <li>8. The goals and targets proposed by the Open Working Group should be fully endorsed, and there should be a clear path to devise ambitious indicators for the SDGs</li> <li>9. Means of Implementation must be prioritized for the Post-2015 Agenda</li> <li>10. The commitments to monitoring, review and accountability must outline comprehensive processes for national, regional and global reviews</li> </ol> |
|--|---|

Many of those interviewed agreed that the WMG used innovative communication methods to ensure that WMG priorities would be included across the Agenda. During the negotiations of the SDGs, they issued “Red Flags” statements to convey their non-negotiable principles at critical moments throughout the negotiations. (See Box 4.)

Among the innovative communications ideas used by the WMG, the story that came up most frequently in interviews was the “scarf strategy.” (See Box 5.)

*As members of the Women's Major Group we try to do almost everything. We tried to do the markups on the documents that came out, we tried to talk to different delegates, we came with creative ideas for infographics on social media and tagging UN missions and engaging in a very vibrant social media campaign. We tried to come up with issues of wearing scarves and moving with them along the corridors of the UN so that they could see us. We really worked so hard to make sure that our message was not only heard but also seen.*

This tactic built on a long tradition of grassroots feminist organizing and creative messaging. In the words of a WMG member:

*We used our bodies. And I think for feminists, that's always been part of it, is how do you ground the work that you do in your own body and in the bodies of other women...So we did some activism in the corridors.*



### BOX 5: THE SCARF STRATEGY

In a strategy meeting held during the last session in July 2015, WMG members agreed to use the colors of the rainbow to illustrate specific issues. One of the WMG partners from Turkey suggested using scarves. One WMG member described the effort:

*We agreed that we would use green to highlight the environment, we would use purple to address gender based violence. Every day there was a different color scarf along with materials, fact sheets printed on paper that said, "This is the issue that we care about and this is what we want to see in the final Agenda." As governments were negotiating there was a visual reminder that women were watching them and wanted them to address these issues in very specific ways. This idea got a lot of momentum. It was exciting because we would have government delegates emailing us and saying, 'What's the color for tomorrow?' They would start bringing their own scarves or wearing a yellow tie or a green tie depending on the issue that was at hand. Then towards the end of this process of negotiation, there was essentially a rainbow of scarves and people would wear whichever color scarf that they particularly wanted to highlight.*

Towards the final hours of negotiations, the WMG had woven many scarves together and put them on the podium where co-chairs Ambassador Kamau and Ambassador Donoghue were sitting. As one WMG member put it:

*We had rainbows for each room in the UN, we put one on the microphone for the G77 and another one for the EU and just around the room there were different colored scarves everywhere...you could see that the colors, the issues that we cared about were actually at the front of minds of the governments that were there and negotiating during the final hours of the discussion. It was a way to make sure that we were being heard and that we were visible.*

The WMG enjoyed heightened visibility because of strategies such as the scarf strategy, which helped to identify the group and their issues when they were addressing a Member State or a UN agency. Many felt that it elevated their members to another level because they were acknowledged not just for their expertise, but also as a very powerful and unified political force.

The WMG also used social media strategies effectively, developing a toolkit, which encompassed the popular hash tags #whatwomenwant and #feministvision to communicate priorities via social media. This was particularly important for women outside of New York. One interviewee remarked, "Over time we perfected the social media strategy in the WMG, which was hugely important for bringing in excluded voices."



## Facilitating Factors

The effectiveness of the WMG organizing was the key to their success, but several facilitating factors are also worth noting.

### FUNDING

Funding was very limited, but it was used strategically to make the process as inclusive as possible. Many of the activists spoke to the importance of having funds to support the basic infrastructure of the WMG, to organize strategy meetings and to bring people to New York throughout the process. Without this funding, the advocacy capacity of the WMG and other civil society organizations would have been severely curtailed.

### THE MAJOR GROUPS SYSTEM

As described above, the major group system was created more than twenty years earlier, at the Rio Earth Summit of 1992. As women began to organize at the regional level in 2010, they saw the WMG as a way to bring together women from all over the world into an existing mechanism that allowed access to the process. At its formation, the WMG was less clearly feminist and more focused on a narrower set of sustainable development issues, particularly environmental ones that were central to the Earth Summit. As feminist advocates began to see the role that the WMG could play in the Post-2015 process, they expanded its agenda. Describing the WMG, one advocate noted, “We seized on that. That existed, so we grabbed it and decided to really build that up as our vehicle for engaging and lobbying governments.” Another described the process:

*We thought we would strengthen the feminist presence within the Women's Major Group. So around maybe 2011-12, we started to really move. I think women's groups have always done this. Even if we have a structure that maybe is working, but isn't working maybe in the way we need, then we go in and we try and see what we can do to increase its political force, political efficiency. So as feminists, we went in, we brought other allies of ours into that space.*

### THE OWG STRUCTURE

The structure of the Open Working Group (OWG) meetings was also seen as a crucial facilitator for success. At Rio in 2012, it was decided that 30 countries would form the OWG to negotiate the SDGs. It took several months to construct, providing time for meaningful discussions and relationship building among the governments involved, and resulting in an OWG composed of 69 countries organized in groups of three. These “troikas” freed countries from their usual regional or political blocs and allowed them more autonomy in their negotiating positions. It led to less guarded conversations among Member States than in previous UN negotiations.

