



UN Open Working Group on Sustainable Development Goals Prioritizes Sexual and Reproductive Health and Reproductive Rights But Final Post-2015 Development Agenda Must Go Further

The Population and Sustainable Development Alliance welcomes the proposal of the UN Open Working Group on Sustainable Development Goals, particularly the importance it places on ensuring universal access to sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights and achieving gender equality and empowering women and girls. These are critical priorities in their own right, and also essential for addressing the links between population, health and environment which are intrinsic to sustainable development. Yet the outcome document falls short by failing to respect, protect and fulfil sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) in full, and by overlooking some of the other necessary ways to address population dynamics in ways that respect and protect human rights. These aspects must be rectified in the final post-2015 agenda in order to ensure a truly transformative and sustainable international development agenda that delivers for all within planetary boundaries.

Sexual and reproductive health and rights and gender equality:

We commend the inclusion of sexual and reproductive health commitments in both the goals on health and on gender equality and empowerment of women and girls. Within the health goal commitments are made to 'by 2030 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 programmes'. We welcome the emphasis on sexual and reproductive health information and education, although it is regretful that the specific importance of comprehensive sexuality education for the health, education and empowerment of young people is not recognized. We are pleased to see the reference to family planning, reflecting the necessity of addressing the unmet need for modern contraception that an estimated 222 million women in developing countries have. Ensuring that everyone can decide freely and responsibly the number, spacing and timing of their children is a key human right and central to the achievement of sustainable development. We are also pleased to see a focus on maternal and child mortality.

The goal on achieving gender equality and empowering all women and girls commits to ensure universal access to sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights, but lacks the clear time frame for its implementation that is required. While the recognition of reproductive rights is a step forward from the Rio+20 UN Conference on Sustainable Development, we strongly oppose the failure to recognize sexual and reproductive health and rights in full despite overwhelming support for SRHR by the majority of OWG members, as demonstrated by a [joint statement](#) at the final Open Working Group Session delivered by H.E. Ambassador Nozipho Mxakato-Diseko of South Africa on behalf of 58 member states. Sexual and reproductive health and rights are fundamental for human health and well-being, especially that of women and young people, particularly girls, and are vital for the achievement of gender equality. The final post-2015 agenda must prioritize sexual and reproductive health and rights as part of a rights-based approach to development which is at present lacking throughout the proposal.

We endorse the targets on the elimination of violence against women and girls, child, early and forced marriage, and female genital mutilation which are further, crucial targets for ensuring sexual and reproductive health and rights, and the human rights of women and girls overall. We congratulate the Open Working Group on the inclusion of a standalone goal to 'Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls' as well as attempts to integrate gender equality across other goals. We were particularly pleased to see consideration of the particular needs of women and girls under goals relating to education, water and sanitation, food security and nutrition (with reference to adolescent

girls, pregnant and lactating women) and human settlements (with reference to public transport and access to safe public spaces).

Population dynamics:

The inclusion of targets on sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights, including access to family planning and other sexual and reproductive health care services, as well as the goals relating to gender equality and education, are welcome. They are key priorities which will help women and couples achieve their desired family size, help stabilize population growth and address the relationships between population, health and the environment. This is an essential part of addressing population dynamics in ways that respect and protect human rights, but other necessary ways to do this have not been comprehensively embraced. The proposals include a focus on some population dynamics, particularly urbanization and migration. Yet insufficient attention is paid to population dynamics overall, which include population growth, population decline, ageing, urbanization and migration. These population trends and changes have implications for planetary boundaries and determine the number and location of people requiring access to food, water and sanitation, health and education services etc, therefore influencing the scale and shape of the development challenges we face. We are pleased to see a focus on migration, including for example the need for data disaggregated by migratory status, recognition of the particular protection needs of migrants and especially women migrants with respect to safe and secure working environments, and other measures to address difficulties and discrimination faced by migrants. Of relevance to age structures and population ageing, there are some references in the document, although greater focus on the needs and rights of both young and older people is necessary to truly realize the commitment to 'leave no one behind'.

