

MAKING THE MDGs WORK BETTER FOR WOMEN

Implementing Gender-Responsive
National Development Plans
and Programmes

United Nations
Development Fund for Women
UNIFEM



UNIFEM is the women's fund at the United Nations. It provides financial and technical assistance to innovative programmes and strategies to foster women's empowerment and gender equality. Placing the advancement of women's human rights at the centre of all of its efforts, UNIFEM focuses on reducing feminized poverty; ending violence against women; reversing the spread of HIV/AIDS among women and girls; and achieving gender equality in democratic governance in times of peace as well as war.

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Foreword

Recent decades have seen great advances in gender equality at national and global levels, particularly since the 4th World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995. Today, issues of gender equality and women's empowerment have been taken into account in many national planning systems and gender equality priorities are being included in national and local programming and budgeting processes. They have been embraced in the Millennium Declaration and recognized both as important goals in themselves and as central to achieving all of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) agreed in 2000. UNDP and UNIFEM have played a key role in assisting Governments and other stakeholders in many countries achieve progress and in developing and implementing programmes that support legislative and policy changes aiming at gender equality, promote women's human rights and establish close partnerships with governments, gender equality advocates, the private sector and other agencies of the UN system.

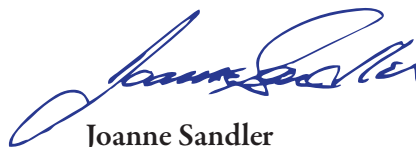
Despite important progress made, much work remains to be done to achieve gender equality. We are now almost 15 years after the adoption of the Beijing Platform for Action and 10 years since the adoption of the Millennium Declaration. New challenges have emerged in the form of food, economic or energy crisis and climate change, combined with unmet ODA commitments, which make it unlikely that the MDGs shall be met. Furthermore, UN and other reports have found that in many if not most countries, women are likely to be disproportionately impacted by these crises, further retarding progress on achieving reproductive health, reducing maternal mortality and making it more difficult for women to share in progress in such areas as the reduction of poverty and hunger, gains in productive and decent work and the elimination of chronic diseases, including HIV and AIDS.

Important commitments have been made by Governments in the past years and the pivotal role of gender equality for development and poverty reduction has been recognized at all levels. However, a major challenge today is turning these commitments into actions. Many national development plans still lack a gender perspective; governments and aid agencies still lack gender expertise; policies still lack appropriate gender sensitive targets and indicators; documents and studies still lack accurate data disaggregated by sex and gender statistics; and overall, commitments to gender equality lack provisions for financing and implementation.

Making the MDGs Work Better for Women draws on good practices to elaborate key strategies for accelerating the pace for reaching the MDGs. Women's empowerment and progress towards gender equality drives all of the MDGs. Making the MDGs work better for women implies that they work better for all.



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Preface

Achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) by 2015 hinges on making tangible progress with regards to gender equality across the developing world. Innumerable studies have demonstrated that gender equality is a precondition for sustainable growth and poverty reduction. Where women are empowered we observe better health and education outcomes for their children as well as a more sustainable use of natural resources. Where women are meaningfully integrated into the labour force we have seen impressive advances in social well-being.

Maintaining and scaling up investments in gender equality is especially important in the context of the current global economic crisis. Projections of sharply reduced economic growth, rising unemployment, tightening credit conditions, falling remittances, and compressed aid flows will likely deepen deprivation around the world and seriously impede, if not reverse, progress towards the attainment of the MDGs. Although it is difficult to assess the likely magnitude of the setback, evidence from past crises demonstrates that growth collapses are costly for human development outcomes because the rate of deterioration is more rapid during growth decelerations than the rate of improvement during accelerations. This has the potential to irreversibly deplete the human capital stock in developing countries.

In this context, it is especially important to optimize the use of scarce aid funds and protect and scale up recent achievements towards the attainment of gender equality. This publication seeks to distil knowledge on successful practices developed through the “Gender and the Millennium Development Goals” project to highlight approaches that governments, donors and civil society can take to make the MDGs work better for women. It does so by bringing together the knowledge and experience of these stakeholders in promoting gender-responsive MDG processes.

Section I, “The MDGs and Gender Equality: Progress and Challenges”, looks at successes and road blocks in meeting MDG targets and the extent to which national reports have addressed gender in reporting on each goal. Section II, “Engendering Local and National MDG Policy Processes”, focuses on strategic priorities and actions. Section III, “Good Practices: Gender and the MDGs Project”, highlights processes and activities that work, while Section IV, “Scaling Up Progress on MDG3: Investing in Gender Equality for Development”, sets forth the challenges. Section V summarizes the key recommendations put forward in sections I-IV.

This publication draws on a range of monitoring reports, analytical assessments, action guides and training modules developed and published by various stakeholders including UN agencies and task forces, the World Bank and other donors, women’s networks and individual gender experts. These materials, listed under References, serve to support, strengthen and expand the pilot project outcomes and observations. They will be invaluable to users of this guide who wish to read more about using a gender-sensitive lens to assess and advance the MDGs so that they work better for women.

