

**AWID reflections on the  
United Nations Secretary General Report  
“A Life of Dignity for All”**

**1. Introduction and summary**

From September 24 to October 4, 2013, the United Nations (UN) holds its **68th ordinary session of the General Assembly (GA)** where deliberations aim to substantively contribute to shaping the post-2015 development agenda, including the Sustainable Development Goals. Civil society and other stakeholders will reunite around the inter-governmental processes as well as around a series of UN and civil society led events to influence the discussions. The report “[A life of dignity for all: Accelerating progress towards the Millennium Development Goals and advancing the United Nations development agenda beyond 2015](#)” released by the UN Secretary General (SG) on July 26 will guide deliberations amongst Member States at the GA on progress in the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and recommendations for further steps to advance the development agenda post-2015.

AWID presents this analysis of the SG report as a contribution to the UN debates from a feminist and human rights perspective, and also as a follow-up to our [critical analysis of the Post-2015 High Level Panel report](#)<sup>1</sup>. We recognize the GA is a critical political moment for ensuring that the future international development agenda is aligned to human rights principles and gender justice, building a strong foundation for long-term, sustainable, inclusive, and just development for all<sup>2</sup>.

Our main points on the proposals put forward in the SG report are:

- We welcome the references to the need to apply a human rights framework for a development agenda to take root. We would also like to lay emphasis that the post-2015 development agenda should be holistic, inclusive, just, equitable, people-centred and universal, and should aim to eradicate poverty, promote social inclusion, women's rights and sustainable development within a rights-based framework.
- We reiterate the concern on the need to have a more coherent and stronger articulation of the inter-linkages between the fourteen proposals for governments outlined in paragraphs 83 to 96 of the SG report.
- We highlight the concern around the lack of concrete mechanisms and financing of implementation and monitoring framework of the post-2015 development agenda

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<sup>1</sup> The High Level Panel on the Post-2015 development agenda, composed of [27 members](#), was created by the UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon to advise on the global development framework beyond 2015. The work of the panel included a series of online and face-to-face consultations with different stakeholders and the submission of a report containing recommendations to the Secretary-General in May 2013 entitled "[A New Global Partnership: Eradicate Poverty and Transform Economies through Sustainable Development](#)".

<sup>2</sup> See also the paper presented by AWID to the UN Women/UNICEF consultation on inequalities in October 2012 "[Getting at the Roots: Re-Integrating Human Rights and Gender Equality in the Post-2015 Development Agenda](#)"

- We stress the need to put gender equality and women’s rights at the centre in any development framework beyond goals setting.
- AWID calls for a meaningful, inclusive and transparent intergovernmental with civil society inclusion process that involves women and feminists in all their diversity, at all stages.

## 2. Moving in the right direction

We welcome the language in paragraph 11 of the SG report that offers a consistent human rights approach to achieving sustainable development goals. It puts justice and human rights at the centre and calls on governments to advance on three fronts simultaneously: development, peace and security, and human rights.

The document offers a review of the progress made in many countries around the MDGs and calls for a renewed effort towards ending poverty. The SG report offers a broad definition and understanding of poverty, and underscores the compounding and intersecting oppressions that exacerbate poverty. The proposal is better at addressing the disproportionate impact of poverty - well beyond lack of income - that women and girls experience. This report stresses that vision and transformational actions of the sustainable development agenda are needed to address poverty within this broad definition. Paragraph 83 of the SG report highlights the fact that “poverty has many manifestations and is aggravated by discrimination, insecurity, inequality and environmental and disaster risks. Therefore, the eradication of poverty calls for an intersectional approach, encapsulated in the concept of sustainable development, focusing on both immediate and underlying causes” (para 83).

The report also identifies and describes programmes and policies that have driven progress while providing recommendations on how to accelerate progress and suggestions on how to make a smooth transition towards a new sustainable development agenda.

The Secretary General’s report goes beyond the [High Level Panel report](#) in presenting a clearer articulation of the economic, social and environmental pillars of the sustainable development agenda. It makes a stronger call for profound transformation to address the challenges in achieving a new development agenda; and going beyond rhetoric to expanding notion and analysis of poverty.