The OWG structure also made it easier for women's organizations to engage with supportive governments and make headway with others. It created opportunities for countries to have authentic conversations with each other and with civil society organizations in a way that very rarely occurs in political processes at the UN. In the words of one UN ambassador deeply involved in the process:

*We started negotiating in what was called the Open Working Group. And that was ...a very groundbreaking process for the UN, because it was actually quite inclusive. Civil society organizations had the possibility of coming to the meetings and providing inputs and we worked together with them. [And] because this was informal, you could make some other rules than you normally have for the procedures at the UN. Like-minded groups and countries had more voices than we normally would have had.*

## ROLE OF THE FACILITATORS IN THE FINAL NEGOTIATIONS

Once the SDGs had been finalized in 2014, negotiations among all member states on the 2030 Agenda ensued. Drawing on lessons from the OWG process, the co-facilitators kept control of the draft declaration, developing new versions—five or six from January to August 2015—rather than opening up the text for line-by-line editing by governments, thereby keeping the process on track. Furthermore, they allowed for input from civil society at the monthly negotiating sessions, enabling the WMG and other civil society organizations to continue to engage with governments.



## Challenges

Women's rights activists faced a number of challenges, both their own limitations, such as a gap in expertise on financing, and external obstacles, such as the lack of funding and fierce political opposition.

### ENGAGING WITH THE FINANCING FOR DEVELOPMENT PROCESS

From the beginning of the process, the WMG recognized that financing and the means of implementation for the 2030 Agenda would be critical to its success. As one activist said, "Every goal requires resources to implement and we aren't going to have any of the health or infrastructure we worked so hard to put on paper if we don't have financing for development."

The WMG set out a list of ambitious demands as early as September 2013<sup>22</sup> and advocated for Goal 17, which covered finance, technology, capacity building, trade and other important global systemic issues that dramatically affect sustainable development. While ultimately Goal 17 and its targets fell short of the WMG's expectations, it did lay the groundwork for progress on financing as negotiations on the 2030 Agenda continued.

At the conclusion of the OWG, the co-facilitators established an agenda for negotiations that included "means of implementation and the global partnership for sustainable development" as one of four key areas of ongoing debate. At the same time, negotiations were beginning on the outcome for the Third International Conference on Financing for Development (FfD).<sup>23</sup> The FfD process was being followed by the Women's Working Group on FfD (WWG/FfD), which had been created by feminist organizations at the time of the first International Conference on Financing for Development in Monterrey, Mexico, in March 2002.<sup>24</sup> The WWG/FfD included many members of the WMG, and semi-regular calls were held to ensure coordination between the organizing partners of both groups. Nonetheless, there was a push from many within civil society and Southern governments to keep the FfD and 2030 Agenda processes separate in order to preserve the breadth of the FfD agenda and ensure attention to financing issues that went beyond the SDGs. As a result, the WMG deferred to the WWG/FfD and did not actively engage in the FfD process.

Ultimately, the FfD process became the principal venue for discussing financing for the 2030 Agenda. Several WMG members said that if they could go back they would have dedicated more attention to FfD, as essential to ensuring Agenda 2030 is implemented. One WMG member said:

*We didn't do a great job at nimbly responding to the challenge of the FfD and now all we can do is just to keep the pressure up. We need to take this fight on financing outside of these processes all together—and make this a part of our daily work to educate ourselves, build our capacity on economics and financing and keep the pressure up on governments because we don't think there's any chance to keep these goals meaningful if financing doesn't exist, so it needs to be a part of every conversation with governments.*

22 See "Strengthening Gender Justice: Recommendations for the Sustainable Development Goals and the Post-2015 Development Agenda." September 2013. Women's Major Group. Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, Berlin, Germany. <http://library.fes.de/pdf-files/iez/global/10229.pdf> and DAWN newsletter. August 2015. [http://www.dawnnet.org/feminist-resources/sites/default/files/articles/dawn\\_informs\\_20150903.pdf](http://www.dawnnet.org/feminist-resources/sites/default/files/articles/dawn_informs_20150903.pdf)

23 The Financing for Development process engages UN member states with other stakeholders in discussions of funding for development initiatives. The Third International Conference on Financing for Development was held in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, on July 13-16, 2015.

24 This conference was the first time the UN had organized a "summit-level meeting" to address financial and related issues pertaining to global development, such as trade, aid and debt relief. It brought together heads of state/government and Ministers of Finance from around the globe. At that time, DAWN, the Association for Women in Development (AWID) and the Feminist Task Force formed the Women's Working Group on Financing for Development (WWG/FfD).

