Gender equality within the United Nations' international sustainable development policy agreement

- A critical discourse analysis

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Abstract

This thesis sets out to explain the evolution of feminist discourse within the sustainable development policy community. I compare two major United Nations international policy frameworks, Agenda 21 and the Sustainable Development Goals, which have similar objectives and scope and were adopted 20 years apart. The UN agendas define international and national policy and actions that are expected to be taken into consideration by all the UN member states. Its ambitions are to jointly address economic, social and environmental issues through common sets of objectives and cross-cutting goals. Gender issues, especially gender equality feature heavily in both agendas as a key aspect and means to reaching sustainable development. I compare the two agendas and analyze how the gender equality discourse has changed over time.

To guide the analysis, I draw from intersectional feminist theory and use a critical discourse analytical framework. Women, who are the main target in the discourse of gender equality, are subjected as a minority through maintenance and reproduction of gendered norms and structures. I find that in the new agenda women are less marginalized than in the earlier version.

Key words: intersectional feminism, sustainable development, gender equality, United Nations, critical discourse analysis

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1. Introduction

"The achievement of full human potential and of sustainable development is not possible if one half of humanity continues to be denied its full human rights and opportunities" (UN, 2015: para 20).

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), also known as Agenda 2030, are meant to facilitate a process of sustainable change for the world (UN, 2015). It aims for the achievement of ecological sustainability within three key dimensions of human behaviour: economic, social and environmental. The United Nation's General Assembly adopted the agenda in September 2015 replacing and broadening the scope of its forerunner, the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) (ibid). The SDGs include 17 goals with 169 targets and involve a huge range of social issues such as; poverty, hunger, climate change, education, health as well as political rights, gender equality and social justice (ibid). One of the main goals is the achievement of gender equality and the empowerment of women (ibid: goal 5). The objectives are to provide all women and girls the equal rights and opportunities in both public and private life and to eliminate all forms of discrimination against women (ibid). In addition to that, the agenda also takes an integrative approach by putting emphasis on the inter-connectedness of all issues within the SDGs. This mean gender issues should be cross-cutting throughout the whole agenda and makes a textual reading of gender equality interesting. This thesis aims to investigate discursive changes over time, focusing on the issues of gender equality within international sustainable development policy framework. By comparing two very similar documents developed twenty years apart, it will provide an understanding of how gender is represented in a global context.

1.1 A brief presentation of the agendas

Agenda 21 and the SDGs are two major international policy frameworks that pursue sustainable and environmentally sound and socially secured world. Both agendas are non-binding policy frameworks for governments and international, regional and local organisations to take into consideration within their policy-processes. Agenda 21 (UN, 1992) was adopted at the UN conference on Environment and Development in Rio de Janeiro in June 1992. The core themes are set out in 40 chapters that each contain specific objectives, activity suggestions and means of implementation of their respective social and environmental issues. 2030 Agenda

was adopted over 20 years later and is the successor of the MDGs and goes with the title 'Transforming our world' (UN, 2015).

The SDGs includes a variety of actors at the international, regional and local levels in both the process of setting the agenda as well as being target of change for sustainable development. It has tried to tone down the top-down approach making a point of the importance of sustainable developmental change by and for all (UN, 2015). Due to a large variety of issues and with its global implication it is a complex task to achieve. The complexity lies in trying to enable the involvement and inclusion of all stakeholders in making the world a more sustainable and safe environment for all. What the goals together aim to achieve is to change the way development is pursued, and how states incorporate development planning into national strategies that are more inclusive and environmentally sound.

Development has a modernist view of the future and is positive in the capacity of humans to change to a more sustainable way of living (Chowdhury, 2015:143). It promotes relocation of human communities through industrialization, urbanization and renewed technologies (ibid). It also promotes altering land use and property ownership, as well as providing law reforms and economic diversity (ibid). Feminist movements have been working along the lines of these thoughts of modernity, but at the same time contesting the way women are being positioned in the narrative (ibid). Early feminist critique made headway for the inclusion of women in development negotiations, and after struggles women's expertise was included in structuring the programs for development (ibid).

The dimensions of sustainable development are threefold: economic, social and environmental, and work in an integrative manner where many issues have relevance to one and other. Agenda 21 does not set up 'goals' like the 2030 Agenda, but 40 chapters each on a specific environmental and/or social issue. Within those a set of objectives, activities and means of implementation are included. I will use the terms 'goals' as well as 'objectives' for both Agenda 21 and the SDGs.

1.2 Background

Prior to Agenda 21 and the SDGs, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly on December 18, 1979, and took form as an international treaty on September 3, 1981, (UN, 2000). And yet by 1992 when Agenda 21 was developed, and arguably now when the SDGs are under implementation, several of the same issues around women's marginalisation and discrimination in policy-making have not yet been addressed; the processes has shown a strong resistance to feminist thought. Analysis show for example that between 1975 and 2000 the most commitments of countries to CEDAW were made during the Beijing Platform for Action in 1995 and the UN Fourth World Conference on Women (True,

2016:313). In analysis some of the reasons for little progress, True (2016) suggests that the circumstance and the actors involved affect the possibilities of policy change. Examples of affecting circumstances include timing, financial pressures, and peer pressure – e.g. countries could act following regional assessments demonstrating that others are taking action, thus creating a 'wave-effect' (ibid).

The above serves as background to the central question of this paper, and provides an understanding of where the discourse of gender equality comes from in Agenda 21 and the 2030 Agenda. As a priority issue, women are being promoted as one of the core subjects of change within the sustainable development project. Gender equality, empowerment of women and the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women and girls are recognized as crucial issues to be addressed in reaching sustainable development (UN, 2015). These issues are framed under a sustainable development goal of its on – SDG 5. Given the integrative and cross-cutting nature, gender is expected to be further mainstreamed as linked to other goals throughout the 2030 Agenda. However, it explicitly addresses the impacts of gender relations in just a few of the other goals and targets (Stuart & Woodroffe, 2016:70; UN, 2015). It does recognize that women are systematically discriminated against, but does not address how to fundamentally change the way global institutions operate and how to change these patterns (Razavi, 2016:29). Despite some progress, women are still the largest group among people living in extreme poverty (Stuart & Woodroffe, 2016:71).