## 3. Remaining concerns

Recognizing the important contributions of the report as described above, there are key areas of concern that still remain in our view:

On the **need for profound transformations required to address the emerging challenges of sustainable development** (para 116 of the SG report), the report fails to provide a true transformative approach to the current market based development model which would require reformulating economic policy-making and indicators to reflect the value of people and planet therefore challenging the existing neo-classical, patriarchal, unsustainable and “extractivist” model<sup>3</sup> of development as well as reflecting on the women’s unpaid care work that sustain the current model. We stress the need to recognise and build from alternative visions of development that put people and the planet’s well-being at the centre, such as those codified in

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<sup>3</sup> The term “extractivism” was first coined in Latin America to refer to mineral and oil exploitation. Current exports have been nourished by extractivist activities in the region. Extractivism continues to play a major role in national economies. It has also occupied a place at the centre of power struggles because of its economic, social and political impact. See full text in <http://www.iadb.org/intal/intalcdi/PE/2010/04716.pdf>

the constitutions of Ecuador, Bolivia and Bhutan, as well as takes into account all the invisible and uncounted contributions from women's to the economy and well being.<sup>4</sup>

**On the call for a human rights framework** (para 11), while we welcome the progressive language, the report fails to mention and recognize specific and already agreed upon instruments and mechanisms such as the obligations and commitments of the 1993 [Vienna Human Rights Declaration and Program of Action](#); the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women ([CEDAW](#)); the 1995 [Beijing Platform for Action \(BPfA\)](#) (that address multiple and interlinked forms of discrimination against women, including those that take place in the private sphere); the 2001 World Conference Against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance [Declaration](#) and Programme of Action; the 2007 [Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples](#); the [International Conference on Population and Development Program of Action](#); and the 2006 Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities are also crucial international agreements to build from for the post-2015 agenda. And why is the recognition of those agreements important? Shall we say something about that? What difference that would make?

**On the notion and scope of poverty**, while we recognize that the SG report recognizes the need to address inequalities as a cross-cutting issue, we believe that is far from addressing growing inequalities within and between countries and the multiple forms of intersecting inequalities that result in the intergenerational transfer of poverty and its growing feminization in every region of the world. We reiterate the need to take into account the capacity of each State to reach agreed goals by recognizing that each country will get there in different ways, given their growth, level of inequality, natural resources, environmental degradation, vulnerability to natural disasters, conflict, etc. Any new development agenda needs to include a multidimensional approach to poverty eradication that considers the multiple and intersecting inequalities that make it so difficult to break the cycle of poverty. A new development framework must be grounded in an analysis that takes into account the dynamics of race, class, ethnicity, sexual orientation and gender identity, religion, age, ability, territoriality and other dimensions of social inequality and the diverse ways they impact peoples' lives and opportunities as well as the protection of their rights. Leaving no one behind, can only happen if there is a consistent approach that addresses the causes that disproportionately affect women and girls, in all their diversity, and who are already structurally disempowered and oppressed.

**On women's empowerment and gender inequality**, the report fails to address the patriarchal power structures at play in the political, economic, social, cultural and private spheres that perpetuate gender inequality. These prevent the advancement of women's human rights, and therefore, hinder the achievement of internationally agreed development goals. Development debates and decisions need to strengthen different dimensions of women's autonomy to advance women's rights and gender equality. As noted repeatedly by AWID<sup>5</sup>, the distorted, fragmented or limited implementation of diverse approaches these last fifteen years has reinforced the lesson that policies, norms, and strategies for women's empowerment must take into account at least the following five dimensions:

1) Women's economic autonomy: not only stopping the feminization of poverty or working to eradicate poverty, but transforming macroeconomics and economic structures, restructuring the global financial architecture, building equality and social justice and ensuring that women have access and control of economic resources.

2) Women's political autonomy and full citizenship: working for parity of participation at all levels, and ensuring women's participation across the broad spectrum of formal and

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<sup>4</sup> These country examples are not without contradictions and/or free of concerns (such as on human rights obligations), nonetheless they symbolize a break from the neoliberal, capitalist vision of development. See also: AWID IDeA Debate Articles 2, 2013: <http://awid.org/Media/Files/IDeA-Debate-Article-2>

<sup>5</sup> See [keynote speech by AWID's Executive Director](#), Lydia Alpizar Durán at CSW 2010.

informal decision-making institutions and spaces as a reality and not just a quota aspiration; further ensuring that that participation is central to building democracy and ensuring women's full citizenship.

3) Women's freedom from all forms of violence: whether perpetuated by state-sponsored actors, private actors or by family members, violence remains one of the most pervasive barriers to women's full enjoyment of their rights. Any effective intervention needs to address violence and advance its eradication.

4) Women's sexual autonomy: women must have the freedom to decide how they want to live their sexuality without risk of violence and discrimination.

