Gender equality from the MDGs to the SDGs: a feminist analysis

Silvana Mariano [1]
Beatriz Molari [1]

[1] Universidade Estadual de Londrina / Programa de Pós-Graduação em Sociologia, Londrina / PR – Brazil

For decades, feminism has driven a gender equality agenda in development policies. Decolonial and intersectional feminisms, for example, have played an anti-racist and anti-colonial agenda. Women's demands have found different degrees of incorporation into international plans, such as the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). In this scenario, this work compared gender equality in the MDGs and the SDGs to analyze their advances and challenges in the face of the gender mainstreaming agenda and intersectional and decolonial demands. Documental research was carried out on the objectives, targets, and results of the MDGs and the objectives and targets of the SDGs. The results indicate that the SDGs are more ambitious than the MDGs by adopting a broader and more transversal approach to gender equality. However, there are important gaps in operationalizing an approach to gender inequalities that considers the intersections of different forms of discrimination that affect different groups of women.

Keywords: gender equality; millennium development goals; sustainable development goals; public policies; gender mainstreaming.

Igualdade de gênero dos ODM aos ODS: avaliações feministas

Há décadas, o feminismo impulsiona uma agenda de igualdade de gênero nas políticas de desenvolvimento. Os feminismos decolonial e interseccional, por exemplo, têm invocado uma agenda antirracista e anticolonial. As demandas das mulheres têm encontrado diferentes graus de incorporação em planos internacionais, como os Objetivos de Desenvolvimento do Milênio (ODM) e os Objetivos de Desenvolvimento Sustentável (ODS). Nesse cenário, este trabalho comparou a igualdade de gênero nos ODM e nos ODS para analisar seus avanços e desafios frente à agenda da transversalidade de gênero e a demandas interseccionais e decoloniais. Para isso, foi realizada pesquisa documental sobre objetivos, metas e resultados dos ODM e objetivos e metas dos ODS. Os resultados indicam que os ODS avançam por serem mais ambiciosos que os ODM e por adotarem abordagem mais abrangente e mais transversal sobre a igualdade de gênero. Entretanto, há importantes lacunas quanto à operacionalização de uma análise das desigualdades de gênero que considere as intersecções das distintas formas de discriminação que afetam os diferentes grupos de mulheres.

Palavras-chave: igualdade de gênero; objetivos de desenvolvimento do milênio; objetivos de desenvolvimento sustentável; políticas públicas; transversalidade de gênero.

Igualdad de género de los ODM a los ODS: análisis feministas

Durante décadas, el feminismo ha impulsado una agenda de igualdad de género en las políticas de desarrollo. Los feminismos decoloniales e interseccionales, por ejemplo, han impulsado una agenda antirracista y anticolonial. Las demandas de las mujeres han encontrado diferentes grados de incorporación en los planes internacionales, como los Objetivos de Desarrollo del Milenio (ODM) y los Objetivos de Desarrollo Sostenible (ODS). En este escenario, este trabajo comparó la igualdad de género en los ODM y los ODS para analizar sus avances y desafíos frente a la agenda de transversalización de género y las demandas interseccionales y decoloniales. Para ello se realizó una investigación documental sobre objetivos, metas y resultados de los ODM y objetivos y metas de los ODS. Los resultados indican que los ODS avanzan por ser más ambiciosos que los ODM y por adoptar un enfoque más amplio y transversal de la igualdad de género. Sin embargo, existen vacíos importantes en la operacionalización de un abordaje de las desigualdades de género que considere las intersecciones de las distintas formas de discriminación que afectan a distintos grupos de mujeres.

Palabras clave: igualdad de género; objetivos de desarrollo del milenio; objetivos de desarrollo sostenible; políticas públicas; transversalidad de género.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Incorporating demands for equality in debates and actions on development results from decades of action by women's movements. Sardenberg (2018), when resuming the participation of Brazilian feminists for introducing the gender perspective in speeches on development, emphasizes that gender equality was incorporated into the founding charter at the first articulating meeting of the United Nations (UN), held in San Francisco in 1945. The preamble of the charter reaffirms "[...] the faith in the fundamental rights of human beings, in the dignity and value of the human being, in equal rights of men and women, as well as of large and small nations" (Organização das Nações Unidas Brasil [ONU], 1945). After this fact, many discussions aimed to adjust development programs based on the feminist critique, which evoked the need for adopting a gender perspective in international plans.

Nobre (2016) highlights that, in the 1990s, the UN applied the gender mainstreaming strategy to discussions on development, as in the gender equity proposal in the Beijing Action Platform, approved at the Fourth World Conference on Women, held in 1995 (Sardenberg, 2010). The gender mainstreaming strategy emerged in the late 1980s, but its adoption prevailed from 1995 onwards. According to Nobre (2016, p. 646), the context for the elaboration of this strategy "were the structural adjustment policies imposed by multilateral financial institutions in the 1980s on indebted countries, on the verge of insolvency, because of the unilateral increase in interest rates", which were mainly adopted in developing countries. Although the so-called neoliberal policies were a relevant part of this context, it is crucial to consider the positive impulses derived from the cycle of UN conferences during the 1990s. In the Brazilian case, the redemocratization process was also essential, for which women's participation was a relevant factor.