For centuries women's limitations and possibilities have been imposed on empirical 'women' as a biologically determinist and culturally essentialist definition and classification (Lykke 2010:113). Women experience inequalities both in public and private life, and the empowerment of women is about having equal access to education and equal opportunity for employment and leadership (UN, 2015). Gender inequality is recognized as a global issue and relevant to all 17 goals within the SDGs because it is a universal challenge (gender inequality pervades all societies). Gender equality is thus an objective and an incentive for achieving human development, environmental sustainability, good governance and peace; to make visible a specific goal on gender equality in such a major framework will push governments to act on the issue and be accountable for advancement within this area (Razavi, 2016:30).

Previous reviews of the agenda have been critical of the indicators of gender equality in the policy frameworks. According to analysis of Agenda 2030 by CONCORD, a group of several Swedish organizations working on SDG-related issues, there are limitations in addressing gender equality throughout the Agenda. There is consensus among the authors that almost all goals are missing important points of reference to gender issues (CONCORD, n.d.). However, this might be a matter of how the framework is interpreted. For example, another analysis shows that with some creativity member states and organizations can interpret the goals freely, and in that way, connect the gender issues that need more emphasis (Koehler, 2016).

As a point of departure, I agree with studies that show there has been some progress in integrating gender related issues in international policy-making as a whole (Randall, 1992; Harding, 2005), giving greater thought to mainstreaming than just giving attention to women's

marginalized role or special needs. Since studies show progress in feminist work and a greater acknowledgment to feminist knowledge within politics (Randall, 1992; Harding, 2005), it is possible to already assume a change in the discourse on gender equality. Such change can be seen through progress in the integration of women in mainstream political agenda.

1.3 Research question

This thesis investigates how central concepts of gender equality are reflected in international policy making, by comparing the UN Agenda 21 adopted in 1992 and the UN 2030 Agenda adopted in 2015. Comparing two similar documents that have a span of over twenty years apart would enable an understanding of the discursive changes of gender equality over time. The central themes of gender equality discourse analysed include the construction of women's identities and gendered norms, the integration of gender into mainstream policy process and how this discursively effect women's social reality. Using a critical discourse analysis makes visible the possibilities and limitations women experience in social practice through language.

The main question of this thesis is:

How has the discourse of gender equality changed within the United Nations' international sustainable development policy process over the past 25 years?

1.4 Outline

The analysis of this thesis is divided into three different sections that all represent central notions of gender and feminist thought. First section looks at how gender is being mainstreamed throughout the document; second section looks at the identities and gendered norms that are constructed; and third section discuss the limitations and possibilities this has in discursive practice.

In approaching the analysis, I draw from literature on feminism to read through the Agendas and determine a specific set of concepts and terms that serve as proxies to, synonyms of or elaborate on aspects of gender equality. This is because 'gender equality' does not have to be explicitly written as such, owing to the non-academic nature of the policy text and also differences in periodicity, and thus possibly prevailing terminology, of the two documents. The search includes the terms; gender, gender equality, equal, women, men, power, and empower. Where each of the terms appears, I analyse the aspect of or context in which gender equality is reflected.

The first section is about the integration of gender equality in policy processes. This will give the reader an overview of the documents and an initial understanding of how gender is being

discussed. The second part of the analysis discusses gender norms and identities that are constructed through discourse, and how this is reflected throughout the texts. The third and final part of the analysis draws from the first two sections and provides a discussion on the social limitations and possibilities that the construction of identities cause.

Following this introduction, I present the theoretical framework that will help identify specific ideas of feminist knowledge and intersectional feminist critique. In the methodology chapter I explain the discursive tools used to guide the analysis, a detailed explanation of the choice of material, and finally the limitations of the methodological choice.

2 Theory

Due to deeply rooted gender norms and institutional structures, gender related issues such as women's rights and gender equality have long faced resistance to being reflected in public policy. However, thanks to feminist institutionalisation and organisation the type and nature of these issues have evolved within policy processes, gaining more attention, in general terms. By studying the activities of women's social movement, grass-root organisations, and non-governmental organisations advocating gender equality, feminist scholars have developed new perspectives of political and social institutions. Developing the 2030 Agenda has partly been a success for feminists because it has engaged more actors than the patriarchal groups that has been setting previous agendas (Esquivel 2016; Razavi, 2016). It remains unclear how these emerging perspectives on gender issues are reflected in sustainable development policy discourse, especially in processes and frameworks that set national and international institutional agenda. Using the approach of intersectional feminism and through critical discourse analysis it is possible to explain parts of a discursive change.

2.1 Feminist approach to knowledge

Feminist theory challenges the epistemic and philosophical conception of the world as it is, operating on a knowledge basis developed mainly from the perspective of socially privileged men (Disch & Hawkesworth, 2015:6). It is built on the questioning of partial and androcentric structures of society and the construction of the lives of women through political discourse (ibid). The notion of who is behind the knowledge is relevant in feminist thought - it tries to specify when and under what conditions this is epistemically significant (ibid). Although the scope of and methodology for this paper does not cover stakeholders negotiations behind the scenes that led to the development of the Agendas, the final texts reveal specific power structures in the characterization of 'others'. Feminist thought and knowledge have endured a lot of scepticism, resistance and disbelief for a long time. This is partly due to its positioning and critique towards a patriarchal, male-dominated production of knowledge (Code, 2014). Similar to social constructivism, a feminist approach to knowledge, view knowledge as constructed through interactions between different actors and institutions (ibid). An objective truth or 'Gods view' is therefore not possible to claim, the focus shifts and phenomenon that is to be studied is seen to be situated instead (ibid).