The WMG aimed to be bold, knowing that not all of their priority issues, especially those related to global economic structures and processes, would be included. They had to work within the constraints of what governments were prepared to consider, even while they continued to push the agenda as far as possible.

Another said:

*I think ultimately there wasn't consistent enough engagement with processes that matter in terms of implementation. One of them was financing...We weren't there in the numbers and level of engagement and expertise that we should have been. We were there, but it was nowhere near the strength with which we were there in the other processes.*

### BALANCING A BOLD APPROACH WITH POLITICAL REALITY

The diversity of voices and views in the WMG was both a source of strength and a challenge. Some WMG members described a “tension between being strategic and being inclusive and transformative.”

WMG members interviewed stressed that the WMG aimed to be bold, knowing that not all of their priority issues, especially those related to global economic structures and processes, would be included. They had to work within the constraints of what governments were prepared to consider, even while they continued to push the agenda as far as possible. One WMG person remarked:

*In the end we came to decide between the pragmatic approach, to get all governments onboard with our proposals, or to go with the highest ambition, and to go to pursue the highest standards of protection and promotion and guarantee of human rights, and we went for the second; so we knew that that was a more radical approach, but in a negotiation...you need to go with your stakes at the highest, highest level because then you have a framework.*

These WMG members emphasized the ability of the WMG to find unity on a wide range of issues, but towards the end of the negotiations, some organizations from the Global North refused to criticize their own governments on issues that many considered critical, such as trade, the international financial system, and the influence of the USA globally. As one WMG member said,

*One of the challenges, perhaps, of the Women's Major Group is that we have shared vision for gender equality, but we haven't laid out exactly what our political perspective is. In our region, we have, and it's called development justice...*

*And those are the things that are outside of this process—the trade agreements, the international financial institutions, and the power of the US to influence the global agenda. So those are the sorts of things we are able to do in the region that I don't think has been able to be done globally as the Women's Major Group.*

## FUNDING CONSTRAINTS AND A NEW YORK-CENTRIC PROCESS

As described above, the commitment of funds by a handful of donors supported the infrastructure of the WMG and enabled the WMG to bring women from around the globe to UN headquarters in New York for negotiations. Yet funding was always constrained. Some of the most supportive donors were slow to get on board, initially focused on the twentieth anniversary of the ICPD in 2014. And the donors committed to funding the advocacy work on the SDGs were few. One of these donors described their efforts to get other donors involved to no avail. She described how donors working with the UNDP on SDGs did not prioritize gender, and those supporting women's rights did not get involved in Post-2015. Consequently, there was never enough money to do all that the WMG wanted to do.

Another question was whether the donors that did fund the WMG and related activities directed those resources as effectively as possible. Donors reflected that in an effort to address needs that they perceived, e.g. for strengthened collaboration among different groups or more effective communications strategies, they may have funded efforts that were too little, too late, or done in a way that made the recipients feel that the activities were donor driven.

The fact that advocacy was centered at the UN headquarters exacerbated the funding constraints. Many activists outside of New York City were not able to participate consistently in a process that required being at the UN every month for nearly two years. The pace of the OWG meetings in 2014 and the negotiations in 2015 was intense, which was a challenge even for governments. As one WMG member said:

*We had funding but it was never enough to bring everyone, and the pace of everything was always very difficult to keep up with...the timeframe meant that some voices got lost.*

This meant that sometimes participation was narrowed to those in New York or with the resources to get there. This was further complicated by the fact that nearly everything was conducted in English, excluding many people who otherwise wanted to engage. It was hard to keep up with the process. One person represented the views of others, saying: "There was leadership at times that tended to dominate everything, but I also think it was a matter of personality and expertise that facilitated the advocacy process. There were people who knew the game much better and easily slipped into the processes necessary to engage in advocacy." An interviewee from one of the WMG OPs stated:

*I think that maybe what happened was there were just so few resources and we had to make sure that people were coming to New York, and the process was really complicated, so we tried to strike a balance between funding people who hadn't been before, but also people who had been engaged in the process and [were] able to go straight into that advocacy and lobbying without orientation as well. So I think in that way, because we had so few resources we couldn't include as many people in New York as we may have wanted to.*

A UN Women staff person noted:

*The fact that it was long and complicated made it inaccessible in many ways... the implication of that was that there was a particular group of stakeholders that were really following it closely. I am not sure upon reflection that it was all that inclusive... in the end, only a few "survived" so to speak. It was so NYC focused so I am not sure how many women's organizations were able to participate.*



WMG members spoke about the pace of the negotiations placing a tremendous burden on advocates' and activists' well-being. This led to exhaustion and at times, burn out, and was perceived by some as another example of unpaid labor by women. One donor said:

*...this just looks more like free women's work but we don't have the funds for it at the moment. Women insisted that they're doing it because they believe in the work and they want this process to achieve something, but at times it erodes their own work, the work that we are supposed to be doing on a daily basis, and it does exhaust people.*

The lack of funding for women's rights activists and for the "infrastructure" of the women's movement is not new. As another WMG member stated:

*As someone who has been involved in various ways with the Women's Major Group over the years, it's been done with no money. And that means a lot of energy and time, on top of ridiculous work schedules, and that's about this deeper understanding of well-being and what the women's movement is doing with no resources. So let's be honest. It's not like there's no money at this moment. There's never been any money.*

## FACING THE BACKLASH

The WMG confronted conservative backlash from Member States that did not want to support gender equality, sexual and reproductive health and rights, or sexual orientation and gender identity rights. The opposition of countries like Saudi Arabia and Nigeria, as well as the Holy See, came as no surprise to women's rights activists, but it did threaten progress. And it hindered WMG advocacy. A WMG member recounted an incident when the Holy See asked to have civil society removed, a "stunt" that seemed unfair, given that the Holy See is not even a Member State, yet is given a voice in intergovernmental negotiations.



## The WMG confronted conservative backlash from Member States that did not want to support gender equality, sexual and reproductive health and rights, or sexual orientation and gender identity rights.

Some UN mission staff affirmed that sexism and homophobia among some Member States can be a huge obstacle. It was not just conservative governments and the Holy See. Religious right-wing groups opposed to gender equality, women's rights and sexual and reproductive health and rights advocated against inclusion of those issues. One diplomat said:

*Luckily, the facilitators tried to manage these types of situations in a good way so it [sexual and reproductive health and rights] was kept in there, but I think that was really a big challenge as well. And I think that the sentiment that you didn't want to push people too far, you didn't want it to boil over too much, we had to make sure people weren't sitting back and allowing certain people to be outrageous. This happened to a point that I've never ever seen before at the UN. I think that was really the challenge.*

Despite the vitriol from some governments about gender equality and sexual and reproductive rights, the government negotiators argued that it was essential to listen to all the voices, to keep those in opposition from walking away from the negotiations. Indeed, they acknowledged that, depending on the issue, any government might take a problematic position:

*[It] shows you the difficulty of this sort of thing. As much as we can preach on one thing, every member state has their thing, where they're like, 'except this' and we actually had issues about that. So that's when you're trying to do this mass agenda that's difficult. So I think that's one of the difficulties as well—is how do you get 193 countries to sign on where they can swallow everything, and even some things that we had trouble swallowing.*

While women's rights activists were disappointed that the 2030 Agenda is not stronger, especially the exclusion of sexual rights, government negotiators central to the process argued that they achieved as much as was possible:

*The SRHR area... was one of maybe eight or ten key issues in the final perhaps two or three months of the negotiations.... It was a challenge to find consensus on all of the issues, in particular in the human rights field. At the end of the day, we found language with which all one hundred and ninety-three member states could live... I'm glad to say that we have a reference to the Beijing platform within the declaration which accompanied the goals and targets. Again, depending on your perspective, it may not be entirely satisfactory, but we managed to find a language solution.*

## INTERACTIONS BETWEEN THE WMG AND OTHER PLAYERS IN THE ADVOCACY SCENE

Interacting and organizing with other Major Groups and other civil society groups, as well as the private sector, was also cited as a challenge. While the Major Groups and other civil society organizations collaborated with each other in many instances, they were not always unified in support of gender equality and women's rights. And some were not as well organized or experienced in UN advocacy as the WMG. For example, one WMG member spoke about witnessing careless advocacy from other civil society groups that undercut the sexual and reproductive health and rights goals.

Some donors and UN stakeholders wanted to encourage greater integration of civil society groups. One WMG member differed, "As much as coordination does make us stronger, we have different priorities and opinions. We shouldn't be expected to homogenize when there are conflicting priorities and messages."

One actor in the mix that many WMG found particularly troubling was the private sector, characterized by the "Global Goals" publicity campaign<sup>25</sup>, which they felt detracted attention from the role of civil society organizations and elevated celebrities and corporations.

*Another unexpected negative effect was the way in which the private sector was involved in the agenda—this frightened and angered a lot of activists and only made it worse that human rights integration across the board was weak.*

Some WMG members described the private sector as a "strong antagonist" driven by profit that could not be trusted with the implementation of an Agenda intended to advance human rights and gender equality. WMG members questioned whether governments listened to the private sector over and above the voices of civil society organizations advocating for transformational change.

This view became an irritant for some UN agency staff and government mission staff. After the 2030 Agenda was adopted, some WMG member organizations wrote a letter criticizing the reframing of the SDGs as the "Global Goals," arguing that these media campaigns were de-politicizing the work they had done and that the UN was buckling to private sector influence in human rights work. One diplomat described their reaction to the letter:

*It was like you told us you wanted to dig a well, and so we dug a well and we got it and here we are and you're like, 'it's not deep enough!' and we felt like 'you guys! There wasn't a well here before, we helped you build a well, can you at least take five seconds to acknowledge we got a well, this is great! Now we can think about how we can make it deeper, improve on it in the future...'*

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<sup>25</sup> The "Global Goals" is a public relations campaign, led by filmmaker Richard Curtis, designed to popularize the 17 UN SDGs and push for their full implementation by governments, citizens and the private sector worldwide. The campaign includes private sector and celebrity endorsements and a wide reaching social and traditional media campaign.