The implementation of fiscal adjustment policies in the 1990s resulted in increasing poverty and the adoption of social policies that included money transfer and providing private services to soothe the situation (Nobre, 2016). In this scenario, women were considered the most vulnerable, but also those who could manage unaddressed and unanswered needs by the state and the private sector, as they had much to contribute to development (Cornwall, Harrison, & Whitehead, 2013). However, only addressing gender for development is not sufficient for the policies adopted to contribute to equality. This problem occurs especially when speeches promote building women's social and political identities, since they are often seen as subjects without agency.

In more recent periods, the international debate on gender equality has gained new dimensions, and sometimes new contours, with the creation of the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG), which were internationally agreed, with MDG corresponding to the period 2000-2015 and SDG to 2015-2030. Hence, it is relevant to investigate how gender equality is incorporated in these documents, which are currently important vectors of development policies, and we raised the following research question: what happened to the vision, objectives, and goals related to gender equality in the transition from MDG to SDG, especially regarding the achievement of gender mainstreaming? To answer this question, we carried out a document search to examine MDG and SDG and compare them in terms of the possibilities and challenges for advancing the gender equality agenda in feminist debates on gender mainstreaming, and the publications of decolonial feminism on gender and development. In this article, we employ gender as an analytical category, as proposed by Joan Scott (1995), designating the social constructions established on the basis of the differences between sexes. We were particularly interested in the constitution of gender in social institutions and organizations related to the access to material and symbolic resources of a society.

This article is organized in three sections, in addition to this introduction, the final remarks, and the references. The first section addresses the strategy of gender mainstreaming, considering the approaches that deal with the inclusion of women in the development topic, and presents MDG and SDG. The second section analyzes Goal 3 of MDG and its respective target 3A as to the treatment of gender equality, based on the criticisms made by women from the Global South. The third section, rooted on the perspectives of decolonial feminisms on gender and development, addresses the advances in terms of gender equality in Goal 5, the targets and indicators of SDG in relation to MDG.

The results indicate that the two commitments have the common characteristic of facing the issue of gender inequality as a social problem, which can contribute to UN signatory states for creating more appropriate actions to fight inequalities experienced by their populations. SDG advance by being more ambitious than MDG and by adopting a more comprehensive and cross-sectional approach to gender equality. However, despite these advances, there are still important gaps regarding the operationalization of an approach to gender inequalities that considers the intersections of the different forms of discrimination that affect distinct groups of women.

2. APPROACHES ON DEVELOPMENT: MDG AND SDG

The development of a society goes through economic, social, and political spheres that frequently cross each other, and from these intersections emerge central issues for debating the topic. For Bucher and Dominquez (1995), identifying women's subordination as a problem for the development of a society has led to new perspectives and new solutions to this issue. However, the efforts depend on how each perspective conceives women's role in society, which is related to knowing their economic and social participation and interpreting their capacity in the production area. This reflects in the way women are incorporated into development projects.

Gender mainstreaming is a way to guide public policies' building that incorporate women. There are disagreements about the conceptual design of the term (Marcondes, 2019); hence, this paper understands it as the incorporation of the gender perspective into public policies, guided by the commitment to equality (Farah, 2004; Marcondes, 2019).

There are four development approaches that propose to address women's issues: family; women in development; women and development; and gender and development. The characteristics of each perspective, as well as considerations about them, are presented in Box 1.

BOX 1   DEVELOPMENT APPROACHES

Approach	Considerations
Family (1950's). Inspired by the Modernization Theory.	The non-inclusion of women was defended by the argument that development would occur through a "cascading effect", which would benefit them. Differences between sexes define each individual's functions. Hence, women carried out functions related to the domestic environment.
Women in development (1970's). Criticism of the Family perspective, by understanding that women still experienced inequalities, despite modernization.	Development depended on women's economic contribution. Therefore, it was necessary to break with the sexual division of labor that established the activities to perform based on gender.
Women and development (1980's). Criticism of the Women in development perspective, based on the Marxist Theory.	Development affects differently sexes, genders, classes, and ethnicities; hence, women's position would improve if international and class inequalities were eliminated. However, by prioritizing class relations, this perspective does not question gender relations; for example, domestic work, which is often not acknowledged as labor.

Continue

Approach	Considerations
Gender and development (1990's).	The focus changes from "women" to "gender", to emphasize the cultural and historical building of genders; the unequal relationships between men and women and their impacts on development; power relations and the social organization of inequality. MDG Goal 3, which addressed gender equality, was aligned to this approach.

Source: Elaborated by the authors based on Bucher and Dominquez (1995), Kabeer (2005), Massolo (1999), Parella-Rubio (2003), and Santos (2014).