We support the inclusion of a goal on cities and human settlements, with a focus on urbanization. But it is concerning that targets for enhancing sustainable urbanization and development planning fail to acknowledge the significance of population projections and trends and the need for systematic use of population data for planning purposes. Population trends, including urban population growth, rural to urban migration and population ageing must be taken into account as part of effective urban planning. For example, to ensure sufficient infrastructure, health and education services for growing and changing populations, including migrants, youth and older persons. There is a focus in the document on the need for population-related data for the purpose of monitoring and accountability. Importantly for the address of social inequalities, the document acknowledges the need to improve the availability and accessibility of data disaggregated by income, gender, age, race, ethnicity, migratory status, disability, geographic location and other characteristics. The target on birth registration will support this, although universal death and marriage registration is also necessary. Yet the fact that population data is not also recognized as necessary for the planning and the formulation of development goals and strategies is a serious omission. The Rio+20 outcome document stated that; "Through forward looking planning, we can seize the opportunities and address the challenges associated with demographic change, including migration." If, however, goals, targets and indicators are not based on projected changes in population size, location and age structures, there is no forward looking planning and this key opportunity will be missed.

Climate change and protection and sustainable use of natural resources and ecosystems:

We are pleased to see a climate change goal, and particularly the recognition that women, youth, local and marginalized groups must be a part of capacity-building for effective climate change related planning and management. We emphasize the role that ensuring universal access to rights-based sexual and reproductive health services must play in supporting adaptation to climate change and increasing the resilience of communities living in ecologically fragile areas. Advancing universal access to sexual and reproductive health services, including access to rights-based voluntary family planning services, also has the potential to contribute to conservation efforts, including in areas of high biodiversity, such as forests and coastal and marine areas, while promoting human health and well-being. The links between population, health, including sexual and reproductive health and rights, and the environment are intrinsic to sustainable development and must be considered cross-cutting issues which merit integration. With this aim we call attention to the potential of integrated approaches which combine rights-based sexual and reproductive health services with conservation and other development initiatives. These Population Health Environment approaches benefit both the health of local communities and the ecosystems upon which they depend, and could advance the Post-2015 agenda by helping balance natural resource use, environmental protection and human well-being.

Looking to 2015:

The Open Working Group's proposals for Sustainable Development Goals represent a positive step in the right direction, but in integrating the SDGs into the final Post-2015 development agenda we call on the UN Secretary General and the General Assembly to be bolder and go further. The post-2015 framework can and must address the challenges and harness the opportunities presented by demographic change, including through the consideration of population dynamics, data and projections when identifying and measuring development strategies, goals and targets, and by ensuring the full respect, protection and fulfillment of sexual and reproductive health and rights.

PSDA recommendations for advancing sustainable development in the post-2015 agenda through a focus on population dynamics and SRHR:

Prioritize universal access to sexual and reproductive health and rights, including family planning: Address population dynamics in ways that respect and protect human rights and prioritize the unfinished business of MDG 5 and the full implementation of the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development and the key actions for its further implementation beyond 2014.

Devise forward-looking goals: SDGs, targets and indicators must be forward-looking, based on projected changes in population size, location and age structures which influence demand for and supply of key resources and services.

Sectoral planning should utilize population data: Planning for water and sanitation facilities, food security, health and education services etc., and overall development strategies, must be informed by systematic use of population data and projections.

Use population data to help comprehensively address inequalities and social equity issues: Monitoring and reporting mechanisms should use data and indicators disaggregated by sex, age, geographical and rural/urban location, educational background and economic quintile, to ensure development goals benefit all.

Invest in the cross-cutting issues of health, education, women's equality and human rights: These critical investments offer opportunities to improve human health and well-being and advance each of the three dimensions of sustainable development.

This response is available [online](#) and a detailed proposal with illustrative targets and indicators for the integration of population dynamics and SRHR into the SDG and Post-2015 Framework is available [here](#).

The Population and Sustainable Development Alliance (PSDA) is an international network of civil society organisations that work together on population, sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) and sustainable development issues.

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