

GOAL  
1

## THE 'POVERTY GOAL'

### Goal 1 Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger

**Target 1 Halve, between 1990 and 2015, the proportion of people whose income is less than \$1 a day**

*Indicators* Proportion of population below \$1 (PPP) per day  
Poverty gap ratio (incidence x depth of poverty)  
Share of poorest quintile in national consumption

**Target 2 Halve, between 1990 and 2015, the proportion of people who suffer from hunger**

*Indicators* Prevalence of underweight children under five years of age  
Proportion of population under minimum level of dietary energy consumption

### Poverty has a gendered face

Millions of women around the world are disadvantaged in ways that make them vulnerable to poverty – whether defined in terms of money (income poverty) or in terms of well-being (human poverty).

- **Gender inequality distorts women's access to assets.** In the majority of countries, women do not have legal rights to land and property, rendering them economically insecure and depriving them of economic returns such as access to credit, decent work and an assured income.
- **Gender inequality distorts access to public goods and services that are designed to improve well-being.** In many countries, the home is women's primary domain and they have only limited access to public spaces. They are thus unable to use public services or avail of opportunities for education, health care and skill-enhancement.
- **Gender inequality dictates unequal distribution of resources within the family.** In many countries tradition dictates that women and girls eat last and least. The outcome - higher rates of malnutrition and anaemia among women and girls in comparison to men and boys from the same families.
- **Women's access to employment is gendered.** While more and more women are entering the global work force, discrimination in the job market results in their generally earning a far lower wage than men doing the same kind of work. Women workers are concentrated in the informal sector where wages are

lower. Jobs in the formal sector show a pattern of segregation by sex, with jobs at the lower end of the scale usually earmarked for women.

- **Women are constrained by time poverty.** Time poverty is a result of the unequal distribution of care work, or the work of nurturing and sustaining families and communities - tasks like cooking, cleaning, looking after and teaching children, caring for old people and those who are ill, and meeting the water, fuel and fodder needs of the household. These tasks are essential for survival, but are not valued or acknowledged as contributions to development. The burden of care work limits women's chances of taking advantage of opportunities for education and employment, and seriously constrains their involvement in development.

Apart from the above, there is evidence from several countries of the increasing numbers of poor households that are headed or maintained by women. This phenomenon is often referred to as the **feminisation of poverty**, and can be understood as an outcome of all the above factors which combine to create poverty for women.

## Gender perspectives on poverty add value to MDG reporting

National MDG Reports are conceptualised as key instruments for tracking and monitoring overall progress on national poverty goals. Ideally, the report should reflect an accurate picture of reality by showing how the country as a whole is progressing and making visible the differential situations of vulnerable groups. Whatever the criterion by which this vulnerability is defined – race, social grouping, age, location and so on – women are at the bottom of the ladder because they are additionally disadvantaged by gender inequality. Without a gendered approach, the fact of women's special vulnerability and its linkage with gender inequality will remain hidden and invisible – making the MDG Report less accurate and blunting its effectiveness as a means of public advocacy.

Despite the global consensus on the need to go beyond economic criteria in defining and tackling poverty, the policy framework in most countries continues to be driven by purely economic considerations, with poverty reduction being seen as an automatic by-product of economic growth and macro-economic stability. A gendered approach to reporting on poverty is essential because the nature and quality of economic growth – how wealth is created and how it is distributed - is as important for combating poverty as the rate of economic growth. Looking at poverty through a gender lens would convey the message that the government places as high a value on equity and social justice as it does on economic growth, and recognises that it cannot hope to reduce, far less eliminate, poverty without addressing gender inequality.

### Gender and poverty - key messages

- *Gender equality in capabilities and access to opportunities can accelerate economic growth.*
- *Equal access for women to basic transport and energy infrastructure (such as clean cooking fuels) can lead to greater economic activity.*
- *Gender equality in farm inputs helps increase agricultural production and reduce poverty because women farmers form a significant proportion of the rural poor.*
- *Equal investment in women's health and nutritional status reduces chronic hunger and malnourishment, which increases productivity and well-being.*

*From Taking Action: Achieving Gender Equality and Empowering Women  
Task Force on Education and Gender Equality. UN Millennium Project 2005*

Such a report would mark a significant departure from the ‘twin track’ approach that relegates macroeconomic policies and social policies to different domains, and make a strong case for investing in women through targeted interventions in key areas. Programmes to increase women’s access to productive assets and employment opportunities, to widen the coverage and eliminate gender biases in the delivery of social services and public goods, ensure the availability of survival needs such as drinking water and fuel, to support technological innovations that reduce the drudgery of domestic work - all these would conceivably be components of a gender-responsive national poverty strategy.