As we can see, labor organization is a recurring concern in development approaches. When women's work is considered indispensable to the family, only their reproductive role is recognized, which hides the productive activities they do (Family perspective); hence, there is no notion of how gender affects the configurations of production relations (Parella-Rubio, 2003).

The **women in development** perspective, on the other hand, emerged in the 1970s and was critical of the family perspective because, contrary to what modernization theories predicted, women still experienced a context of inequalities, despite modernization (Kabeer, 2005).

For Santos (2014), the 'women in development' perspective sought to integrate women into development-related discussions held by development agencies, governments, and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs). That perspective understood women's subordination as a result of the sexual division of labor, which excluded them from highly prestigious positions. In that conception, equality between men and women would be achieved by breaking that divisions, through legal and administrative changes to fight discrimination against women (Bucher & Dominquez, 1995). In other words, women's economic independence would promote the reduction of inequality between them and men (Parella-Rubio, 2003).

With this logic, that perspective conceived women as socially productive, contributing to development (Kabeer, 2005). This understanding also looked at economic aspects, focusing on the amount of money women could mobilize. Thus, development projects started to include women because they needed their economic contribution (Bucher & Dominquez, 1995).

The 'women in development' perspective is based on liberal thinking, which assumes aspects that were targets of criticism, because, in this conception, differences between individuals are ignored and the capitalist economic system is accepted without questioning. In this perspective, discrimination against women results from individual actions and development planning, so it does not pervade sexism and does not seek to identify the sources of women's oppression (Bucher & Dominquez, 1995), such as the logic of the production system (Parella-Rubio, 2003). By not addressing the system of production critically, this perspective does not challenge the relationship between the sexual division of labor and sexual segregation in the labor market, which is present in women's life through occupational discrimination, the wage gap between men and women, and the unequal division of labor in the domestic environment. Therefore, the insertion of women in productive activities is encouraged without addressing the inequalities still present in this scenario.

The '**women and development**' perspective emerged in the early 1980s, and focused on criticizing the 'women in development' approach (Bucher & Dominquez, 1995). It is based on Marxist feminist theory, and the solution for gender equality is divided in two scopes, one in the short term, regarding the change of the sexual division of labor, so that men would participate in the unpaid domestic work and women in the paid productive work. In the long term, a socialist revolution would be necessary to remove women from capitalist exploitation and to eliminate the international division of labor established between poor and rich countries.

In this perspective, development has specific impacts on individuals of different sexes, classes, genders, and ethnicities, so that women's position would improve if international and class inequalities were eliminated. Therefore, it would not be a problem to include women in development projects, since they had always been inserted in actions that promoted their societies' development, but the challenge was to acknowledge the activities they performed, such as unpaid domestic work, often undervalued, and equal participation and compensation in the labor market.

Criticism of the 'women and development' perspective emphasizes that by prioritizing class relations, this approach fails to address gender relations (Bucher & Dominquez, 1995). This leaves out important issues, such as the reasons why women's work is not recognized, which are essential to the gender equality debate.

The last perspective is the '**gender and development**', which emerged in the mid-1990s. In this conception, the focus shifts from "women" to "gender," as it emphasizes the cultural and historical building of genders, the unequal relations between men and women and their impacts on development, power relations, and the social organization of inequality (Massolo, 1999). Santos (2014) highlights that in this perspective the sexual division of labor stems from the social relations between sexes, which puts men in the productive sphere and women in the reproductive sphere (Hirata & Kergoat, 2007). There are two principles that organize work within this logic: separation and hierarchy. The first refers to the division of attributions conceived as appropriate for individuals according to their sex. The second establishes that the work done by men is more valued than the work done by women.

In a society organized by the sexual division of labor, men are more valued, and their performance is seen as more important for development. For women, this division makes them responsible for domestic work and care activities, which are considered as having less social value, rendering them invisible and undervalued for some sectors of society (Paradis, 2019). Care practices are included in what is understood as 'care', a polysemic term that involves "watching out, solicitude, concern for others, being attentive to their needs" (Hirata, 2010, p. 43). Care integrates unpaid domestic work, that is, activities done by women and understood as a way of showing love to family members. However, this is not the way men express this feeling. Despite the invisibility of unpaid care work in a sexual organization of labor, this activity mobilizes a significant amount of money every year. In 2019, the estimated global value of this type of work done by women aged 15 years was US$ 10.8 trillion (Oxfam, 2020).

Considering that women are responsible for care work also reflects in occupational segregation, since most often they are the ones who do this paid activity, which we can call the professionalization

of care work. Feminist debates on this occupation expose the precarious work situations, such as the lack of professional registration and the damage to the health of women working as caregivers, companions, nursing assistants, nannies, etc., who have no rights regarding the activities they perform (Hirata, 2010).