5) Women's reproductive autonomy: without reproductive freedom and the proper supports for it (universal access to quality health services, the decriminalization of abortion), the full range of women's human rights cannot be advanced.

**On financing for gender equality**, the SG report fails to insert time bound targets and mechanisms to ensure compliance. This is particularly problematic given the very limited resources allocated by donors from different funding sectors to women's rights and gender equality and the serious gap that exists in holding donors accountable by tracking their performance in financing gender equality, women's organizing, and women's collective empowerment processes around the world. Given that some key bilateral donors<sup>6</sup> committed to women's rights and supporting women's organizing have been heavily affected both by financial and conservative political pressures for shrinking international development aid, this is now even more essential to address. And, while a few donors<sup>7</sup> that champion women's rights have retained strong levels of commitment, funding levels are still far from what would be required to meet commitments to women's rights, and therefore, contribute to the achievement of broader development goals.<sup>8</sup>

Further, financing for gender equality must recognize the diversity of actors engaged in development, including civil society, and among them, women's rights organizations, movements and grassroots activist organizations, who are doing some of the most impactful and innovative work in the field, holding the line on past gains, pushing for new policy and behavioural changes, providing critical services, and holding governments accountable to their commitments. In order to foster positive and sustainable change in women's lives around the world, it is important to ensure that women's rights organizations' creative strategies and close connection to local and grassroots women's concerns are at the forefront in guiding and shaping funding strategies. Research<sup>9</sup> from recent years shows that the most effective financing for gender equality moves away from fragmented, short-term funding cycles towards longer term partnerships of predictable, flexible, and multi-year core support.

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<sup>6</sup> Such as those in the Netherlands, Spain and Canada.

<sup>7</sup> Including, but not limited to the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Swedish International Development Agency, the growing international community of women's funds, and some private foundations such as the Oak Foundation). The Dutch Ministry of Foreign affairs with their creation of the MDG3 Fund and consequently the creation of the FLOW Fund has been a trailblazer and leading advocate for women's rights and gender equality within the bilateral agency community.

<sup>8</sup> Data provided by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) Development Assistance Committee (DAC) reflect that while funding to civil society women's organizations and institutions has more than tripled (from close to US\$72 million in 2007 to over US\$285 million in 2011), the 2011 figure represents only 0.27% of total aid from DAC country donors. Based on AWID analysis of data provided in the OECD DAC Creditor Reporting System using sector code 15170: Women's equality organizations and institutions and Channel 20000: NGOs & Civil Society.

<sup>9</sup> See "Women Moving Mountains: How Resources Advance Gender Equality", forthcoming at [www.awid.org](http://www.awid.org)

While we welcome the reminder of the “**importance of our common humanity and the values of equity, solidarity and human rights**” (para 96), the report ignores the context in which global partnership plays out. The text disregards the persisting financial and economic crisis and its inter-linkages with existing energy, food, fuel, water, human rights and care crises. Furthermore, the report fails to recognize the very fact that the structural issues that created this interlocking crisis persist.

In spite of the many calls by civil society in this respect, the proposals in the SG report ignore the vast evidence on how these intersecting systemic crisis affect women and women’s rights. Any new development agenda should analyse and consider the impact of recent governments’ austerity mechanisms as responses to the crisis as well as responses from International Financial Institutions. Following extensive research, AWID has repeatedly noted<sup>10</sup> that these measures have detrimental impacts on both poor women and men; however, due to women’s gendered role in maintaining communities and families in society, they are disproportionately impacted by fiscal and macro-economic policies that contravene human rights and women’s rights resulting in expanding unpaid work burdens on women; the loss of public sector employment, held often in large part by women, due to cuts in public spending, which disproportionately affect women and women-headed households; constrains in access to services for women and girls, amongst others.

All funding sectors, whether private or public, need to establish clear, measurable and time-bound gender equality and women’s rights objectives, and put in place accountability mechanisms for resources allocated, disbursed and implemented. A ‘multiple accountability’ approach should be applied to hold development actors to account for their financial commitments – including holding donors accountable by tracking their performance in financing gender equality, women’s organizing, and women’s collective empowerment processes around the world – as well as human rights and environmental agreements. This includes also the accountability of non-state actors, and the need for stronger regulatory frameworks, especially for the corporate sector. This should be done by building on and improving the existing country or regionally relevant indicators and accountability mechanisms related to obligations and commitments made within human rights instruments such as CEDAW, BPfA,, ICPD, and the Human Rights Council Universal Periodic Report (UPR).