Another UN mission staff said:

*The letter left a bad taste in our mouths; it was a sad thing that was the last thing we got from the Women's Major Group. I think a little bit of effort of showing some love to the Member States that stood up for women's rights is important.... When we get feedback from our NGOs it was, 'it wasn't good enough! You didn't go 120 percent, so you're not really our allies, we question you. And that just doesn't inspire us, as diplomats and delegations, so I think, a little bit of 'thank you' and a little, 'let's keep on working together'—more positive is really important.*

Although concern about the role of the private sector rushing in at the end of the process to claim the SDGs was widely shared, some WMG members refused to sign the letter, seeing it as counterproductive at that moment.



2 Opposition formulation

3 Actual formulation





## 4. Movement Building

One of the questions this evaluation examined was whether the organizing and advocacy conducted by the WMG was an example of movement building and whether it contributed to strengthening the women's movement. Some of the ways that interviewees defined a social movement were:

*A movement is when a group of people come together with common goals and work together towards reaching those goals.*

*For me there are so many movements, but I think it's when a group of people feel very strongly about one issue and they set aside differences and they are focused on that one issue. 'Divided we fall but united we stand' is so true in this case.*

*A group of people who come together to advocate for social change in a way that is organic and not in a top down way; it springs from the grassroots. So movement building is about broadening your movement for your cause, expanding it beyond the communities who are most affected.*

Approximately half of WMG members expressed the view that the WMG did reflect characteristics of a movement. One said, "Building this kind of cross-sectoral alliance has only been matched at the Beijing Conference on Women, which was another great example of movement building." Another said, "There's no question that over the last few years, one thing that's been strengthened is the solidarity of movements, the women's movement in particular through this process." They described an incredible feeling of solidarity among women's rights activists across many areas, building on a long tradition of women's organizing at the UN and in other global spaces.

Interviewees also talked about the WMG being a reflection of the capacity of women to come together to utilize a political opportunity. One WMG member described it as a "platform to facilitate engagement with the SDGs" and another said:

*That's another thing that something like the Women's Major Group can do. It can give you a little form. It should never be the kind of structure that holds you in and fully names you, but it should allow you ways to increase your power in a space that is already about holding you down anyway. If it does that, then to me that is helping towards movement building.*

The other half of respondents expressed the view that WMG advocacy is not an example of movement building, but rather a specific and technical process. As one donor put it, "Advocacy at the UN is a strategy, not a movement. It is an important space, which should be leveraged." Many felt that movements must be driven from the grassroots and, while there were attempts to make links to the national and local levels, they characterized the WMG as an elite advocacy process, cut off from the grassroots in many ways.

Even those who questioned how much the WMG's engagement would contribute to strengthening the women's rights movement recognized the effort to be inclusive and to bridge the local to the global level. Some described how the WMG work contributed to relationship building and to breaking down silos that have existed historically in the women's movement and in movements generally. One WMG member said:

*The ability of the Post-2015 process to contribute to that process [of movement-building] is limited because it was driven by northern based NGOs, and a lot of grassroots individuals and activists were not involved. This process was not driven by grassroots, it hasn't contributed to movement building in this sense, but it has contributed to movement building in the sense of issue-based bridge building among established constituencies.*

Some WMG members spoke about the WMG having spillover effects to the Women's Rights Caucus, a network set up to advocate at the Commission on the Status of Women, which they believe was strengthened due to the relationships built through the WMG.

*The WMG grew so big and broad during this time leading up to the Post-2015 agenda and this had effects on the women's rights caucus and made it more open and made people within the women's rights caucus more aware of the larger issues taken up by the WMG.*

Finally, some respondents pointed out that the true effects of the Post-2015 advocacy process on movement building will only be revealed over time, as women's rights organizations mobilize to advocate throughout the SDG implementation process. A UN agency staff person noted:

*Influencing this process did require a movement, in particular women's organizations coming together and defining priorities. There was a very strong and high level of organizing...and strong alliances and structures. I guess you could define that as movement building, but the question is what happens now?*

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# 5. Conclusion: Lessons Learned and the Way Forward

## Top Ten Advocacy Lessons

This review of the advocacy strategies used by feminist activists yielded several lessons for engaging in global political processes to shape policy agendas:

### 1. **Build a transparent and inclusive method of working:**

The WMG was able to transcend some of the challenges of advocating in a fast-paced environment based in the Global North by its commitment to inclusivity and transparency. The restructuring of the leadership early in the process to include regional representatives was key. Also critical was the use of resources to bring advocates from all over the globe to New York, organizing of strategy meetings, and the use of social media to keep people informed.

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### 2. **Work across issues:**

A huge achievement of the advocacy process of the WMG was to get out of “silos” and work across issues. They learned from each other and built their expertise. More than any other factor, this was seen as both an outcome in and of itself and a reason that they were so successful at influencing the 2030 Agenda.