Introduction: Context and Background

The United Nations Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) are increasingly being used to frame national development strategies and the flow of aid resources. The eight goals (see Box 1), with their 21 time-bound targets

and 60 indicators, aim to improve living conditions and remedy global imbalances by 2015 in the areas of development and poverty, peace and security, the environment, and human rights and democracy.

Box 1: The Millennium Development Goals

- 1.** Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger
- 2.** Achieve universal primary education
- 3.** Promote gender equality and empower women
- 4.** Reduce child mortality
- 5.** Improve maternal health
- 6.** Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases
- 7.** Ensure environmental sustainability
- 8.** Develop a global partnership for development

Source: End Poverty 2015: A gateway to the UN system's work on the MDGs www.un.org/millenniumgoals/bkgd

Drawing on the outcomes of the major UN conferences and summits on development held in the 1990s, the MDGs are a road map for implementing the Millennium Declaration agreed by 189 governments at the September 2000 UN Millennium Summit in New York. The Declaration commits governments “to promote gender equality and the empowerment of women as effective ways to combat poverty, hunger and disease and to stimulate development that is truly sustainable.” It also addresses “the equal rights and opportunities of women and men” and pledges “to combat all forms of violence against women and to implement the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)” (UN 2000).

The UN Secretary-General commissioned an expert advisory group, the UN Millennium Project, which set up a number of task forces to identify the policy measures and interventions needed to achieve each of the goals. The Task Force on Education and Gender Equality emphasized the importance of putting gender equality and women's empowerment at the center of development planning, adding that achieving MDG3 “depends on the extent to which each of the other goals addresses gender-based constraints and issues” (Grown et al. 2005:2).

A human right

Gender equality has been recognized as a human right since the establishment of the United Nations. The 1948

Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) and the 1976 international covenants on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), signed by the majority of UN Member States, all contain clear statements on women's right to be free from discrimination. The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), which was adopted by the General Assembly in 1979 and came into force in 1981, obliges signatories to undertake actions to ensure gender equality in both the private and public spheres and to eliminate traditional stereotyped ideas on the roles of the sexes.

Governments have also formally committed to upholding the rights of women at a number of UN international conferences held in the 1990s. These include the World Conference on Human Rights (Vienna, 1993), which emphasized the rights of women and girls as "an inalienable, integral and indivisible part of human rights" and classified violence against women, sexual harassment, sexual exploitation and trafficking in women as human rights abuses, and the International Conference on Population and Development (Cairo, 1994), which, for the first time, formally recognized women's sexual and reproductive rights. Perhaps most importantly, governments at the Fourth UN World Conference on Women (Beijing, 1995) laid out specific actions to attain the equality and empowerment standards set by CEDAW.

How has this support for women's human rights been manifested in the MDGs? MDG3 calls for the promotion of gender equality and women's empowerment, and several other goals address aspects of the Beijing Platform for Action adopted at the Fourth World Conference on Women, namely poverty and employment (MDG1), education (MDG2), health and reproductive health (MDGs 4, 5 and 6) and environmental sustainability (MDG7). The global targets and indicators mentioned above do not fully convey the central importance of gender equality to achieving all the goals, as expressed by governments in the Millennium Declaration. However, there is a growing recognition of the centrality of gender equality among development partners (governments, the

UN system and international financial institutions), who have placed a high priority on making the MDGs work.

The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) is working with a wide range of partners to create coalitions for change to support the MDGs at global, regional and national levels, and to monitor progress. UNDP also helps countries to build institutional capacity, and put in place the policies and programmes needed to achieve the MDGs. National reports were originally the primary instrument for tracking progress at the country level—although, more recently, the World Bank's Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs) have begun to incorporate MDG targets to measure results. UNDP views country-level MDG processes (preparing reports, advocacy, implementation, monitoring) as significant opportunities for mainstreaming gender equality perspectives into the broader human development agenda. These processes also offer a chance to reaffirm and advance CEDAW, the Beijing Platform for Action (BPfA) and other globally and regionally agreed documents on gender equality and women's empowerment.

A UNDP (2003) review of MDG country reports indicated gender equality received very little attention. There was insufficient data disaggregated by sex across all the goals, and not enough consultation with civil society organizations, especially with women's organizations, to enable them to highlight gender equality issues. Thus opportunities had been lost and the potential existed for further erosion of the ability of countries to address poverty in a meaningful way.

It was in this context that UNDP and UNIFEM initiated the "Gender and the Millennium Development Goals" pilot project, to be executed by UNIFEM in five countries. The pilot project brought together government, civil society and UN Country Teams (UNCTs) to advocate among policymakers and programme planners for the mainstreaming of gender equality in all of the MDGs, and to strengthen gender-sensitive monitoring and reporting on progress in achieving them.



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