**On South-South cooperation**, AWID believes that SSC is uniquely placed to contribute to sustainable, inclusive and just development and development cooperation if implemented from a human rights based approach with an integrated gender perspective. When governments work with CSOs and other development actors, include a systematic focus on gender equality and women’s rights and ensure the transfer of knowledge and resources in an equitable and transparent way, SSC can spur innovation, sustainability and equality, while shifting power imbalances and articulating policies and programs in a horizontal, democratic way.

**On aligning economic policy and practice with development aims**, AWID calls for policy coherence between development cooperation policies on the one hand, and policies on trade, debt, foreign direct investment, and taxation on the other hand. All must be in line with and support international agreements on the gamut of human rights, women’s rights, economic, social and cultural rights as well as labor rights.

**The SG report is notably silent on the need to reform international financial institutions (IFIs)** such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank, a longstanding demand of civil society, so that their guiding framework is not an imposition of neoliberal economic

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<sup>10</sup> See for example "[Getting at the Roots: Re-Integrating Human Rights and Gender Equality in the Post-2015 Development Agenda](#)" page 7 or the [AWID series on the impacts of the crisis on women](#).

policies aimed at maximizing economic growth, but advancing human rights and international solidarity as part of a more equitable and appropriate global governance system. The report could have gone further by recommending the elimination of loan policy conditionalities so that countries could choose to use counter-cyclical policies (or other relevant policies) to protect living standards, trade, and employment. Governments and IFIs should prioritize social spending to fulfil human rights obligations, not debt servicing obligations.

In addition, there is no mention in the SG report of the **need to address global financial instability** and engage in a committed negotiation to establish a new international monetary system that prevents speculation against currencies, puts an end to a single country's currency being the reference of the system, rules out the need of holding considerable foreign reserves and provides for a certain level of currency-exchange predictability. While the SG report mentions the need for "robust accountability mechanisms" the report is still very timid in pressing the need to assess the fulfilment of human rights commitments and environmental regulations beyond notions of corporate social responsibility. A push for coherence with Human Rights treaties in the implementation of the philanthropic work and priorities of diverse actors from the private sector, including their compliance with labor rights, other human rights provisions, fair competition and environmental regulations should be a key dimension of private sector engagement in the post-2015 development agenda.

The SG report puts high emphasis on Overseas Development Assistance (ODA) (paragraphs 97 and 99) but disregards the fact that levels of ODA continue to fall despite pledges for aid to constitute 0.7% of GDP. We call attention to the fact that some donor countries are reducing their aid budgets due to economic crises, further reducing public spending and hampering the realization of human rights, including women's rights. There has also been the upsurge in 'new' development actors from the private sector and a proliferation of public-private partnerships, with 'investment' becoming the preferred strategy to 'aid'. Channels for influencing agendas and accountability by these new actors are often unclear or delinked to human rights commitments. Women's organizations and movements are often not represented directly in the spaces where private sector actors set the tone and agenda of funding on women and girls and broader development issues. This lack of inclusion and uneven understanding about women's rights, has led in many cases to instrumentalizing women's contributions to economic growth, and often making invisible the knowledge and experience of feminist and women's rights movements around the world.<sup>11</sup> A critical question is the extent to which such initiatives are leveraging significant resources for a narrow agenda that is defined by the initiating organizations, at the expense of supporting gender equality and human rights from a more transformational perspective. We recommend that the post-2015 process explicitly address this issue moving forward.

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<sup>11</sup> See also: the AWID contribution (p.244-255) to *the State of Civil Society report 2013* from CIVICUS. Available: [http://socs.civicus.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/04/2013StateofCivilSocietyReport\\_full.pdf](http://socs.civicus.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/04/2013StateofCivilSocietyReport_full.pdf)



#### **4. Conclusion**

AWID welcomes the SG report in that it represents a step forward in recognizing that human rights have a key role to play in designing a transformative sustainable development agenda post-2015. We recognize it goes beyond the goal of eradicating extreme poverty to provide a more holistic view of the root causes of poverty and the multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination that perpetuate and hamper efforts to break the cycles of marginalization and inequality.

However, as we prepare to debate its recommendations with diverse stakeholders at the General Assembly, AWID calls for a more ambitious and bold agenda that includes profound reforms in key structural areas such as the model of production and consumption, the global financial architecture, global governance and monitoring framework to align with human rights, and particularly with women's rights commitments. We urge the UN and its member states to recognize civil society and women's rights advocates and organizations as development actors in their own right, ensuring they are included in every stage of the shaping and implementation of a post-2015 sustainable development agenda.