Sex is not the only system that establishes hierarchies. Systems originating in modern capitalist and colonialist thought also emphasize categorical logic about race, gender, and sexuality (Lugones, 2014). Unpaid care work is done mostly by women and girls affected by discriminations of race, class, ethnicity, nationality, and sexuality that intersect each other (Oxfam, 2020), and further strengthen a society's scenario of inequalities. Naturalizing women's responsibility for unpaid domestic and care work affects their lives by inserting them precariously in the labor market, thus compromising their income; it generates or worsens health problems due to physical and mental efforts, hindering their access to continuing education (Paradis, 2019).

Regarding care, the feminist economy brings a proposal for designing public policies that aim to reduce inequalities without creating others, which involves recognizing the different political subjects involved in each economic decision as individuals capable of reversing situations of subordination. The feminist economy, therefore, has as priority the social responsibility of care and the appreciation of goods essential to life, as is the case of producing goods for self-consumption in experiences of solidarity economy (Nobre, 2016).

The development approaches mentioned early address the sexual division of labor differently. While in the family perspective women are mere beneficiaries of development, the 'women in development' perspective emphasizes the sexual division of labor as something that must be overcome in order to achieve gender equality. The 'women and development' approach, on the other hand, recognizes the work done by women, but centralizes the discussion on class relations established at the workplace; therefore, it does not address the power relations that organize the work done by men and women based on gender. Finally, the 'gender and development' perspective discusses the hierarchical relations between the productive and reproductive spheres, since it understands that the unequal relations between men and women make up the social, political, and economic inequalities of a society.

The sexual division of labor has a great flexibility, which means that the situations that occur are not stable, and change in time and space (Hirata & Kergoat, 2007). Parella-Rubio (2003) mentions the experiences of women in Western societies - despite their higher levels of education and participation in the labor market, they were still affected by occupational segregation, wages lower than men, and responsible for unpaid and care work. Differences are also visible among distinct groups of women, as those belonging to the middle and upper classes can hide part of their subordination by hiring other women for the domestic work, mostly from racialized lower classes (Biroli, 2016). Therefore, by focusing only on economic aspects, differences among individuals are ignored, and occupational segregation based on gender is not addressed.

In the 'women and development' approach, the transformation of the sexual division of labor aims to eliminate international class inequalities, but does not address gender relations, which are the focus of the 'gender and development' perspective. This is because gender relations provide the

basis for the sexual division of labor, as well as for social, political, and economic inequalities in a society. Hence, it is evident that incorporating women into development enables approaching gender equality in different ways, which can even result in new practices.

Women's instrumentalization occurs when they are placed in highly strategic positions (Dobrowolsky, 2007 as cited in Labrecque, 2010). When applied in international development plans, instrumental logic organizes the measures mechanically, which satisfies practical gender needs. The study developed by Labrecque (2010) in a Mexican city is an example of this form of instrumentalization, as the microcredit program created by public management made local women participatory and income-generating, although it did not eliminate gender inequalities. Similarly, in development plans, international institutions instrumentalize women from the Global South by allocating financial grants to them, based on the argument that they manage better the money received and respect more the rules of the programs, a practice that shows a colonialist thought (Vergès, 2020). Financial benefits help women in the Global South to carry out practical daily activities, but do not include actions that promote social justice and gender justice.

Therefore, we question if gender mainstreaming, as addressed in international development plans, effectively collaborates with gender equality. In this study, we turn our attention to MDG and SDG. A series of summits held during the 1990s discussed the topic of human development and resulted in the approval of MDG, adopted by UN member states in 2000. Resolution No. 55/2, of the UN General Assembly, which was named the United Nations Millennium Declaration, was the founding framework of MDG. The declaration was adopted by representatives from 191 countries at the 55th session of the General Assembly, also known as the UN Millennium Summit, held in September 6-8, 2000, in New York. According to this document, the main challenge at that moment was to make globalization positive for everyone, considering the unequal distribution of its benefits and costs (ONU, 2000). The declaration recognized that developing countries or those with transition economies faced the most difficulties, which required a broad effort for an equitable and inclusive globalization. In Goal 3, gender mainstreaming is aligned with the 'gender and development' perspective addressed earlier.

After the period established in the Millennium Development Goals Agenda, in September 2015, representatives from 193 UN member states, meeting in New York, recognized that eradicating poverty was the main challenge at the global level, and an indispensable action for sustainable development. The result of the meeting was the document entitled *Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development,* which is "an action plan for the people, the planet, and prosperity that seeks to strengthen universal peace" (ONU Brasil, 2015). It consists of 17 SDG and 169 targets, which were created after weighing up the goals not reached by the MDG Agenda, and aims to achieve advances in eradicating poverty and promoting a dignified life according to the planet limits. The agenda considers a time frame of 15 years, from 2016 to 2030.

