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The Promise of Equality

Gender Equity, Reproductive Health and
the Millennium Development Goals



The Promise of Equality
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the Millennium Development Goals

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United Nations Population Fund
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1 Overview

“No new promises are needed—only following through on commitments already made.”

— UN Millennium Project

The world has an unprecedented opportunity to realize the promise of equality and freedom from want. During the next decade, hundreds of millions of people can be released from the stronghold of poverty. The lives of 30 million children and 2 million mothers can be spared.¹ The spread of AIDS can be reversed. Millions of young people can play a larger role in their countries' development and, in turn, create a better world for themselves and generations to come.

Gender equality and reproductive health are indispensable to the realization of this promise.

In the year 2000, leaders from 189 countries met at the United Nations Millennium Summit and forged a unique global compact to reduce poverty. From the Summit's declaration, eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) were derived, with 2015 set as the date for their achievement. In 2002, the UN Millennium Project brought together more than 250 leading experts to advise the UN Secretary-General on how to implement the MDGs. Their conclusions are reflected throughout this year's *State of World Population* report.

Gender equality is a human right, one of the Millennium Development Goals and key to achieving the other seven. The UN Millennium Project concluded that reproductive health is essential to achieving the MDGs, including the goal of gender equality. Investments in gender equality and reproductive health offer multiple rewards that can accelerate social and economic progress, with lasting impact on future generations.

Gender Equality and Equity: The costs of gender discrimination are highest for low-income countries, and within countries, for the poor. Women constitute a

large share of the labour force and play a central role in rural economies and food production. They are also primary guardians of the next generation. Gender discrimination squanders human capital by making inefficient use of individual abilities, thus limiting the contribution of women. It also undermines the effectiveness of development policies.²

When discriminatory burdens are removed, the capacity and earning power of women increase. Furthermore, women tend to reinvest these gains in the welfare of their children and families, multiplying their contributions to national development. Empowering women propels countries forward towards the MDGs and improves the lives of all.

Reproductive Health and Rights: The considerable, and largely preventable, burden of poor reproductive health falls most heavily on the poorest women and their families, who can least afford its consequences. The ability to make free and informed choices in reproductive life, including those involving childbearing, underpins self-determination in all other areas of women's lives. Because these issues affect women so profoundly, reproductive health cannot be separated from the wider goal of gender equality.

The Equality Dividend: Strategic Investments, Large Payoffs

Countries will need to invest scarce resources wisely if they are to meet the MDGs by the fast-approaching 2015 deadline. As discussed in **Chapter 2**, experience shows that simultaneous investments in three areas can be particularly effective in spurring progress at the country level: education for girls and women; reproductive health information and services and

women's economic rights.³ Women engaged in the political process, as individuals or members of civil society organizations, can help keep these priority issues high on national agendas, and hold governments and other key actors accountable to commitments made.

Expanding Education for Girls and Women: The gender gap in education has left nearly twice as many women as men illiterate. In the poorest regions, more girls than boys are out of school, and the gap widens at the secondary level—even though secondary and higher education for girls is especially significant in reducing poverty. Educational attainment increases women's income-earning potential, reduces maternal and infant mortality and improves reproductive health overall. It is associated with lower rates of HIV. Educated girls are more likely to delay marriage and childbearing, and instead acquire skills to improve economic prospects for themselves and their families. The multiple benefits of girls' education also lead to better health and education for the next generation.

Improving Reproductive Health: Reproductive health problems comprise the leading cause of death and disability for women the world over.⁴ Most are preventable. Universal access to reproductive health services is an international commitment and a human rights imperative. It is also a powerful investment for countries fighting poverty.

Impoverished women and adolescent girls with limited access to reproductive health care suffer the most. These women and their families are least able to afford the consequences of reproductive health

worldwide and reduce the overall productivity of women by as much as 20 per cent.⁵ Adolescent pregnancy, the AIDS epidemic, and excess fertility due to lack of family planning services further strain national budgets, slow social and economic development and deepen poverty.

Providing Economic Opportunities: Although women have entered the paid workforce in increasing numbers, they confront many forms of discrimination, including restricted choice of occupations and lower wages. Entrepreneurial efforts may be frustrated by laws and customs that combine to prevent women from owning property, acquiring credit or controlling income. In some regions, women cannot inherit, even from deceased husbands. Many end up working in the informal sector, where work is unregulated, poorly paid, insecure and often unsafe.⁶

The labour of rural women accounts for 60 to 80 per cent of food production in developing countries,⁷ but many face restrictions on the rights to own, use and inherit land. Research in some sub-Saharan African countries found that output could increase

1 **2005: MILESTONES IN THE COUNTDOWN TO THE MDGS**

This year begins the 10-year countdown to the 2015 deadline for achieving the Millennium Development Goals. It also offers several milestones by which to measure progress and intensify action to improve the human condition. The year 2005 marks:

- The 10th anniversary of the Fourth World Conference on Women
- The 30th anniversary of the First World Conference on Women

预览已结束，完整报告链接和二维

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