



## **The Backbone of Sustainable Development:**

### **Empowering Women's Organizations to Protect Human Rights**

UNITED NATIONS—By 2030, the world aims to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls, but the new development agenda to be adopted by the United Nations (UN) in a few days does not live up to the previous, hard-fought commitments toward gender equality and provides only a fragmented plan to empowering half the world's population.

During the UN Sustainable Development Summit, from 25 to 27 September 2015, the 193 Member States will adopt the new development agenda with an outcome document titled “Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.” The 2030 Agenda – to be implemented over the next fifteen years – includes the seventeen Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the next generation of global goals to address extreme poverty and which build upon the previous Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

Unlike with the MDGs, the process to develop the SDGs was inclusive, involving consultations with civil society and women’s organizations and other stakeholders. As the SDGs will impact every woman and girl in the world, their meaningful participation and leadership and greater investments in gender equality are required to implement the global goals and achieve sustainable development.

However, the 2030 Agenda, although ambitious, contains critical gaps in several important issues for realizing the full rights and empowerment of all women and girls.

The advocacy and activities of civil society and women's organizations at the grassroots level will be key to the implementation and monitoring of the 2030 Agenda. However, as the Guardian recently reported, in the last few years, almost half of the world's countries have implemented restrictive laws to inhibit human rights organizations.

These restrictive actions seriously impede the realization of gender equality and empowerment of women and threaten the achievement of the SDGs, yet the 2030 Agenda does not provide adequate recognition and protection for human rights organizations and activists.

In the Asia Pacific region, the increasing restrictions on these organizations, especially in large countries like China and India, can affect the rights and wellbeing of billions of women and girls, who already face significant social and economic barriers.

“It is the civil society and NGOs who have been the backbone of significant development activities in most developing countries,” stated Bandana Rana from Nepal.

“Their work should be recognized and an enabling environment created for them to be able to contribute even more meaningfully to accelerate the results for substantive gender equality and to ensure that the transformative normative commitments of the SDGs are implementable on the ground,” Rana added.

Furthermore, more attention and action are required to address the heightened suppression, imprisonment, and violence against individual Women Human Rights Defenders (WHRDs) in the region.

“The emerging issue of extremism, which is slowly but steadily engulfing Asia, requires urgent attention from world leaders, as women are the ones who will have to face the consequences of this,” stated Visaka Dharmadasa of Sri Lanka.

The leadership and political will of State governments is critical to ensure the protection and promotion of human rights. “Governments must ensure resources and mechanisms for gender equality and women's empowerment, including gender-sensitive protection measures, so that WHRDs in all their diversity can do their work in their specific contexts,” according to the Association for Women's Rights in Development.

“Holding governments accountable to international principles and standards has been a main strategy to reduce inequalities and underlying factors that cause economic, political and social marginalisation,” stated Sivananthi Thanenthiran from Malaysia.

“We would hope that the implementation of the SDGs will also uphold concepts of equality – including gender equality, human rights, non-discrimination, fundamental freedoms, and liberties – in a manner that states cannot continue to ignore and side-step, because sustainable development is fundamentally different from development,” she added.

State governments will be primarily responsible for ensuring the full and effective implementation of the 2030 Agenda, and civil society organizations and other stakeholders will be instrumental in helping governments and holding them accountable. Therefore, instead of restricting the activities of human rights organizations and defenders, the international community and country governments must protect and promote them.

“Governments, when committing to the 2030 Development Agenda, must recognize the value in involving civil society and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). These trusted, pre-existing networks can significantly help implement this transformative agenda and make it a reality,” stated Yvonne Simpson from New Zealand.

“We know what we need to achieve, but how will the SDGs and 2030 Development Agenda be implemented? What is the action plan? How will governments be accountable? We must empower civil society by ensuring it plays a fundamental role in actioning and achieving sustainable development,” she added.

*The Post-2015 Women's Coalition is an international network of feminist, women's rights, women's development, grassroots, and social justice organizations working to challenge and reframe the global development agenda. For more information, please visit our website at [www.post2015women.com](http://www.post2015women.com) and follow us on Twitter @Post2015Women.*

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