Approaches to inclusion of women in political institutions have evolved over time and taken different forms – e.g. assigning quotas in gender representation, same treatment policies, and more recently attempts at gender mainstreaming. In the case of mainstreaming, there has been some success with the integration of gender equality, in theory, at international, regional and national levels around the world. Gender mainstreaming aims to reduce the gaps and

inequalities between women and men at all levels of society and addressing systematic gender structures (Allwood, 2013). It is a way for governmental bodies, companies and organisations to reflect and integrate knowledge of gender equality in their organisations. Both Agenda 21 and the 2030 Agenda have mainstreaming tendencies. In this analysis the main focus is how these documents integrate gender issues throughout the agenda.

2.2 Gender and development

Within the discussions of peaceful and safe environments and societies women are often portrayed as passive victims of global forces instead of active participants in social activities (George 2016:383). This means there is a failure of addressing women's capacities as active agents. Their local and traditional roles, as for example farming, or fishing or other formal or informal workloads are thus overseen (ibid). What seem to be appropriate activities for women could as a result be constraining and set up barriers for women to legitimize other activities than the 'naturally given' identity. In this example women's experiences are shaped by a set of gender based assumptions which institute the appropriate forms of gender activity and authority, by a higher power (ibid). Feminist scholars have an important role in this case because their work has brought women's issues on the political agenda, and there is a deliberation on gender and environmental insecurity (ibid: 385).

In a study looking at adoption of global resolutions on gender equality within peace-processes, the author (True 2016) concludes that there is a strong resistance in integrating women's equal participation and involvement across United Nations Security Council (UNSC) policies and operations, including: equal participation of women in peace and security decision-making; gender balanced approach in policy analysis; gender-specific data and research within peace-keeping and peace-building operations (True 2016: 308). The study, with special focus on the pacific island states, showed that the policies had clear objectives in theory, but the results after signing the resolution showed little or no change in the implementation process (ibid). Institutions and organizations systemically discriminate against women, in this sense as active participants of peace-building and decision-making processes.

The construction of gender identities and gender norms seem to have a huge potential on finding solutions on how to implement and act on the ideas and ideals of policies seeking gender equality. The SDGs acknowledge this kind of systemic discrimination against women and that change of societal structures is needed, but fail to address how to implement a structural change in institutional systems (Esquivel 2016, Razavi, 2016). With a feminist ideology, a sensitivity to gendered systems provides empirical tools to expose different forms of oppressing norms of society, such as sexism and racism (Code 2014:10).

2.3 Intersectional feminism

Another important contribution to feminist theory is the intersectional perspective that address different kinds of inequalities. This strand illuminates the social production of hierarchies of difference (Disch & Hawkensworth, 2015: 2-3). It has grown into a critical theory that question the exclusion of people based on sexual difference, and draw light on assumptions about sex, race, sexuality and gender (ibid). Intersectionality is common in the theoretical work of contemporary feminism. It draws from black feminism that provides a fundamental insight about power, that there is interaction between various systems of oppression (racism, sexism, capitalism etc.) (ibid:8). Bodies do not exist outside politics and culture since they often have been categorized in a way that gives people different status which determinates their opportunities and limitation in society (ibid). The shaping of individuals does not only describe the perception of 'others', but how individuals understand themselves and their frames of action in comparison to others (ibid:9). Intersectional feminism also reveals power relations between privileged and disadvantaged women and not only based on patriarchal hierarchies (Severs et al., 2016: 347). According to the OECD, one of the obstacles to greater gender equality is gender stereotyping. This happens at home, at work and in broader society; the way women, and other groups, are portrayed will have a normalising effect (OECD, 2017:38). When individuals are ascribed different qualities, it provides a common-view and understanding.

The roles of women in society is of great relevance and importance to international, regional and local policy processes, which could allow them to contribute to setting the agenda, based on their own experiences and capacities. All issues within the frameworks towards sustainable development have more or less relevance to gender; it suggests that all goals are interlinked and suggest cross-cutting policy areas (UN, 2015). Women are among the most exposed to consequences of unsustainable development issues, both socially, economically and environmentally (ibid). Thus it is important to understand the relevance of gender, and to address where it is being discussed or left out. Gender sensitive information could improve the policies and practices of governments, intergovernmental organizations, NGOs, and legal systems. Consequently, this would also improve societies all over the world.

In sum, intersectional feminists reveal a system of domination that interact and impact peoples' identities in various ways (Severs et al. 2016). In the course of answering the main question, I analyse the material with a critical view, assuming androcentric tendencies, and marginalisation of both women and other groups based on race, culture, ethnicity, age and class. My intention is to explain possible changes in how women are represented within global sustainable development.

I do not mention gender beyond the binary form in the agendas. Neither of the agendas distinguish gender other than its binary form of 'women' and 'men'. However, the understanding of gender in this paper reflects the terminological use by other feminist

descriptions of gender. Widely described as a social construct, implying that gender is constructed by pre-defined notions of what gender is (Allwood, 2013: 43). With an intersectional feminist approach it is possible to more widely analyse the definition of gender and inequalities not only based on gender. A critical view of the conception of gender as "fixed" structures and as a natural given, in this case, gender equality discourse can thus be seen as both constraining structures and a possibility for political change. This will be further developed in the analysis with examples from the two documents.

3 Methods

The theory and method in this thesis takes a similar standpoint in the view of knowledge. Discourse analysists also believe that knowledge of the world should not be treated objectively, instead it is created through social interaction (Jorgensen & Phillips, 2008: 12). There is no objective truth, instead, a common truth is constructed by humans where true or false is arguable (ibid). This does not suggest there are no rules or boundaries; "specific situations place restrictions on the identities which an individual can assume and on the statements which can be accepted as meaningful" (ibid: 13). These are some common ground thoughts of discourse analysis. The specific approach I think is mostly suitable for this analysis is critical discourse analysis (CDA). This means there is both a focus on the linguistics and the effects language has on reality. CDA focus on the outcome the text have in social practice (ibid). The following section provides a more detailed description of the methodology and some fundamentals of discourse analysis as well as critical discourse analysis frameworks.