## How gendered is reporting on Goal 1?

It is encouraging to see that 42 out of the 78 national MDGRs covered in this study make specific mention of women’s vulnerability to poverty. This seems to be an advance over the pilot gender scan of 13 MDGRs carried out in 2003, where women found mention as a vulnerable group in only six reports – less than half of the sample.

In comparison to a single report in the pilot study, 17 out of the 78 reports now include sex-disaggregated data on poverty indicators to support the statement that women are a particularly vulnerable group. This is certainly a positive trend. Statistics are far more persuasive than unsupported statements - disaggregated data provides ‘hard’ evidence of women’s situation and makes the case for a sharper policy focus on specific aspects of women’s poverty.

**By presenting sex-disaggregated poverty data, these reports have made visible some key aspects of gender inequality and poverty in the concerned countries. The inclusion of such information as part of reporting on Goal 1 is likely to have far-reaching impacts on national poverty policies.**

Although only 11 of the reports make specific mention of the link between women’s poverty and gender inequality, 13 reports include empowerment of women and actions to advance women’s rights and reduce gender

### A positive trend - disaggregated poverty data

- **Nutrition/malnutrition levels of children by sex** (Benin, Cap Verde, Guatemala, Paraguay, Syria)
- **Employment/unemployment rates by sex** (Azerbaijan, Cambodia, Kosovo)
- **Comparative poverty of male-headed and female-headed households** (Bosnia & Herzegovina, Botswana, Jordan, Rwanda)
- **Levels of satisfaction of basic needs by sex of household head** (Lebanon)
- **Labour market status of Roma women and men** (Hungary)

Figure 1 **Recognition of women’s poverty**

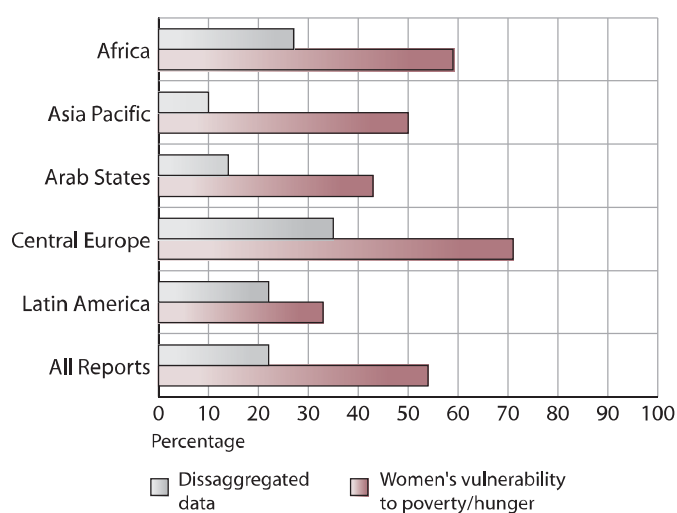
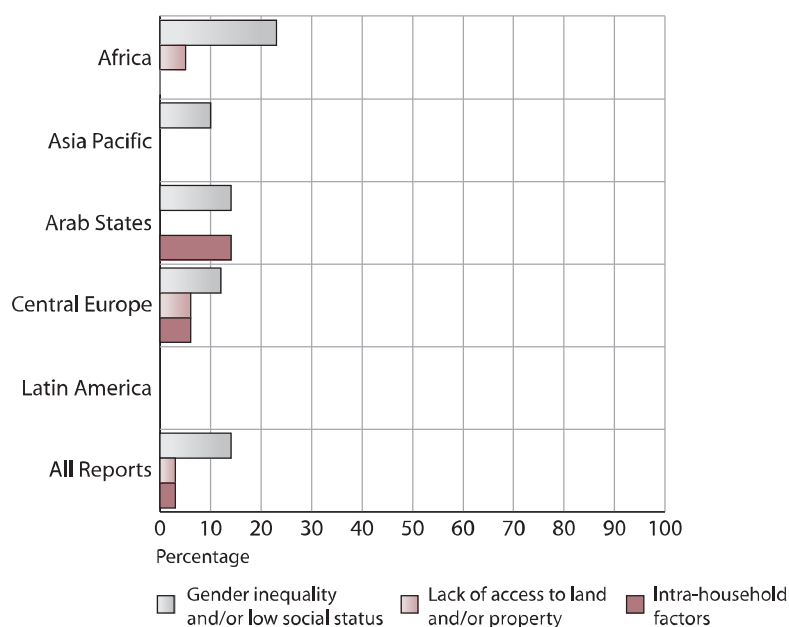


