

However, there is much that can be achieved through the SDGs. In order to ensure that women are empowered through them, government and society should:

- Accept that the SDGs apply to all countries and recognise that there are inequalities between the developed and developing world that need to be addressed
- Include the SDGs in national laws and ensure that there is a commitment to them
- Raise awareness of the SDGs through a number of avenues
- Create opportunities for public consultation on and participation in achieving the SDGs
- Create a transparent system for monitoring and evaluating progress on the SDGs.

Ultimately, there needs to be a global change in attitudes and commitment to ending poverty and inequality - you can give people as much information as you like but something 'inside the body' needs to stir in order to mobilise people to make a difference.



Finally, Mothers' Union urges caution against overemphasising the ability of the SDG framework to empower women and girls. There are many other agreements, such as the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, that are stronger and more comprehensive in

promoting gender equality, and therefore the SDGs should be considered as complementary to these rather than a replacement.

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Women's empowerment and the link to sustainable development

Gender equality and women's empowerment should be promoted through the new Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs); and in a more comprehensive way than the Millennium Development Goals did. Whilst the SDGs aim to end poverty, halt climate change and fight injustice and inequality, the new 'development agenda' does not challenge the current global political and economic systems that have allowed poverty to flourish. Neither does the agenda take a more radical approach to tackling gender discrimination than existing international agreements. Therefore, the SDGs should not be treated as the only international framework for furthering gender equality but as an additional impetus building on existing international agreements.



Barriers to women's empowerment

Throughout 83 countries, Mothers' Union works to support family life and promote flourishing relationships. Our grassroots members have identified a number of barriers to women playing an equal part in their communities. These include:

- Inequality of power between women and men
- Violence against women and girls
- The unequal value placed on women and girls, and the roles they typically carry out, especially caring and domestic responsibilities.

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Action needed from governments and policy makers

Whilst life experiences are different for women and girls across the world, our members in both developed and less developed countries experience these barriers to empowerment, to differing degrees. In order to change this, we believe that all governments must take action.

1. End discrimination in law

First, governments should ensure there is no discrimination against women and girls under national law. It is also important that discrimination through local and customary law is ended, as this is more powerful in some countries. These laws should ensure that women have equal right of access to:

- Freedom
- Economic resources, such as land, property, inheritance and pay
- The right to vote and other political participation
- Justice

2. End violence against women and girls

Second, governments and leaders should work to prevent and end all forms of violence against women and girls, through:

- Rejection of attitudes that perpetuate gender inequality and gender-based violence, through awareness-raising and education, especially about mutually respectful relationships.
- Provision of support for victims and survivors of gender-based violence, including services and information; and sensitisation on gender-based violence for those working in law enforcement and justice systems.
- Enforcement of laws against gender-based violence, both in the home and in the public sphere; punishment and rehabilitation of perpetrators; and safe and fair access to justice for victims.

3. Support and value unpaid care

Third, governments should put in place policies that help families to provide unpaid care and nurture for children, those with disabilities and older people; such as flexible working policies, equal pay and social protection. Government and society should also work to raise the esteem of unpaid care and recognise the social as well as economic value of it.



The Sustainable Development Goals and women's empowerment

The 17 new SDGs provide a framework and motivation for addressing some of our recommendations, especially Goal 5: Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls, and some of the gender targets in the other 16 Goals.

However, some of the targets in the SDGs are weaker than they should be, allowing governments the opportunity to opt-out of achieving the targets if they are not in line with current laws - rather than encouraging governments to change laws to achieve these targets. These opt-outs contradict the emphasis in other goals to ensure that discrimination against women and girls is ended everywhere, through enforceable laws.

In general, the new SDGs do not seek to change the underlying power relations and global economic system that perpetuate inequalities and poverty. Instead, goals look to address symptoms rather than causes of inequalities, for example by suggesting 'safe spaces' for women, rather than changing the causes of women's insecurity - i.e. the threat of gender-based violence and the attitudes that perpetuate such behaviour.