

Lost opportunities in Addis Ababa – Gender Equality and Women’s Rights Present but not in Depth

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Women’s rights organizations and most civil society representatives were profoundly disappointed over the results of the UN’s third Conference on Financing for Development (FfD3) which took place in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia from 13 to 16 July, 2015. Government delegations reached agreement on the conference’s outcome document, the Addis Ababa Action Agenda (AAAA), late on the 15th after intense negotiations between the global north (EU, USA, Japan, etc.) on the one side and the global south (the G77 and China) on the other and adopted the AAAA on the last day of conference.

KULU’s chairwoman represented WIDE+ in the global network Women’s Working Group on FfD’s (WWG’s) delegation to the conference. She also represented KULU-Women and Development in the official Danish delegation and in the international network Feminist Task Force (FTF). Prior to the Addis conference a Women’s Forum was convened on 10 July, followed by a NGO-Forum on 11-12 July with the participation of 600 civil society representatives from all over the world.

Results?

While many UN member states in the global north were happy with the results, many negotiators from the global south were unsatisfied because no measures were adopted to change the skewed power balance in the international financial architecture or to strengthen the role of the UN in resolving systemic problems. Neither were issues such as the developing countries’ debt problems addressed. Instead of obligating countries to commit new resources to eliminate poverty and for sustainable development, the document merely encourages rich countries to live up to the UN’s minimum goal of committing 0,7 % GNI to development assistance. On the other hand, the document embodies a strong belief in the will of private initiatives and investments to meet and resolve the challenges of development, without a similar recognition of the important role of the state in the development process and in the protection and promotion of human rights, and in particular women’s and girls’ rights and empowerment.

It is therefore difficult to detect an agenda in the AAAA that can genuinely carry the necessary work of securing and implementing the coming post-2015 sustainable development goals forward.

UN Women’s executive director Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka stated that the outcome document includes *strong political obligations* to ensure gender equality and the empowerment of girls’ and women’s rights because the document reconfirms that women’s human rights, gender equality and empowerment are decisive in achieving lasting, inclusive, and just economic growth and sustainable development.

From the perspective of women’s rights organizations, the problem is that the political obligations stop with the nice formulations. The rhetoric is there, but it is not followed up by concrete implementation plans, demands to monitor progress, and last but not least, how to finance it.

Neither is the WWG satisfied with a number of formulations in the document on girls’ and women’s rights, which can at best be considered keeping status quo in comparison to earlier

processes. In some cases there is even a watering down of the results achieved at the earlier FfD conferences in Monterey (Mexico 2002) and in Doha (Qatar 2008). An integrated, consistent, and clear human rights-based approach is lacking. The WWG also detects tendencies to instrumentalize gender equality and women's and girls' rights and empowerment to secure economic growth and sustainable development, instead of also being rights in themselves. The structural barriers to women's economic rights, unpaid care work and other labor, as well as several other vital issues did not make the cut into the final outcome document.

Adoption of the FfD outcome document was deemed a prerequisite for a continued process towards and a successful outcome at the UN Summit on the 17 post-2015 development goals in September 2015. In this respect, the adoption of a document is positive.

In addition to the outcome document containing some relatively strong formulations on gender equality and women's and girls' rights, as UN Women's executive director noted, some other improvements were included in the document: the establishment of a Technology Facilitation Mechanism and the UN Committee of Experts on International Cooperation in Tax Matters was formally recognized.

However it is necessary that the WWG and civil society in general monitors its implementation the FfD3 outcome document.

When FfD3's Addis conference ended on Friday the 16th, the final negotiations on the post-2015 sustainable development agenda started in New York City the following Monday. The next event for the post-2015 development goals will be at the UN Summit in September. Negotiations on whether the Addis plan of action should be a subordinate annex to the post-2015 sustainable development goals (SDGs), or an independent process and instrument to support the implementation of the SDGs split the world once again along a North-South divide.

The WWG on FfD have continued the work of analyzing FfD3 results, its follow up and the links to the post-2015 development process. The WWG cooperation continues, as does the cooperation with the broader civil society group in order to decide the next steps. The next WWG meeting took place online on 5 August!

Explanations:

KULU – K.U.L.U.-Women and Development, Danish national platform for WIDE+

WIDE+ - Network Women in Development Europe +

Feminist Task Force: KULU is European Focal Point for FTF

WWG on FfD – Women's Working Group on Financing for Development was established after the first FfD conference in preparation for the second, and re-started in 2014 in preparation for FfD3 in Addis.

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For more information:

UN Women: <http://www.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2015/7/un-women-ed-statement-financing-for-development-outcome#sthash.L106UTsh.dpuf>

Women's Working Group on FFD (WWG):

<https://wwgonffd.files.wordpress.com/2015/07/women-working-group-reaction-to-addis-ababa-action-agenda-17-july-20151.pdf>

Civil Society Organizations and WWG's response:

<https://csoforffd.files.wordpress.com/2015/07/cso-response-to-ffd-addis-ababa-action-agenda-16-july-2015.pdf>

CSO Forum Declaration, 12 July 2015: <https://csoforffd.wordpress.com/2015/07/14/addis-ababa-cso-ffd-forum-declaration/>

WWG on FfD publication, "Realizing Human Rights in Development", 13 July 2015: <http://wwgonffd.org/2015/07/14/realizing-womens-human-rights-in-development-publication-launched/>

Ana Inés Abelenda and Nerea Craviotto, AWID, "Addis delegates failed to put money where mouth was on gender equality", 17 July 2015: <http://www.awid.org/news-and-analysis/addis-delegates-failed-put-money-where-mouth-was-gender-equality>

Aldo Caliari. Center of Concern, "FFD 3 Outcome: Fishing for Crumbs of Hope in a Sea of Lost Ambition", 20 July 2015: <https://www.globalpolicy.org/component/content/article/271-general/52797-ffd-3-outcome-fishing-for-crumbs-of-hope-in-a-sea-of-lost-ambition.html>

Bhumika Muchhala, Third World Network, NYC, 30 July, 2015, "Post-2015 development agenda debate on Means of Implementation (Part 1 of 2): To annex or not to annex FfD3 outcome, that is the question": <http://www.twn.my/title2/unsd/2015/unsd150719.htm>