Figure 2 **Causes of women's poverty**



decreasing women's reliance on informal employment, closing gender gaps in earnings, and reducing occupational segregation.

These strategic priorities are largely invisible in the reviewed reports. Only two reports mention women's lack of land and property rights as a cause of poverty. Only two refer to intra-family gender issues such as domestic violence and unequal access to food. While eight reports highlight increased access to employment for women as a strategy for poverty reduction, only one flags the wage gap.

Including issues such as occupational segregation and wage gaps under the discussion on the Poverty Goal can make the powerful point that improving women's access to productive resources and addressing gender discrimination in labour markets are effective and efficient poverty reduction strategies, not just 'gender' strategies. Reporting on these issues exclusively under Goal 3 therefore represents a missed opportunity to bring a gendered focus to the poverty discourse.

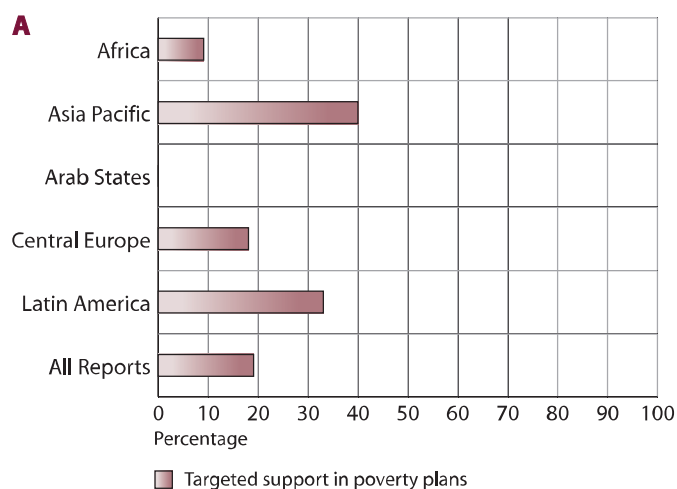
**A notable missing link in MDG reporting is the connection between women's poverty and HIV/AIDS.** Women face 'negative income shock' (a sharp and sudden drop in income) when HIV/AIDS incapacitates an earning member of the family. In many countries, subsistence farming of food crops, which is predominantly a women's activity and which is often all that stands between poor families and starvation, has been severely affected by the pandemic. Caring for affected people has increased women's workloads and made it even more difficult for women to take up paid work.

**The omission of these issues from the poverty discourse is both a symptom and a cause of policy failure in dealing with the larger economic implications of the epidemic.**

inequality among strategies for poverty alleviation. **As many as 15 reports state that targeted interventions for women are included in their national poverty strategies.**

The Millennium Task Force on Education and Gender Equality has identified seven strategic priorities for action on gender inequality. Three of these priorities are designed to address poverty - investing in infrastructure to reduce women's and girls' time burdens; guaranteeing women's and girls' property and inheritance rights; and eliminating gender inequality in employment by