3.1 Critical discourse analysis

This methodological framework aims to explain and reveal power relations between different types of discourses and identities that both legitimize and limit different behaviours (Bergström & Boréus, 2014: 358). A discourse is a dynamic system of rules that both legitimizes and excludes knowledge and, at the same time, is dynamic because the systems of rules tends to change within themselves (ibid). Another important part of discourse analysis that is common for many analytical approaches is the emphasis of language. It is through language we have access to reality, through language we create representations of reality thus it is not a reflection of pre-existing realities but constructed (Jorgensen & Phillips, 2008: 15). Despite this position, there are physical objects that are real; they however gain meaning through discourse (ibid). The analysis of language brings nuances of different realities depending on context and identities; through this dynamic view it is possible to explain changes of social realities. Texts such as Agenda 21 and the 2030 Agenda cannot be analysed or understood in isolation, they can only be understood in relation to webs of other texts and in relation to the social context (Jorgensen & Phillips, 2008: 62).

According to Fairclough, critical discourse analysis aims to find out how aspects of the world are ascribed meaning discursively and what social consequences they have (Jorgensen & Phillips, 2008: 119). Fairclough differentiates between discursive practice and social practice, which makes critical discourse analysis stand out from others (ibid). The discursive practice is the constructed representation of the world, including social subjects and social and power relations (ibid: 57). The role this practice takes is a mechanism that furthers interests of social groups, thus making the discourse not solely linguistic but taking part in social practice (ibid).

The construction of identities in text set the frames in which people can act in a social reality, for example if women are described together with children, it puts women in a position similar to a minor.

Two other important concepts are interdiscursivity and intertextuality, which happen when different discourses and genres are articulated together in one same communicative context (ibid: 65). This is seen as a sign of and a driving force of discursive change, and thus, as a result, in socio-cultural change (ibid). I will discuss the interdiscursivity further in the analysis as I look for changes in the gender equality discourse. One final and important aspect of critical discourse analysis is hegemony. The discursive practices of gender equality within the agenda can be analysed as a part of a hegemonic struggle. It is a contribution to both the reproduction of and transformation of the order of discourse (power relations), and is intended to generate critical social research (ibid: 67-68).

The texts that I aim to analyse are the results of negotiations among several different actors, such as: intergovernmental organizations, non-governmental organizations, expert groups, UN major groups and stakeholder groups. These documents involve several competing social and environmental issues and have a large audience, including governments operating under different conditions. Since the policy recommendations are not obligatory, the language is often nuanced, thus it is up to the reader to interpret the objectives and goals within the Agenda. A critical discourse analysis is applicable because it makes it possible to understand the relationship between language and practice. The way gender equality is being discussed has an effect on the social reality of its subjects. The language of discourse on gender equality is likely to have different implications today as a part of the 2030 Agenda, compared to 25 years ago in Agenda 21. There are both constraining and enabling factors to change, which means the two agendas are likely to have both similarity and differences in how they treat gender equality.

The methodological limitations of discourse analysis are due to its interpretive nature. As I delimit the order of discourse after my own interpretation it has to be clear that it is a constructed discourse in itself (Jorgensen and Phillips, 2008:118). To solve the problem of reflexivity that is inevitable in a study of post constructionist nature, I draw from previous studies and discourses that relate to the question of this analysis. In addition, the incorporation and a pedagogical mapping of each methodological step and clear reference to theoretical and methodological framework make results of the analysis more reliable. The aim is to explain problems in gender equality discourse and to open a discussion on discursive change in issues of social inequality.

There are a couple of factors that make this analysis scientifically relevant. Gender in development is a strong subject and widely cited. Critical discourse analysis will help explain ideas of social reality of women and other marginalized groups, which contributes to a wider understanding of gender in sustainable development processes.

3.2 Material

The main material used for this thesis are the United Nation's international policy frameworks for sustainable development, Agenda 21 and the SDGs, which is part of the 2030 Agenda. I have chosen to limit the material of this thesis to these two key documents because it allows for an in-depth analysis. They are each complex in both their form and purpose. With the aim of understanding changes over time within the gender equality discourse in sustainable development, comparing the SDGs and Agenda 21 are compatible for that purpose and provide sufficient data to answer the question under research:

a) they have both the same institutional setting as they are major policy frameworks, adopted by the United Nations General Assembly, that define international and national policies and actions

b) they have broad and integrative scope, that bring together several important issues, thus making it easy to see how gender can be mainstreamed

c) they have a span over twenty years apart that can show either progress or the lack of progress in addressing gender issues, and

d) they include both the role of developing and developed countries, which gives it a global relevance.

There have been other sustainable development frameworks between Agenda 21 and the 2030 development agenda. The nature of these frameworks does not allow for such analysis and cross comparison as intended here. For example, some have been too topic specific – such as the Kyoto Protocol on climate change. Others have been broad but mainly focused on supporting implementation of Agenda 21, for example the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation from the UN World Summit for Sustainable Development.

Another relevant document is the intermediary framework that could have also been analysed for this thesis: the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), launched by the UN in 2002. However, it will not be included in this analysis for several reasons. There are both structural and procedural differences. The MDGs are framed differently: they are limited in scope (to addressing poverty in developing countries). They were developed by appointed experts and not through inter-governmental negotiations as is the case with Agenda 21 and the 2030 Agenda. Another reason is that in the course of developing the SDGs, lessons were drawn from experiences and progresses in implementing the MDGs (UN, 2015). Thus the SDGs already consider and reflect progress made under the MDGs.

