Shifting policy discourse and priorities

Second-wave feminists of the 1970s and 1980s got 'redistribution' and 'representation' (i.e. women's 'work' and 'voice') into the then prevailing 'women in development' (WID) agenda. They did so by revealing the systemic subordination of women in the global economy and calling for gender 'equality', reframing the issue as 'gender and development' (GAD). Subsequently, the impacts of the 1980s–1990s' contestations around HIV and SRHR forced debates on sex and sexuality (i.e. the 'body') more squarely into development discourse, especially in terms of rights, identity, and new, more positive approaches to pleasure, sex and sexuality by the mid-2000s. Concurrently, research and action on masculinities emerged from the mid-1990s, leading to a gradual

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'inclusion' of men and boys in work on gender and sexuality, with new contestations about violence, power and 'safe spaces'.

Along with this progress in research and understanding, policy and practice has also followed its own dynamics in the recent era. Many feminists critiqued the framing of gender equality in the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) as 'instrumentalist' and focused on a few quantitative targets, while others have pointed out the significant gains made in those important areas at least. The MDGs were also pursued within a post-9/11 period of changing narratives and a 'securitisation' of certain parts of the development agenda, within a context of resurgent nationalisms, conflict and insecurity, along with an apparent rise in the movement of people, all increasingly falling outside of the traditional frames of development policy in gender

and sexuality. It was in this context that sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) was raised on the agenda as something not meaningfully addressed in the MDG framework, by activists, women's groups (such as the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF)), non-governmental organisations (NGOs) such as Save the Children and the International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF), civil society organisations (CSOs) such as Sonke Gender Justice, the White Ribbon Campaign, IDS and Instituto Promundo, and a number of development agencies (including UN Women, the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida), Norad, the Department for International Development (DFID) and others). There has also been an increasing recognition of the interconnectedness and intersectionality of problems of inequality in gender and sexuality over the past decade, along with their 'structural barriers' and 'drivers' (Edwards and Nesbitt-Ahmed 2016).

Agenda 2030: principles, priorities and politics

Following more than two years of intense negotiations, the UN's member states reached consensus on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (United Nations 2015a) to end poverty by 2030 and universally promote shared economic prosperity, social development and environmental protection. 'Agenda 2030', as it is also known, was adopted at the September 2015 UN Summit on the post-2015 development agenda in New York. Through 17 goals and 169 targets, Agenda 2030 strives to tackle the structural barriers to social and economic change in favour of gender equality, which were left

⌃ UN member states negotiated late into the night before reaching consensus on the agreed conclusions of the 58th session of the Commission on the Status of Women on 21 March 2014.

largely untouched by the MDGs. Most of the strategic demands voiced by women's groups made it into SDG 5: to 'Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls'. Sexuality remains less visible, however, but the key principles underpinning the SDGs – indivisibility, universality and inclusivity – do signal a significant shift towards a more holistic development paradigm, with implications and potential for more transformative formulations of and responses to issues of both gender and sexuality.

Under SDG 5, one of the hardest-fought and most transformative targets relates to recognising and valuing unpaid care and domestic work – an agenda which IDS has been taking forward together with partners and networks for several years. Other examples of advances include new targets

on: women's greater leadership at all levels of economic, public and political life; eliminating all forms of violence against all women and girls in public and private spheres; and ensuring women's equal ownership and control over land and property. Aside from SDG 5, however, there are also some progressive targets on gender and sexuality issues under other goals, such as SDG 8 on employment, which calls for the achievement of 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. However, while strong on highlighting key sites for pushing on women's empowerment, SDG 5 remains rather silent on issues of sexuality in gender, or how men and masculinities need to be addressed for progress on equality.