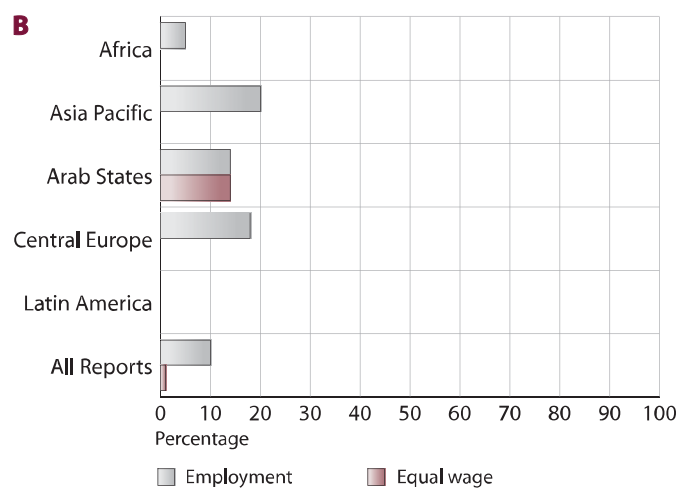
Figure 3 Strategies to address women’s poverty



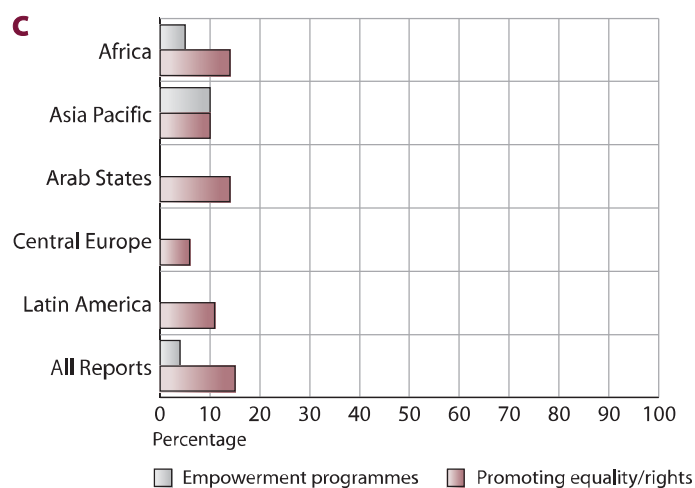
**The ‘education-poverty’ link - a gendered view**

*‘Education of the household head has a strong influence on the household’s poverty status... On the other hand, it is interesting to note that gender bias exists regardless of the household status: both in poor and in non-poor families the illiteracy rate for girls aged 11-15 is twice that of boys.’*

From Egypt MDGR



- A positive trend - recognition of strategic issues**
- **Access to land** (Bosnia, Burkina-Faso, Vietnam)
  - **Discrimination in the family** (Bosnia, Jordan)
  - **Wage gap** (Jordan)
  - **Link between gender equality and agricultural productivity** (Ghana)



The **Bosnia & Herzegovina** MDGR reports that major policy instruments - the MDG Report, the Human Development Report and the Poverty Reduction Strategy - have been aligned to ensure synergies between immediate, medium-term and long-term development policies.

This is an important step in converting gender equality commitments made in the MDG Report into reality. National Poverty Reduction Strategies are a major vehicle for gender equality. Harmonisation creates the opportunity for practical integration of gender equality targets into poverty plans, macroeconomic policies and national budgets.

## How can reporting on Goal 1 be strengthened?

- Presenting **sex-disaggregated data** on poverty.
- Drawing attention to the interface between gender inequality and other forms of vulnerability by presenting sex-disaggregated data on **specially vulnerable groups** – whether landless agricultural workers, racial and ethnic minorities, people with disabilities, single-parent households and households affected by HIV/AIDS, pensioners or communities living in conflict-affected areas.
- Contextualising and **localising poverty indicators**.
- Using qualitative data to highlight **connections between poverty, gender equality and other Goals**.
- Making the **'money trail'** visible through highlighting allocations for women and gender equality under poverty programmes.

### Unpacking 'feminisation of poverty' in Vietnam

*'...female-headed households reported poverty rates of 20% in 2002 (down from 28% in 1998) whereas male-headed ones reported poverty rates of 31% (down from 40% in 1998). This finding needs to be interpreted with some caution, however, since there are important difficulties at establishing who is the household head, and data is not disaggregated between married female-headed households and unmarried ones, an area for further development in forthcoming surveys. Moreover, many married female-headed households are recipients of large remittances from their migrant husbands working elsewhere in the country or overseas. In addition, female headed households tend to have a smaller size, an important determinant of poverty levels. The further gender disaggregation of data from the living standards surveys is a critical need to evaluate in depth the relative situation of women in Vietnam.'*

From Vietnam MDGR