3.2.1 Agenda 21

The first section is on social and economic dimensions and deals with issues such as international cooperation to help accelerate sustainable development in the then called 'developing' countries, combating poverty, changing consumption patterns, demographic

dynamics, protect and promote human health. The second section is on conservation and management of resources for development discuss environment, protection of nature, environmental management of wastes, toxic chemicals etc. The third section on strengthening the role of major groups discusses action for women towards sustainable and equitable development, children, ethnic minorities and other population groups for equal development; strengthening the role of non-governmental organisations (NGOs), local authority initiatives, the role of business, industry and workers and the role of farmers. The fourth section on means of implementation discusses financial resources, environmentally sound technologies, capacity-building, promotion of education, public awareness and training, national and international institutional arrangements and legal instruments and decision-making (UN 1992). These are called objective compared to the newer agendas Goals.

3.2.2 SDGs

The 2030 Agenda is as mentioned above also known as the SGDs which contains 17 goals, each of which further has proposed targets for achievement. Below is a list of the 17 goals (UN, 2015):

- Goal 1. End poverty in all its forms everywhere

- Goal 2. End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture

- Goal 3. Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages

- Goal 4. Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all

- Goal 5. Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls

- Goal 6. Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all

- Goal 7. Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all

- Goal 8. Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all

- Goal 9. Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization and foster innovation

- Goal 10. Reduce inequality within and among countries

- Goal 11. Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable

- Goal 12. Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns

- Goal 13. Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts

- Goal 14. Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development

- Goal 15. Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss

- Goal 16. Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels

- Goal 17. Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development

4. Analysis

Drawing upon the theoretical and methodological framework of this paper, there are several ways to explain nuances within the discursive changes of gender equality. As already noted, it is possible to assume changes because of a greater involvement of women's organizations and feminist thoughts in creating the new agenda. This analysis seeks to answer how these changes emerge in a universal policy framework. By analyzing gender equality discourse through an intersectional feminist theory, it is possible to reveal both how gender identities are constructed and to reveal different forms of inequalities. Through the construction of identities people are given pre-defined frames in which they are supposed and allowed to act in a social reality.

4.1 Mainstreaming gender

The integration of gender into mainstream policy-processes is something that both agendas have the ambition to do. It means there should be a gender perspective integrated into different issues and at all levels. This section provides an overview of the gender equality discourse in the two agendas, and how gender is integrated throughout the texts.

4.1.1 Agenda 21

There are three strong patterns in which gender equality is being discussed. First, and most prevailing, is that women are grouped together with other population groups that experience some form of marginalization. The other groups that require special measures in the pursue to have sustainable development, besides women, are: indigenous peoples, migrants, children and youth, and older people. These are also referenced to when discussing the urban poor and the most vulnerable people of society. These groups together require or are required particular emphasis in policy process, implementation of policy and special attention throughout different development programmes. Besides women these groups are based on age, e.g. children and elderly, and/or based on ethnical background. These are the most disadvantaged groups in society. The following text quoted from Agenda 21 presents an example and summary of this observed pattern:

> "Strategies should establish best possible condition for sustainable local, regional and national development that would eliminate poverty and reduce the inequalities between various population groups – It should assist the most disadvantaged groups – in particular, women, children and youth within those groups – and refugees" (UN 1992, para 3.5.c)

Second pattern is that women's organizations have to be empowered and their roles in society needs to be strengthened at the national, international and local levels (UN 1992). The following text quoted from Agenda 21 illustrates this observation:

> "The overall human settlement objective is to improve the social, economic and environmental quality of human settlements and the living and working environments of all people, in particular the urban and rural poor. Such improvements should be based on technical cooperation activities, partnerships among the public, private and community sectors and participation in the decision-making process by community groups and *special interest* groups such as women, indigenous people, the elderly and the disabled … Furthermore, countries should make appropriate provision to monitor the impact of their strategies on marginalized and disenfranchised groups, with particular reference to the needs of women" (UN 1992, para 7.4).

The third pattern is somewhat similar to the second but seeks the empowerment of individual 'women'. Women need to be empowered within both public and private life:

> "Governments at the appropriate level, in collaboration with national organizations and with the support of regional and international organizations, should establish innovative procedures, programmes, projects and services that facilitate and encourage the active participation of those affected in the decision-making implementation process, especially of groups that have, hitherto, often been excluded, such as women, youth, indigenous people and their communities and other local communities" (UN 1992, para 10.10).

This sort of attention brought to women, and other marginalized groups, is repeated throughout most of the chapters and under different issues in Agenda 21. The first example is picked out from the third chapter on combating poverty (para 3.1-3.12), the second example is taken from chapter 7, on promoting sustainable human settlement (para 7.1-7.80). The third example is from chapter 10, on planning and management of land resources (para 10.1-10.18). The ways that gender is being integrated into these different fields is explicit, where women and other marginalized groups are given emphasis. In most cases governments in cooperation with 'appropriate' actors at 'appropriate' levels should give particular attention to integrating gender into their policy process.

4.1.2 The SDGs

In the SDGs, there is a clear shift in how to integrate gender into mainstream policy process and the tone is rather different. The agenda aims for a more equal world for *all*, which include not only equality between women and men but equal access and equal rights for *all* irrespectively of gender, age, race, ethnicity, class, or disability (UN, 2015). The catchphrase 'Leaving no one behind' implies that all kinds of inequalities should be tackled (Stuart & Woodroffe, 2016: 70). It also implies that governments should make headway for the most marginalized groups before the average (ibid). The intersection of different forms of

marginalisation is a fundamental concept to feminism and important for governments' potential to lift people out of poverty, in all its forms (ibid: 73). According to the 2030 Agenda, people who are vulnerable include: children, youth, persons with disabilities, people living HIV/AIDS, older persons, indigenous peoples, refugees and internally displaced persons and migrants, who all must be empowered (UN, 2015: para 23).