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'Leave no one behind' suggests that no goal will be considered met unless it is met for everyone; yet, this appears to not always mean quite everyone. The language on the goals being met for 'all social and economic groups' was watered down late in the negotiations, to be replaced by the phrase 'all segments of society'; a nuance reflecting a refusal from some governments to recognise the rights of people oppressed on the basis of non-normative sexual orientation and gender identity and expression (Esplen 2015).[4,5]

> **Several SDG targets remain deeply controversial and are already qualified by the clause 'as nationally appropriate'.**

Despite this marginalisation of non-normative identities, a recent IDS review of how the SDGs relate to the social exclusion of people on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity and expression (Mills 2015) has helped to identify available entry points for tackling this social exclusion – in part based on a language of 'other status' – within the SDG targets, across seven development priority areas (Haste, Overs and Mills 2016).[6]

Agenda 2030 has several other limitations when it comes to issues of sexuality and gender justice. We should perhaps be wary of the potential for de-politicisation of the 'leave no one behind' principle itself, of the risks of presenting women as a 'vulnerable group', or of framing empowerment as something we 'do' or 'grant' to people rather than a process that women or others 'own' or claim, and which requires fundamental shifts in power structures. For all the welcome attention to inequalities in SDG 10, there is not a single reference to the need for redistributive policies, and the most contentious target on what is now framed as 'sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights' effectively excludes sexual rights. An accountability framework based on voluntary national reviews is another concern and the language of 'accountability' was actually vetoed by some member states. As several targets remain deeply controversial and are already qualified by the clause 'as nationally appropriate', this also affects

SDG 5 itself and effectively gives governments an 'opt-out' (Esplen 2015).

So, with development entering a new post-2015 era, in the face of deep and broad global shifts and increased volatility, it is indicative that narratives and framings of development are also changing, and perhaps partly so in recognition of the increasingly outdated approach taken at a time of more positive outlooks around the millennium. Yet, change is not linear and we see much resistance to increased equality on bases of gender and sexuality, as well as on other scales of social oppression. In order to assess the changing context, we also need to briefly consider the scale and dynamics of the resources required for the significant changes pledged in these international agreements.

Relating resources to stated commitments

The wide range of goals and targets set by Agenda 2030 beg the question of what will be prioritised (and by whom). It takes for granted key elements of our inherited dominant economic model, reflecting a heavy interest in market-oriented approaches and the strong presence of the private sector. While this is a reality that we have to negotiate, this has gender implications, driving instrumentalist logics around empowering women and girls as economic agents, as noted by Fraser (2009) among others. The notional emphasis on women's economic empowerment is encouraging, but it focuses primarily on getting women into the labour force, without attention to required transformations in sociocultural norms and supportive institutions.

Furthermore, current development aid in support of gender equality remains concentrated in the social sectors of health and education, in line with earlier priorities set by the MDGs (OECD 2015a), while the gender focus is weakest in the infrastructure sectors such as energy and transport. Concerns about prioritisation are even more acute in view of the fact that this ambitious set of commitments has not been matched by a commitment to ambitious new levels of development financing.

In the run-up to the agreement on Agenda 2030, heads of state and government representatives gathered in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, in July 2015, at the Third International Conference on Financing for Development in order to address the challenge of financing and creating an enabling environment for sustainable development. The resulting Addis Ababa Action Agenda (United Nations 2015b) gives a broad sense of priorities on the minds of donor countries.

While there are a wide range of commitments in the Agenda to work on gender equality, these should be understood in the context of the apparent priority given to what is called a 'global social compact', focused on providing essential public services for all, universal secondary education, elevated infrastructure efforts, women's equal economic rights, and improved municipal finance. But the Addis Ababa Action Agenda also recognises the changing realities of development finance, focusing not just on aid but on domestic finance, foreign direct investment (FDI) and other 'means of implementation', including trade and technology.

While overseas aid still has a role to play in low-income countries, it will only ever be a drop in the ocean of total financing on development; meanwhile, aid accounts for just 0.3 per cent of the average gross domestic product in middle-income countries where great poverty and inequality often persists (Barder and Evans 2014). With an increasing focus on 'smart aid', supporting the establishment and monitoring of national gender equality priorities and gender-responsive public financial management systems will be critical.

An increasingly relevant role for development actors and movements – as well as for development research – may lie in shaping, monitoring and reporting on such processes and structures at the national level. However, it is important to note here that these roles appear to be increasingly constrained in that little funding is directed to organisations and groups focused on transformative, long-term and long-lasting work through organised collective action, with a noted trend of less and less funding going directly to women's rights organisations in the global South (Esplen 2016; OECD 2015b).

66 Little funding is directed to organisations and groups focused on transformative, long-term and long-lasting work. 99