In gender mainstreaming, started in MDG and deepened in SDG, there are changes in the very use of gender, linking it more strongly to social problems. As Connell (2014) observes, gender theories formulated in the North, and most popular among us, are usually those of cultural orientation and focused on the problem of identities, as in certain currents of post-structuralism and queer theories. Gender theories designed in the Global South provided an important contribution by

linking the gender issue to social justice, creating, in this case, demands for a gender social justice. In this vision, which includes but is not limited to the identity problem, a wide range of interests, demands, and topics emerge, such as the right to land, poverty, nutrition, hunger, housing, child marriage, forced pregnancy, fight against HIV/AIDS, environmental destruction, colonialism, and neoliberalism. Hence, Global South feminism has contributed to incorporating visions of gender justice into human development.

In the following sections, we compare these documents regarding their possibilities and challenges for advancing the agenda of gender equality.

3. GENDER EQUALITY IN MDG

Goal 3 of MDG (Box 2) addressed specifically gender equality, which was a gain in terms of visibility for intertwining the problems of gender inequality and the promotion of human development.

BOX 2   MDG GOAL 3

Promote gender equality and women's autonomy

Target 3 A – Eliminate gender disparity in primary and secondary education, preferably by 2005, and at all education levels until 2015.

Source: Elaborated by the authors based on ONU (2015).

Goal 3 only established Target 3 A, referring to education. This vision was expanded to include indicators related to women's insertion in the labor market and their participation in political positions. Despite this expansion, there is an absence of targets. This strategy was criticized for its shyness in committing to gender equality and women's empowerment.

The 2015 Millennium Development Goals Report, published by the UN, showed that Goal 3 and Target 3A were achieved globally. However, there are regional disparities, so that among developing countries, only 64% have achieved gender parity in primary education, and one-third has achieved parity in secondary education. In 2015, women accounted for 41% of paid workers outside the agricultural sector, a 35% increase from 1990. From 1990 to 2015, the average proportion of women in parliaments nearly doubled, and they gained more space in almost 90% of the 174 countries considered. Still, in 2015, women held only one out of five seats in parliaments (ONU, 2015).

MDG results were deemed unsatisfactory, since they showed that education gains were not sufficient to remedy iniquities in the labor market and in politics (Struckmann, 2018), in addition to evidence of inequalities between different countries or regions. Kabeer (2005) weighed up the gains

and limits of education. On the one hand, there is a large body of evidence on the positive effects of women's access to education, such as more cognitive capacity and aptitude to reflect, question, and act on their living conditions, which contributes, for example, to train them in contacts with state agents and to face situations of domestic violence. On the other hand, the changes brought about by education are also conditioned by the context; therefore, some of them impose additional constraints to gender equality and women's empowerment. In this regard, Kabeer (2005, p. 17) warned:

> Where the role of women in society is defined purely in reproductive terms, education is seen as equipping girls to be better wives and mothers or increasing their chances of getting an appropriate husband. These are legitimate aspirations, given society realities. However, they do little for equipping girls and women to question the world around them and the subordinate status assigned to them.

In recent decades, in Brazil, women have achieved, on average, more years of schooling than men; however, in the labor market, they received, in 2019, on average, 76.4% of men's earnings (Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística [IBGE], 2018). This is largely explained by the gender bias that affects the dynamics of the labor market, limiting both the choices of schooling and careers, and the distribution of time between paid and unpaid work. Thus, Brazilian women are more responsible than men for caregiving and other unpaid work (Souza & Mariano, 2018). These barriers for converting education into gains in the labor market are also affected by the intertwining of gender, race, and class. Black women, overrepresented among poor people, are mostly employed in jobs with low social recognition, such as domestic work. Therefore, they take care of people from white families, and of their own family members. Socially, they are the main source of care in an unequal, impoverished, racialized, and sexualized society (Gonzalez, 2020).

These factors justify development policies with gender and intersectional mainstreaming. For Collins and Bilge (2020), Gonzalez (2020), and Crenshaw (2002), the intertwining of different systems of oppression, such as capitalism, patriarchy, and racism, produces its own dynamics of opportunities and barriers that are only understood when the analytical framework is able to grasp the social interactions that occur in these spaces. Thus, the intersectional approach highlights forms of inequalities that remain hidden by explanations that rely on a single cause, or that separate and rank categories. In this perspective, when seeking remedies for these inequalities, public policies' answer must be intersectional; that is, to achieve development with gender equality, we must answer to inequalities among women, avoiding what Crenshaw (2002) called overinclusion and underinclusion.

MDG also included Goal 5 - improving maternal health - whose objective was to reduce maternal mortality rate by three-quarters between 1990 and 2015. The 2015 report indicated that such target was not reached, as the worldwide decrease was only 45%. A second target of Goal 5 predicted achieving universal access to reproductive health by 2015. However, only half of pregnant women were receiving the recommended amount of prenatal care. Global births attended by skilled health

professionals grew from 59% to 71% between 1990 and 2015, showing a slow progress. In the same period, contraceptive prevalence grew only from 55% to 64% among women aged 15 to 49, married or in a consensual union (ONU, 2015).