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### 3. **Organize early, prioritize demands and develop unified positions:**

The women's movement started to organize more than three years before the Agenda was finalized—identifying priorities, developing unified positions, producing position papers and clear messages, and analyzing opportunities for advocacy.

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### 4. **Find champions and build relationships:**

The women's movement skillfully mapped allies in government—identifying those governments that shared their views on specific issues, as well as individuals within government and within UN agencies.

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## **5. Deliver clear and consistent messages and put persistent pressure on governments:**

The WMG was tenacious and skilled at providing technical language on a wide range of issues to government mission staff, in ways that they could then use in negotiations. Their consistent presence also put pressure on governments to respond to their demands.

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## **6. Utilize innovative and visible communications strategies:**

As the negotiations progressed, women became increasingly focused on conveying their priorities and maintaining a visible presence through the use of public presentations and events, visual messaging and social media.

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## **7. Fund participation of advocates, especially from the Global South:**

Funding for women to come to New York from all over the globe during the negotiations was critical. Resources for basic infrastructure, occasional strategy meetings, and communications also made a huge difference to the effectiveness of the WMG.

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## **8. Utilize existing structures and opportunities:**

WMG members were extremely strategic at seeing and utilizing an existing entity, a Major Group, and transforming it into a representative and highly effective vehicle for advocacy. They also took advantage of the opportunities created by the process, such as the OWG and the co-chair consultations.

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## **9. Identify gaps in expertise and build capacity (e.g. financing):**

One of the weaknesses identified in this evaluation was an insufficient understanding of development financing, as well as a failure to engage fully in advocacy on it. Building this area of expertise would strengthen advocacy for implementation over the next 15 years. A related lesson for the future is that advocates should map areas of existing expertise, as well as the gaps, in order to conduct capacity building and seek technical assistance, including bringing others into the advocacy effort.

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## **10. Link global advocacy to national advocacy and strengthen the movement at every level:**

One of the most consistent messages throughout the evaluation was that implementation will happen at the national level. Those interviewed recognized that the Post-2015 negotiation process took place in New York at the UN, requiring a concentrated effort with governments there. But the ambitious goals of the 2030 Agenda will only be realized, making a real difference for women and girls, if women's organizations at regional, national and local levels have the support to hold their governments accountable.

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## The Way Forward

This report captures the principal findings of an evaluation of advocacy done by women's rights activists to influence the new sustainable development agenda. The evaluation focused on the Women's Major Group (WMG) as the principal umbrella for women to advocate for a comprehensive gender equality goal and for the mainstreaming of gender across the entire agenda. It found that the WMG coalesced around a set of priorities for inclusion in the SDGs, successfully influenced the intergovernmental negotiations process, and achieved most of their objectives—making a profound impact on the 2030 Agenda.

All of those interviewed pointed to the fact that the 2030 Agenda will be a living Agenda for the next 15 years, and that robust accountability mechanisms are essential to make sure that it is realized. Women's rights activists expressed concern that governments will “cherry-pick” goals and targets, focusing on those that are less controversial and more politically expedient. They see the danger that women's rights—and sexual and reproductive health and rights in particular—will be sidelined. They pointed to several important next steps to help advance implementation of the 2030 Agenda:

### FOCUS AT REGIONAL AND NATIONAL LEVELS

WMG members spoke of the need to support women's rights movements at the regional and national levels to hold governments accountable. They described a disconnect between what missions negotiate at the UN and what governments actually execute at the national level, and expressed frustration over the fact that governments have made commitments in other global processes, for example CEDAW or Beijing, which they have not kept. Many felt that the priority now is to develop and implement mechanisms at the national level to hold governments accountable for their commitments. As one activist put it, “I think at the global level we've gotten about as far as we can get. We need to take on one country at a time.” Where possible, women's rights activists should engage in regional and national development planning processes. They need to participate in determining how implementation will be monitored and measured at the national level, for example, taking part in the selection of indicators and data sources that will be utilized. They should keep the pressure on their own governments and track what they are doing. In many countries, civil society can develop alternative monitoring mechanisms, such as shadow reports. Feminists in the Global North have a responsibility not only to hold their governments accountable for implementing the SDGs in their own countries, but also to contribute to financing the 2030 Agenda through development funding.

### CONTINUE TO WORK ACROSS ISSUES AND SECTORS

Stakeholders expressed the need to maintain strong interaction across all issues during the implementation phase and to avoid the urge to “go back to our silos.” Many spoke with conviction about how the WMG had “contributed to relationship building and breaking down some of the silos that have existed in the women's movement and movements generally,” and pointed to that as key to their effectiveness. They expressed a fervent desire to keep that cross-sector approach alive at the national level and urged donors to take this into account in their funding.