Within the SDGs women are mostly referred to in Goal 5 - to achieve gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls. The pattern from Agenda 21, where women are often targeted together with other marginalized groups, is not as frequent in the SDGs. A similar pattern can be traced in three different places in the new agenda:

> "We are committed to ending poverty in all its forms and dimension, including eradicating extreme poverty by 2030 … We are also determined to end hunger and achieve food security as a matter of priority and to end all forms of malnutrition … We will devote resources to developing rural areas and sustainable agriculture and fisheries, supporting smallholder farmers, *especially women farmers,* herders and fishers in developing countries…" (UN, 2015: para 24).

Compared to Agenda 21, it seems that in Agenda 2030 there is a less generalizing tone on the identity of 'women'. In the example above, special attention is given to *women farmers*, instead of just general 'women'. Focus seems to have shifted from marginalized groups, such as women, ethnic minorities etc. to focusing on countries instead. In most places where similar statements as the ones from Agenda 21 are applied, there are countries that need particular attention in sustainable development processes and that are vulnerable. These countries are: states in conflict, developing and least developed countries, African countries, landlocked developing countries and small island developing States. All who are in need of special attention, are in special situations or have special needs (UN, 2015: para 16, 22, 56).

The other two places where women are mentioned in this context are in the sections on access to and/or provision of water, sanitation and hygiene for all, and on and accessible and safe transport systems (UN, 2015: para 6.2, 11.2). Women still, as in Agenda 21, prevail among the most vulnerable groups in the 2030 Agenda. However, in the 2030 Agenda there is a more general sense to 'vulnerability' and poverty, instead of generalizing 'women' as vulnerable.

Another example that shows a shift in both focus and priority between the two agendas can be found in a comparison of the goal on poverty eradication. In the SDGs, it is set as the first goal, which gives it a strong sense of priority; it also has a stronger promise using the word "ending poverty" (UN, 2015) instead of "combating poverty" (UN, 1992). Vulnerability is not as frequently directed to women but to *people* who live in poverty (UN, 2015: para 6). The Agenda aims for *universal* respect of human rights and a world that respects the needs of the most vulnerable (UN, 2015: para 8). Drawing upon these examples it is possible to assume both a more integrative approach to gender and a less generalizing tone on women's experience. The interconnecting nature of the SDGs imply gender equality should be considered in all related activities.

The problem with a universal language, however, is that gender equality issues might be depraved of its important role in sustainable development. Esquivel (2016) observes that the

meaning of empowerment could be lost if it is too generously used. In some cases, an apolitical use of the term is favoured, by e.g. donors or investors, empowerment then risks losing its purpose (ibid: 14). The point of empowerment is to strengthen people who are marginalized, or even ignored in policy processes. In the agenda 'empowerment' is widely used, but in terms of power relations and the accountability of powerful actors it is weak (ibid: 13).

4.1.3 Summary

This comparison shows that there is a shift in focus of vulnerability and universality. Agenda 21 has a narrower integration of gender throughout the different objectives of the text. The 2030 Agenda provides a more universal tone of sustainable development that imply gender equality discourse should be integrated throughout the whole agenda. The comparison of the gender mainstreaming ambitions in the two agendas shows differences in how it should be done. In Agenda 21 it is more explicit, under almost all social and environmental issues. It is frequent through means of implementation, in particular under capacity building and human resources development. The new agenda set a more integrative tone and leave it open for the reader to both interpret and integrate.

The discursive changes in one of the most prioritized issues of sustainable development, eradicating poverty, are threefold. The first change is in shifting from combating to the more promising term 'ending' poverty. The second is that priority has shifted from being placed second to being the first issue. The third change is in the way gender mainstreaming is being used. In the former agenda, it is explicit with each section containing statements that remind the reader that attention should be given to gender and to other marginalized groups. In the SDGs, some form of imagination is required to combine gender equality issues throughout the different goals.

There are two perspectives to interpreting the shift of the integration of gender in the two agendas. One view is that it misses out to specify gender issues; consequently, in the end it can be left out by the actor who is using the framework in their policy-process where gender issues are more implicit than explicit. Another view is that given the call to mainstream across all goals, there is an underlying responsibility of the concerned actors to integrate gender equality irrespective of which goal they are attempting to address. The question of whether there is enough incentive to actually apply gender equality in policy implementation and real life situations remains unanswered here. One final observation is that, it is up to each country to interpret the policy framework in their own policy processes and under varying, country-specific contexts. This means that gender equality is being prioritized, if considered at all, differently in a mainstream policy agenda in different parts around the world.

4.2 Normative roles

In this part of the analysis a closer look upon the identities within the text will be under investigation. So far, the discussion of gender equality has shown a general image of 'women' as marginalized together with other groups based on economic status, ethnic background and age. These groups have been discussed as fairly homogenous, ignoring the different experiences of individuals that pertain to each group. Intersectional feminism breaks this pattern, both in expose patriarchal oppression and power relations. Gendering and racialisation creates different forms of power relations and inequalities (Disch & Hawkensworth, 2015: 9). The main task in this section is to reveal the identities and gendered norms of the members of marginalized groups that are discussed in the agendas. As seen in the previous section there are in some cases emphasis on giving attention to 'women' and other 'disadvantaged' groups. This is both a way to maintain and reproduce a view of women seen as a minority, it makes that claim possible even though women are about half of the world's population. The following sections show in more detail the contexts in which gender is being discussed.

4.2.1 Agenda 21

Drawing upon previous examples in the first part of the analysis, these different women and ethnic minority groups are often given greater emphasis in specific contexts. Women in particular, are frequently referred to in the fields of education, health, specifically reproductive health, and households:

> "Governments should take active steps to implement programmes to establish and strengthen preventive and curative health facilities that include *women*-centred, *women*-managed, safe and effective reproductive health care and affordable, accessible services, as appropriate, for the responsible planning of family size, in keeping with freedom, dignity and personally held values and taking into account ethical and cultural considerations. Programmes should focus on providing comprehensive health care, including pre-natal care, education and information on health and responsible parenthood and should provide the opportunity for all *women* to breast-feed fully, at least during the first four months post-partum. Programmes should fully support *women's* productive and reproductive roles and wellbeing, with special attention to the need for providing equal and improved health care for all children and the need to reduce the risk of maternal and child mortality and sickness" (UN, 1992: para 5.51).