Given that maternal mortality is most often the result of preventable deaths, its occurrence is a direct product of the gender order; this variable is especially gender-sensitive, and MDG failure is an indication of the limitations to achieve women's empowerment. Additionally, the 2010 Human Development Report (HDR) (PNUD, 2010, p. 109) mentions the importance of services such as "basic education, adequate nutrition, and access to contraceptives, prenatal health services, and deliveries assisted by competent personnel. Such services are not always available to all Brazilian women, and access is conditioned by a combination of gender status, class inequalities, and institutional racism. This combination results in black women in Brazil having a higher risk of maternal mortality than white women (Martins, 2006).

The one-off insertion of gender equality in MDG and the overall failure of the targets of Goal 5, regarding maternal health, were the object of feminist criticism that reported mismatches in the efforts to reconcile the Beijing Action Platform and MDG. Fukuda-Parr (2016) observed that MDG were focused on poverty and its mitigation and brought a novelty, by abandoning the concept of development centered on production capacity and market economy, and adopting an idea of development focused on capacity. Among the criticisms to MDG was the inadequacy of norms and principles of human rights, especially equality, participation, non-discrimination, and transparency. Omissions regarding women's reproductive health were also criticized.

Feminist scholars and activists have also criticized the model of vertical relations between North and South, which adopts perspectives that consider poor women as powerless (Batliwala & Dhanraj, 2013; Cornwall et al., 2013). Post-colonial and decolonial feminists have reported and criticized the presence of colonizing ideas about gender equality and development, even prior to MDG. Mohanty (1984) exposed the power relations that allowed "Western" feminisms to produce a monolithic "Third World woman". In this arbitrary and dichotomous construction, this woman was defined as ignorant, poor, uneducated, bound to tradition, domestic, family-oriented, victimized, etc. This vision, in line with the "family" approach to development, resulted in programs that had a universal conception of women in developing countries, not recognizing them as subjects of development, but rather as beneficiaries. For Spivak (2010), this benevolent vision preserves the subordinate place assigned to them.

In the 1990s, while the "women in development" approach was still spreading, in the midst of high poverty growth, caused by the expansion of neoliberal policies (deeply implemented in Latin American countries), the "development" agenda re-emerged. The development-underdevelopment debate and the terms "First World" and "Third World" were reformulated. As Escobar (2014) and Quijano (2000) observe, this debate is an expression of the reconfiguration of world capitalist power.

As of the second half of the twentieth century, Latin American thinkers showed a fruitful production of new development theories, such as the dependency theory, and the decolonial and post-development theories; however, these theories were not always efficient for capturing the relevance of gender and race. Therefore, the feminist production prevailed in including gender and race in this

agenda. Anzaldúa (2005), Lugones (2014), and Segato (2012) advanced these theories and gathered elements such as capitalism, patriarchy, and racism. These views, along with feminist activism in the region, have contributed to subsequent advances in SDG, together with the more recent development focus - "gender and development".

In the last decades, amidst the reconfigurations, the terms "developed" and "underdeveloped" have been replaced by "developed" and "developing", which, for Quijano (2000), continues to express the same perspective of the previous dichotomous pair. With the "human development" debate, an important change was to differentiate "development" and "economic growth," adding other dimensions to the debate and measurements, which expanded the space for the gender agenda and the awareness of the interdependence between gender equality and human development. Despite these changes, women taken as audience, or "object" of the development programs implemented in that period, continued to be characterized as "Third World women" (Mohanty, 1984). In other words, there are policy and programs' practices that blend the old 'family' focus with the more recent 'gender and development' focus.

Without sufficiently overcoming the legacies of previous development approaches, such as the 'family' and 'women in development' perspectives, MDG were mostly interpreted as an expression of 'power coloniality'. Development programs were designed in the North to be carried out in the Global South, oriented to women considered dependent and unable to define their own terms of autonomy and development. When assessing MDG results for South Africa, Struckmann (2018, p. 5) observed that, although there was progress, the achievement of MDG was "ineffective in addressing the main obstacles that hinder attaining substantive gender equality and justice in the country, such as traditional culture, harmful cultural practices, and other expressions of masculinity and patriarchy". Similar assessments were made by feminists from different countries in the Global South, as noted in the Beijing Platform follow-up meetings (Cornwall & Edwards, 2015; C. Moser & A. Moser, 2005).

These evaluations revealed the trend of development programs to instrumentalize poor women. By making instrumental use of the reproductive obligations socially assigned to women, these actions take advantage of their unpaid work to enhance their effectiveness and efficiency, like reinforcing women's dedication to meeting targets related to childhood and adolescence. Thus, a common problem was to promote the so-called "fight against poverty" without facing the issue of women's subordination, and, even less, the diverse impacts on racialized women. Traditional gender roles, and the consequent sexual division of labor and care genderization, became useful to designers and managers of these programs. Under these conditions, the agenda of 'women's empowerment' was re-signified to provide a useful meaning to instrumentalization. Insisting more on gender mainstreaming was one of the main strategies adopted by feminism in response to this scenario.