## MAINTAIN GLOBAL COORDINATION

Many interviewees believe that the WMG has a continuing role to play, watching and reporting on what governments are doing at the global level and informing activists at the regional and national levels. They need to continue to demand financing for the gender equality components of the Agenda, support regional and national work, and keep sight of the unfinished agenda of deeper structural change. One advocate remarked:

*I think focusing on the implementation is huge to realize that this whole two, three-year advocacy process was the end of the beginning, not the beginning of the end, right? And so now we've got 15 more years of lobbying and making sure this gets in line, so keep the energy of the Major Group together on that to hold us accountable to this stuff.*

Another women's rights advocate spoke of the importance of global solidarity, especially in light of right-wing backlash and the narrowing of political space in many countries. Citing the attacks on human rights defenders, often those that are most effective at working at the intersection of issues, she said:

*We need solidarity internationally and among ourselves as well, and from the Women's Major Group, to make sure that specific organizations in countries are supported when tackling and dealing with these issues...and in the implementation at the national level of the SDGs.*

## ENGAGE IN MONITORING AND MEASUREMENT TO HOLD GOVERNMENTS TO ACCOUNT

As emphasized above, the focus now is on localizing the Agenda, which requires monitoring implementation and using indicators that can measure meaningful change at the national level, as well as globally. The WMG is engaged in tracking implementation and many of its members are participating in processes that can influence the way that the SDGs will be monitored and measured. For example, WMG members are participating in meetings of the Inter-agency and Expert Group on SDG Indicators (IAEG-SDGs), which was created by the United Nations Statistical Commission. The IAEG-SDGs has developed global indicator framework, with indicators for each of the 169 targets.<sup>26</sup> Women's rights advocates are tracking how governments are reporting on those indicators, engaging in national monitoring plans, and carrying out "shadow" or alternative reporting. Over time, it is expected that the indicators will be amended and women's rights activists need to continue to engage in discussions of the global indicator framework as it is being utilized and adjusted over time.

Several tracking initiatives have developed to support advocates in their engagement with governments on national action and monitoring plans, and in their efforts to gather data that can be used by civil society to hold governments accountable on relevant targets through parallel reports. For example, *Equal Measures 2030* is a partnership of civil society organizations that provides an independent analysis of the data being gathered by governments on selected targets and indicators and then supplements those data with additional research and documentation.<sup>27</sup> Aiming to be a bold, autonomous voice that can be critical of governments and the UN system as necessary, this project intends to make this information and analysis widely accessible, thereby creating opportunities for both civil society and governments to track the implementation of the targets that most directly affect the rights of women and girls.

26 Link to IAEG-SDGs website. <http://unstats.un.org/sdgs/iaeg-sdgs/>

27 Link to Equal Measures 2030 website. <http://www.equalmeasures2030.org/>

## INFLUENCE AND USE EXISTING AND EVOLVING MECHANISMS

After the 2030 Agenda was adopted by the world's governments, they agreed that the High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development, convened under the auspices of the Economic and Social Council of the UN, would organize annual meetings to review progress on its implementation. At these yearly meetings, a selection of the goals will be discussed and governments can volunteer to report on progress made at the national level. The first of these after adoption of the Agenda in September 2015 transpired in July of 2016, with voluntary reviews from 22 countries. The second meeting will be held from July 10-19, 2017, with a ministerial meeting convened for the final three days.<sup>28</sup> This is an opportunity for civil society to engage in discussions of what is working and what is not.

In addition, existing mechanisms can be used to monitor progress on the SDGs, including *inter alia* the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW), the Commission on Population and Development (CPD), the World Health Assembly of the World Health Organization (WHO), the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and the Universal Periodic Reviews (UPRs) at the Human Rights Council.<sup>29</sup> The CSW and the CPD are annual intergovernmental meetings at the UN that likely will be used by governments to monitor progress on specific areas of the 2030 Agenda. Civil society participate in these gatherings and can utilize them to advocate with governments. The periodic national reports on actions to implement CEDAW, which is binding for all governments who have signed and ratified the Convention, as well as national reporting on efforts to uphold human rights more broadly through the UPR process are other important mechanisms for holding governments accountable for significant portions of the 2030 Agenda.

Stakeholders also discussed the importance of governments channeling more money to entities that are charged with advancing gender equality and women's rights. Suggestions included the African Union Gender Directorate and Ministries of Gender or Women, so that they can play a role in implementation of the SDGs at regional and national levels.

## INVEST IN THE WOMEN'S MOVEMENT

WMG members stressed the urgent need for donors to devote more resources to women's rights work and specifically for regional and national advocacy to hold governments accountable. Women's rights organizations consistently find themselves strapped for funds, despite evidence that women's rights advocacy and organizing work strongly contributes to the achievement of gender equality and women's empowerment.<sup>30</sup> As one feminist activist said:

*For me, it's about saying please don't just speak the rhetoric of sustainability and justice and human rights without creating the conditions within which the social movements, including gender equality and women's human rights groups, can flourish and do the work.*

Donors were asked about the way forward for the women's movement from their perspectives, and many of them spoke about the need to follow up with activists to see what they want to do at national and regional levels and then use this information to invest in those groups. One donor said, "We

<sup>28</sup> For more information about the High Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development, see the website, which provides the list of goals to be reviewed and countries that have agreed to report each year. <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/hlpf>