In this example, the government of the relevant country should take active steps to implement programmes that are both centred on women and managed by women, so far, the objective is clear. These health facilities are supposed to provide accessible services that help women to responsibly plan the family size. This implies that women have the main responsibility for

family planning. Following that, there is another statement that indicates perceived responsibility of women, namely in the roles of parenthood. This does fall into the assumption that women's role is mainly to take care of the household and its members. The last statement about parenthood has yet another level to problematize:

> "Programmes should focus on providing comprehensive health care … including the provision of women to have the opportunity to breastfeed fully, at least during the first four months post-partum".

There is a lack of recognition of women's different experiences. An example related to the intersectional levels of power differences in terms of class can be drawn upon this statement. Working women in a country where they lack legal support to take parental leave, might have different reasons or opportunities to breastfeed and recover postpartum.

The final statement explicitly connects reproductive health as part of women's roles as a homogenous group with shared interests and problems. This thought is illustrated by the following example:

> "The general objectives of protecting vulnerable groups are to ensure that all such individuals should be allowed to develop to their full potential (including healthy physical, mental and spiritual development); to ensure that young people can develop, establish and maintain healthy lives; to allow women to perform their key role in society; and to support indigenous people through educational, economic and technical opportunities" (UN, 1992: para 6.23)

It is not clear what women's key role is here, as it is not specified, but the headline is "Protecting vulnerable groups". Women's vulnerability could thus be read through different contexts, such as: women are uneducated and lack training in specific areas to have same potential as the mainstream; women are held responsible for family planning and reproductive health; and women's key role is to take care of the household.

It is not only women that are given a specific role in society. Indigenous peoples are also being kept somewhat in the periphery of the mainstream, but taken into consideration when it has gain on sustainable development. For example: Integrate traditional knowledge and experience into national health systems (UN 1992, para 6.5. ix.); Conduct research into traditional knowledge of prevention and curative health practices (UN 1992, para 6.5. iii.) or; account should be taken of traditional cultural practices of indigenous people and their relationship to environment (UN 1992, para 7.76.). A stereotype of indigenous people being close to nature in the sense that experience should be drawn from "indigenous relationship to environment".

> "This programme is concerned primarily with changes in unsustainable patterns of consumption and production and values that encourage sustainable consumption patterns and lifestyles. It requires the combined efforts of Governments, consumers and producers. Particular attention should be paid to the significant role played by *women*

and households as consumers and the potential impacts of their combined purchasing power on the economy" (UN, 1992: para 4.27).

This final section from the 2030 Agenda shows women's connectedness to the household. Women and households have a significant role as consumer, and they have a purchasing power on the economy. There is an implication that women are a strong target to achieve sustainable developmental change. However, through the view of critical discourse analysis these gendered identities work as constraint and reproduction to what frames women can and are supposed to act. Thus, in the social reality women are being marginalized through these ideas.

4.2.2 The SDGs

The universal tone of the 2030 Agenda has a different effect on how women's identities are constructed. It avoids the use of stereotypes in the same way as seen in Agenda 21 discussing women's "key roles". It does however recognize women's disadvantage and that their marginalization is grounded in structural forces and institutions. These are characterized by deeply embedded power inequalities and discriminatory social norms which cut across economic, social, and political arenas, although there is deficiency of any suggestions of how to go about a structural change in the 2030 Agenda (Razavi, 2016: 30).

There is a large difference of modality here compared with the former agenda. There is the pronoun "we" which gives a much more personalized tone, that there is some actor or authority that is held accountable. There is a joint effort that implies a determination to *end* hunger, and a *willingness* to devote resources to female farmers. Through the "we" the new agenda has a sense of fellowship. It takes away the sense of having specific actors held accountable for making sure these structural power/oppression relationships change.

> "We resolve, between now and 2030, to end poverty and hunger everywhere; to combat inequalities within and among countries; to build peaceful, just and inclusive societies; to protect human rights and promote gender equality and the empowerment of *women* and girls; and to ensure the lasting protection of the planet and its natural resources. We resolve also to create conditions for sustainable, inclusive and sustained economic growth, shared prosperity and decent work for all, taking into account different levels of national development and capacities" (UN, 2015: para 3).

Women are a major subject of exploitation and suggests to value women rather than make equal with the normative measure of 'men'. The convention of eliminating all forms of discrimination against women (CEDAW) has created a comprehensive definition of discrimination. This definition also has some limitations since it refers of 'men' as a measure by requiring that women have the same rights as men; enjoying those rights on equal terms

(Kabasakal Arat, 2015: 676). Even though the Agenda 2030 has evolved, in that it includes more actors when developing the agenda, it has certain limitations in how some major points of gender issues can be eliminated.

4.2.3 Summary

One major progress in the 2030 Agenda is the toning down of gender and racial stereotypes from its precursor. Although, both agendas only create norms based on marginalized groups that are 'other' to a normative mainstream. The marginalized people include women or groups based on ethnicity and age, and the 'other' seem to pertain to a group of secured and privileged men that live in the so called developed part of the world. By constructing and re-creating these identities in policy it legitimizes power relations of difference in a gendered system.

So far there is some obvious and general linguistic changes in the agenda. In the SDGs, being vulnerable does not have immediate connection to 'women' but to developing countries and people living in these countries. Women's roles seem to have changed in the 2030 Agenda to be active agents towards the objective of achieving sustainable development. Leaving women out of a general discussion and emphasizing does not mean integration of gender relevant is not important. But, a stronger sense of universality leaves an openness for interpretation of how to integrate gender into policy process.

