

## Progress of the World's Women 2002: Gender Equality and the Millennium Development Goals

Despite achievements, pace of women's advancement remains too slow

There has been progress in achieving gender equality and women's empowerment around the world – but the pace is too slow in many regions. Sub-Saharan Africa has the lowest levels of achievement, primarily because of a devastating combination of national poverty, conflict and the effects of HIV/AIDS. These are among the findings of *Progress of the World's Women 2002, Gender Equality and the Millennium Development Goals*, the second edition of a biennial publication by the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) that was first produced in 2000 to track and measure the world's commitment to gender equality.

*Progress 2002* assesses improvements made towards women's empowerment within the context of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), a set of eight goals that arose out of the historic Millennium Summit of world leaders in September 2000 and that aim at achieving gender equality and combating poverty, hunger, disease, illiteracy and environmental degradation by 2015. Goal 3 of the MDGs calls on nations to "promote gender equality and empower women." It builds on the work of women's advocates at various UN conferences in the 1990s, in particular the Fourth World Conference on Women, and the five year review of the Conference's Platform for Action. In addition, the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) has played an important part in shaping international commitment to gender equality.

The far-reaching goals can only be achieved if efforts to improve conditions are carefully tracked and monitored. To allow this to happen, the MDGs are backed by a set of indicators that are used to analyze progress towards each goal. UNIFEM's report focuses mainly on analyzing the indicators for Goal 3, namely secondary school enrollment, literacy, non-agricultural wage employment and women's representation in parliaments.

Women in sub-Saharan Africa suffer from the highest levels of maternal deaths and the highest prevalence of HIV/AIDS. In addition, more than half the population lives on less than \$1 per day, the

highest poverty rate in the world. It is also the region with the lowest per capita gross national product. Girls' and women's school enrolment and literacy are low compared to other regions, and compared to boys and men within the region. Women's share of non-agricultural wage employment is equally low compared to other regions and compared to men.

One other major finding of the report is that the level of women's representation in national governments has improved. The rise in women's share of parliamentary seats is primarily due to special measures such as quotas being introduced and is not tied to a nation's relative wealth or poverty. The Beijing Platform for Action (PFA), developed at the Fourth World Conference on Women in 1995, calls for at least 30 per cent representation by women in national governments. Those countries that have introduced quotas of at least 30 per cent have seen substantial growth in women's representation.

*Progress of the World's Women 2002* shows that in general, the countries with the highest levels of progress are developed countries. Still, there are many developed countries that don't top the list, mainly because of women's poor representation in national governments. In fact, despite the enormous difficulties confronting sub-Saharan Africa, at least 13 countries in the region have higher rates of women's parliamentary participation than developed countries such as France, Japan, and the United States.

Given the current conditions, UNIFEM believes it is extremely important that governments expedite actions to fulfill commitments to women and that donor nations increase the support and resources necessary to fulfill Goal 3. Promoting gender equality and empowering women are more than mere phrases – UNIFEM shows in *Progress 2002* that achieving these ends improves the lives of everyone, not just women. And it shows how ending women's inequality can have a profound impact on many other national sectors.

*Progress of the World's Women 2002, Gender Equality and the Millennium Development Goals* can be found at: [http://www.unifem.org/index.php?f\\_page\\_pid=10](http://www.unifem.org/index.php?f_page_pid=10)