The accumulation of critical assessments and analyses designed by women in the Global South has produced some effects on the formulation of SDG, which we discuss next.

4. GENDER EQUALITY IN SDG

SDG define Goal 5 as specific to gender equality: *To achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls*. The subtitle shows two important advances. By referring to "all", the signatory states are urged to develop inclusive actions, paying attention to diversity among women, consistent with intersectional and decolonial views. By mentioning "women and girls", SDG contribute to overcome the vice of gender policies guided by adult-centrism, directed especially to adults, without explicit links to the children and adolescents' rights agenda.

Goal 5 comprises nine targets and 14 indicators. In Box 3, we listed the targets and comments on the perceived advances.

BOX 3   GOAL 5 OF SDG AND ADVANCES IN RELATION TO MDG

Targets	Advances
5.1 End all forms of discrimination against all women and girls everywhere.	Emphasizes *discrimination*, one of the factors that put up barriers for women and girls' opportunities.
5.2 Eliminate all forms of violence against all women and girls, in the public and private spheres, including trafficking and exploitation, sexual and of other types.	The explicit reference to violence against women and girls extends the focus by detaching itself from adult-centrism; "all forms of violence" extrapolate intimate relationships, including the public sphere and forms of violence such as trafficking and sexual exploitation. This target follows the updated approach on the topic, as seen, for example, in the resolutions relating to the Inter-American Convention on the Prevention, Punishment, and Eradication of Violence against Women (Convention of Belém do Pará).
5.3 Eliminate all harmful practices, such as early, forced, and child marriages, and female genital mutilation.	Incorporates topics of concern expressed in the Beijing Declaration, of 1995, such as forced child marriage and female genital mutilation.
5.4 Recognize and value the unpaid assistance and domestic work, by making available public services, infrastructure, and social protection policies, as well as promoting shared responsibility within the home and the family, according to national contexts.	This target is in line with the Beijing Declaration, which includes the strategic goal of "promoting the harmonization of work and family responsibilities for women and men". Domestic work and caregiving are issues with special appeal to women in developing countries, as in Latin America.

Continue

Targets	Advances
5.5 Ensure women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic, and public life.	The target and indicators expand the vision beyond the parliament seats, and include other positions with power to make decisions.
5.6 Ensure universal access to sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights, as agreed in accordance with the Program of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development and the Beijing Platform of Action and the documents resulting from their review conferences.	Feminist scholars have criticized the absence of sexual and reproductive rights in the scope of MDG; as a progress, SDG have explicitly included the achievements made in the outcomes of the Cairo (Population and Development) and Beijing (Women) Conferences.
5.a Undertake reforms to give women equal rights to economic resources, as well as access to ownership and control over land and other forms of property, financial services, inheritance, and natural resources, in accordance with national laws.	This target comprises structural aspects, such as economic rights, access to properties and natural resources, and opens up possibilities to move beyond the poverty issue and face inequalities, as some critics of MDG have claimed.
5.b Increase the use of basic technology, in particular information and communication technology, to promote women's empowerment.	By including the technology topic, especially Information and Communication Technology, new opportunities emerge for answering to new forms of inequality, with impact on gender inequalities.
5.c Adopt and strengthen solid policies and legislation for promoting gender equality and empowerment of all women and girls, at all levels.	This is a generic target, whose usefulness may be to host different initiatives under the perspective of gender equality and women and girls' empowerment.

Source: Elaborated by the authors based on ONU (2022).

In addition to presenting a more ambitious specific goal, SDG represent a leap in gender mainstreaming. There was an expansion from one to nine targets and from three to fourteen indicators. Moreover, gender mainstreaming is expressed in the whole document. In a study conducted by the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) in 2016, targets associated with gender equality were identified in all 17 goals of SDG (Bidegain-Ponte, 2017). Besides being more ambitious, SDG also form a new political pact.

For Fukuda-Parr (2016), while MDG focused on poverty alleviation, SDG focus on poverty eradication and adopt a broader and more transformative agenda, including environmental, social, and economic sustainability targets, which result from a wide process of participation of different actors. Bidegain-Ponte (2017) observes that one of SDG ambitions is to reduce inequalities within and between countries. As a result, political commitments cover both developing (feature of the anti-poverty model) and developed countries.

If, on one side, there were advances with SDG, on the other there were mismatches between the ambition and generality of the targets. It is a disadvantage to make a political commitment whose targets are not quantifiable, or, when they are, they seem unattainable, like target 5.2: "Eliminate all forms of violence against all women and girls in the public and private spheres, including trafficking and sexual and other types of exploitation". Considering the extent and characteristics of the phenomenon, it seems unreasonable to estimate its "elimination" by 2030. Paradoxically, SDG have expanded the promises to "achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls", but they are very difficult to demand from the signatory states. We notice that this pact states a final political value, which is desirable, rather than an outcome to be measured. As Esquivel (2016, p. 9) mentions, "the vision of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is not always met with a sufficiently strong language, clear policies, or availability of funds".