In comparing the two Agendas, in Agenda 21, women are often mentioned in statements together with a focus on people who live in poverty; women are often directly connected to education, mobilization of local communities, reproductive health and household which are typically female dominated fields. In the 2030 Agenda, there is a stronger sense of recognition that women do experience inequality at all levels of society. There is some ideational change in the discourse of gender equality, there is a greater awareness to people's different experiences in and within their own communities.

4.3 Limitations and possibilities through language

The previous chapters have provided examples of the textual implications of the gender discursive changes in the two agendas. They show that women are given roles strongly connected to reproductive health and households. Women and other groups are given specific roles in society that have a sense of neutrality. Women are being subjected to social norms through a gender equality discourse that effects women's social reality (discursive practice): by characterizing women through a particular type of language in policy documents, women are also given frames in which to act in a social reality.

Patterns observed in the first part of the analysis show that women and other marginalized groups require particular attention in social and environmental issues; women's groups as well as individual women have a few different functions in social practice. In Agenda 21 women are portrayed as victims of structural inequality and oppression by higher powers. In the context of this agenda, women are considered as a target that needs to be changed in order to achieve sustainable development, and also as a source of or agent that can facilitate this needed change. They should be empowered through active inclusion in sustainable development processes. In the Agenda, the somewhat absent agent behind the text, which is also the constraining factor, seems to be a patriarchal system that upholds gender norms and stereotypes that effect women's possibilities to fully participate in policy processes.

In the SDGs, there is a sense of joint efforts to achieve sustainable development through the usage of the more inclusive pronoun 'we'. One group's issue is also the issue of the mainstream:

> "All countries and all stakeholders, acting in collaborative partnership, will implement this plan. We are resolved to free the human race from the tyranny of poverty and want and to heal and secure our planet. We are determined to take the bold and transformative steps which are urgently needed to shift the world on to a sustainable and resilient path. As we embark on this collective journey, we pledge that no one will be left behind" (UN, 2015: preamble).

A positive implication in this quote is that by promising to leave no one behind, people who have not been counted for in previous sustainable development processes should be included now. These are the most marginalized of society, and often counted for women (Razavi, 2016). The discursive change between the two agendas is in this case a linguistic change that does not necessarily imply a gender equal progress. The change is rather in the nature of the text, both who it is directed to and who is behind it. There are still limitations and possibilities set out through the identification of women and women's role in society. However, in the 2030 Agenda women seem to have changed to being less victimized and stronger agents for their own sustainable development.

5. Discussion

In the conception of 'women' I found it interesting to investigate what are the views on gender equality within international policy. These agendas were negotiated and adopted twenty years apart and present a suitable timespan for understanding changes in discourse on gender equality and women's roles. Because they are influential in shaping government policy, international organisations, development community, and financial institutions, they provide an understanding of institutional norms that bear on everyday realities for women with a variety of experiences and different life conditions. Women are the main group that both work to change the ideas of gender equality, as well as being the target of change in the discussion of pursuing gender equality. To combat social inequality and injustice, women together with other marginalized groups are often mentioned together as 'vulnerable' and in need of 'special attention' (UN 1992, 2015) – this shows the contexts in which 'women' are presented. It is rather interesting, and to me faulty, to see how women, half of the world's population, are being marginalized and compared with minority groups. As within those groups I assume about half of them are also women.

SDG 5 aims to end all forms of discrimination against all women and girls: eliminate all forms of violence against women and girls in both public and private spheres, including trafficking and sexual and other types of exploitation; recognize and value unpaid care and domestic work; ensure women's full and effective participation and equal opportunity to leadership at all levels of decision-making. These are a few examples of what needs to be done to reach gender equality. However, suggestions for implementation fall short in the end. Even though it identifies the need for legal and political systems that promote empowerment of women and gender equality, there is no information or specific actions on how to implement these policies.

The examples above all show different situations of structural norms that help construct identities through language. Even though there is a stronger sense of awareness of the structural discrimination against women little is said about how to change the gender system in which the agenda is produced. Women continue to be central in discussions where they are given a "natural role" as caregivers, and absent in a typically male-dominated field such as governments and peace-building discourse.

The possibilities the 2030 Agenda provides is the interpretive and strong emphasis of the integration of gender into policy processes. The voices of women, and different experience of women, are important to create policy related documents that are directed to them. To continue to build on a male-biased view of knowledge and world view will instead continue to set up constrain and limit the realization of Goal 5. This would contribute to a change of the power relations of difference as well as to centralize women's issues as to be just people's issues instead.

6. Conclusion

In this thesis I have asked how gender equality discourse has changed in international sustainable development policy from 1992 as reflected Agenda 21 to 2015 as in the SDGs. A critical discourse analysis is combined with intersectional feminist theory, which allowed for explaining linguistic patterns and socially discursive implication of gendered statements. To guide the analysis three intertextual subjects were set; mainstreaming gender, normative roles, and limitations and possibilities of language. The discourse is mainly focusing on women, but involves intersectional tendencies since women are often grouped together with other minorities of society, categorized by race, sex, age, ethnicity, disability and economic status.

The discourse of gender equality has changed in where emphasis is put. Both agendas contribute to gender norms and the marginalization of women. In Agenda 21 there is much emphasis on women's roles and the importance of the fulfilment of women to act within the frames of these roles. There is also emphasis on how to empower these predefined roles. In the 2030 Agenda, women's roles are no longer limited to their marginalized position but have changed into active agents for change. Women have a stronger role as both target of change and as a resource to achieve that change. However, the new agenda is missing a clear incentive for implementation of gender equality as in the policies. The gender equality discourse risks being undermined or even due to the difficulty to see how the lack of specific implementation mechanisms will change social practice at national level. Further research on the question of this thesis could possibly include case studies at several levels and parts of the world, to investigate how gender equality is being integrated.

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