<sup>29</sup> Links to: <http://www.unwomen.org/en/csw>, <http://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/commission/index.shtml>, <http://www.who.int/mediacentre/events/governance/wha/en/>, <http://www.ohchr.org/en/hrbodies/cedaw/pages/cedawindex.aspx>, <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/UPR/Pages/UPRMain.aspx>

<sup>30</sup> Htun, M. & Weldon, S.L. (2012). The Civic Origins of Progressive Policy Change: Combating Violence against Women in Global Perspective, 1975-2005. *American Political Science Review*, 106(3), 548-569. <https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/american-political-science-review/article/the-civic-origins-of-progressive-policy-change-combating-violence-against-women-in-global-perspective-19752005/810036AC92E6A7E245A083E3EEE4EFA0>



[organizations in the Global North] cannot be leading the monitoring. It has to be the people on the ground, the people most affected.” By using the WMG to help identify and fund groups working on the ground, donors could leverage the expertise and successes of the past three years towards implementation.

Reflecting on the intensive advocacy process over the last several years and looking to the future, many WMG members talked about the lasting impact of the organizing that had been done and the imperative to build on it. One said, “Not every moment is transformative, but when it comes, I think that building relationships over time will really help you when you need it most.” Agreeing with this point, another WMG member stressed the importance of continuing to “articulate a set of principles, a political analysis so that we can sustain those relationships and also be more effective and strategic when the moment requires it.” Yet another asserted:

*I think [we need to] recognize our power and build on it...We've built our solidarity in ways that others haven't, and...our analysis, our solidarity, and our connection to the local as well as the global, without a doubt. And now I think we should recognize that and figure out how to sustain that power.*







## APPENDIX 1: METHODS

In undertaking this evaluation, IWHC interviewed stakeholders on the successes and challenges of the advocacy work done by the WMG, the contribution of this advocacy to strengthening the global women's movement, and lessons learned for future advocacy work.

The evaluation took place from September 2015 to June 2016 and focused on advocacy that took place from September 2012 to September 2015. It consisted of in-depth interviews and focus groups with stakeholders, including WMG members, allied activists, UN Women staff, staff of government missions, and donor organizations. The guiding research questions were:

- **How did WMG advocacy contribute to the Post-2015 process and outcomes? What were the successes and challenges of the advocacy process?**
- **Did the WMG advocacy contribute to building the women's movement?**
- **What can the WMG learn from their involvement in this process to apply to similar global-level advocacy pursuits?**

This report provides a full assessment of the evaluation data from 26 individual interviews and three focus groups. The individual interviews consisted of 18 interviews with women's rights advocates, primarily from the WMG, three donor interviews (with a total of four people), three UN diplomats and two UN agency staff. Two of the focus groups were with members of the WMG (some overlapping with the individual interviews) and one with UN diplomats (none overlapping with individual interviews). Regional representation was diverse.<sup>31</sup> All interviews were conducted with the guarantee of anonymity. There are no names or identifying information in this report.

Research for this evaluation was conducted by IWHC staff not involved in the Post-2015 advocacy process or in the WMG: Katherine Austin-Evelyn, Program Officer for Learning and Evaluation, and Susan Wood, Director of Program Learning and Evaluation. This team partnered with the IWHC Advocacy and Policy staff, who supported development of the research instruments and finalization of the outline, and assisted with interviews, particularly with UN and government mission staff.

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<sup>31</sup> Qualitative data (in-depth interviews and focus group discussions) were entered, cleaned, and analyzed using the NVivo Software Package (Version 10). Audio recordings from in-depth interviews and focus groups with stakeholders were transcribed approximately. Data were then coded by question and content analysis was used to analyze themes that arose in in-depth interviews and focus group discussions.

## APPENDIX 2: LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

**APWLD:** Asia Pacific Forum on Women, Law & Development

**AWID:** Association for Women's Rights in Development

**CEDAW:** Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women

**CPD:** Commission on Population and Development

**CSW:** Commission on the Status of Women

**DAWN:** Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era

**FfD:** Financing for Development

**FWCW:** Fourth World Conference on Women

**GFC:** Global Forest Coalition

**IAEG-SDGs:** Inter-agency and Expert Group on Sustainable Development Goals Indicators

**ICPD:** International Conference on Population and Development

**IWHC:** International Women's Health Coalition

**MDGs:** Millennium Development Goals

**OPs:** Organizing Partners

**OWG:** Open Working Group

**SDGs:** Sustainable Development Goals

**UN:** United Nations

**UNDP:** United Nations Development Program

**UNFPA:** United Nations Population Fund

**UPR:** Universal Periodic Review

**WECF:** Women in Europe for a Common Future

**WEDO:** Women's Environment & Development Organization

**WEP:** Women Environmental Program

**WHO:** World Health Organization

**WMG:** Women's Major Group

**WWG/FfD:** Women's Working Group on Financing for Development

**PHOTOS**

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**333 Seventh Avenue, 6th Floor | New York, NY 10001  
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