How concrete is the statement "all women and girls"? Looking at the indicators for each target, we notice a distinction between women and girls in several situations. However, differences of race, ethnicity, and sexuality were not considered in the indicators, keeping the deficiencies of public policies that do not see intersecting forms of oppression.

Observe the two indicators regarding target 5.2:

> 5.2.1 Proportion of women and girls aged 15 years and older who already had a partner and were subject to physical, sexual, or psychological violence by a current or former intimate partner in the last 12 months, by type of violence and age;

> 5.2.2 Proportion of women and girls aged 15 years and older subject to sexual violence by people other than their intimate partners in the last 12 months, by age and place of occurrence.

These indicators advance by considering aspects such as age, type, and place of violence against women. However, they do not contribute to expose the combined effects of genderized racism or racialized genderization. For example, in Brazil, while the overall rate of reports of violence against women have decreased, it grew among black women. The number of feminicides in recent years showed the same trend.

If, on one hand, SDG goals and targets seem promising for women's rights and gender equality, on the other their effectiveness depends on political disputes at various levels and on the positioning of women's movements in these disputes, especially considering the contradictions between human rights principles and the hegemonic models of economic growth, at a time of neoliberal globalization (Esquivel & Sweetman, 2016).

In Latin America and Brazil, a broader and transformative gender agenda also faces political obstacles from religious, social, and political movements openly anti-feminist. These barriers are reflected, for example, in the movement against what is called "gender ideology," which originated right after the Beijing Conference in 1995, as a counter-reaction to the Beijing Platform. According to these movements' accusations, the gender agenda is an attack against the family, funded by international agencies captured by feminists and Marxists (Miguel, 2016). Supported by the Catholic Church,

whose agenda was later captured by Evangelical Churches, movements against "gender ideology" are organized internationally, with a strong presence in Latin America.

In political contexts where democracy is threatened while neoliberal policies are reinforced, extending the barriers for the defense of women's and girls' rights, the gender equality agenda is still connected to the necessary defense of democracy, social justice, and the State, as a fundamental agent of social protection.

5. FINAL REMARKS

In this article, we compared MDG and SDG in order to identify how gender equality was addressed and interpret its advances and challenges in the face of the gender mainstreaming agenda and intersectional and decolonial demands. We found that both pacts face gender as a social problem connected to concepts of human development. The analysis involved the challenge of discussing gender equality, but also gender inequalities, considering the asymmetries between men and women and among women, involving intersections such as gender, race, and class.

In the midst of influences of the development approach called 'gender and development', MDG represent an important step, by giving visibility to the connection between women's living conditions and human development; to this end, it dedicated a specific goal to gender equality, in addition to other targets present in other goals. The balance of its results, based on feminist criticisms, enabled suggestions that contributed to SDG formulation.

With SDG, we saw advances, especially in deepening mainstreaming, a process generated by important feminist interventions in these arenas. All 17 goals have targets for gender equality, and they are partly due to the influence of women from the Global South, through productive discussions based on the criticism of capitalism, colonialism, patriarchy, and racism.

Among SDG challenges, we highlight the necessary adoption of indicators to measure and monitor intersectional inequalities, thus making it possible to address "all women and girls" in their different contexts and situations, avoiding the risks of universalisms that hide inequalities. This need has been shown through the dissemination of the influences of intersectional and decolonial feminisms, and represent opportunities to move beyond the "gender and development" approach.

An intersectional approach on SDG indicators would mean new gains in relation to the Beijing Platform, which contributed with significant advances by consolidating the vision of gender mainstreaming in the course of state action. That is, the political commitment present in SDG is for gender equality; however, measuring the progress in this direction requires information and knowledge on gender inequalities, which are better understood when adopting the intersectional perspective.

Dealing with the "challenges for operationalizing a methodological approach that captures the intersection of different forms of discrimination, across different dimensions of well-being", Azcona and Bhatt (2020, p. 345) propose that measurements should be able to identify not only *who* is left

behind, but especially *in which way* they experience marginalization and exclusion. They call this approach *Inequality, Gender, and Sustainable Development*.

After experiencing different approaches to development, with the most recent changes in the intersection between gender mainstreaming, intersectionality, and decoloniality, the "Inequality, Gender, and Sustainable Development" approach emerges as a new and promising alternative.

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Silvana Mariano

https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5849-9460
Ph.D. in Sociology from University of Campinas (UNICAMP); Associate Professor at Londrina State University (UEL). E-mail: silvanamariano@yahoo.com.br

Beatriz Molari

https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5446-7480
Ph.D. student at the Graduate Program in Sociology of Londrina State University (PPGSOC-UEL).
E-mail: beatriz.molari@gmail.com