

# Gender and the Millennium Development Goals



## WHY GENDER MATTERS TO THE MDGS

The Millennium Development Goals, or MDGs, are an integrated set of eight goals and 18 time-bound targets for extending the benefits of globalization to the world's poorest citizens. The goals aim to stimulate real progress by 2015 in tackling the most pressing issues facing developing countries – poverty, hunger, inadequate education, gender inequality, child and maternal mortality, HIV/AIDS and environmental degradation. UNDP helps countries formulate national development plans focused on the MDGs and chart national progress towards them through the MDG reporting process.

In most developing countries, gender inequality is a major obstacle to meeting the MDG targets. In fact, achieving the goals will be impossible without closing the gaps between women and men in terms of capacities, access to resources and opportunities, and vulnerability to violence and conflict.

Millennium Development Goal 3 is 'to promote gender equality and empower women'. The goal has one target: 'to eliminate gender disparity in primary and secondary education, preferably by 2005, and to all levels of education no later than 2015'. Four indicators are used to measure progress towards the goal: the ratio of girls to

boys in primary, secondary and tertiary education; the ratio of literate women to men in the 15-to 24-year-old age group; the share of women in wage employment in the non-agricultural sector; and the proportion of seats held by women in national parliaments. The existence of a separate goal on gender equality is the result of decades of advocacy, research and coalition-building by the international women's movement. Its very existence demonstrates that the global community has accepted the centrality of gender equality and women's empowerment to the development paradigm – at least at the rhetorical level.

Yet the gap between rhetoric and reality persists: the 2005 primary and secondary school parity target will likely be missed. But even if it were achieved, it is hardly sufficient to ensure the full participation of women in the political and economic lives of their countries. Much more is needed: full reproductive health rights and access to services, guarantee of equal property rights and access to work, affirmative action to increase political representation, and an end to violence against women and girls. To realize the MDGs, governments and their partners must seriously and systematically 'engender' efforts to achieve *all* the goals. But today, the gender focus is largely limited to the gender equality, maternal mortality, and HIV/AIDS goals – leaving out



critical development issues such as the feminization of poverty, the preponderance of female-headed households among the hungry, and the lopsided impact of environmental degradation on women (particular in terms of time spent gathering fuel and hauling water).

## **MAKING MDG REPORTING GENDER-SENSITIVE**

Gender experts and advocates have suggested several concrete ways to make the MDG implementation and reporting process more gender-sensitive. Two complementary approaches include adding targets and indicators to Millennium Development Goal 3 (on gender equality and women's empowerment), and disaggregating the targets and indicators for the other goals by gender. Both deserve UNDP support.

The UN Millennium Project Task Force on Education and Gender Equality<sup>1</sup> suggests that national governments add additional targets, beyond the education target, under the gender equality and women's empowerment goal. Recommended targets include:

- Ensure universal access to sexual and reproductive health services through the primary health care system;
- Eliminate gender inequality in access to assets and employment;
- Achieve a 30 percent share of seats for women in national parliaments;
- Reduce by half the lifetime prevalence of violence against women.

The task force also suggests that national governments add additional indicators for tracking progress towards the gender goal. Their recommendations include:

- Completion rates (in addition to enrolment rates) for primary and secondary school;
- Economic indicators such as gender gaps in earnings, sex-disaggregated unemployment rates and occupational segregation by sex;
- Prevalence rates for domestic violence in the past year.

Another option is to add at least one gender-specific indicator not just to the gender goal, as suggested above, but also to the set of indicators for all the goals and targets. A recent UNDP review of National MDG Reports<sup>2</sup> argues that adding more indicators for each and every target, ideal though it would be, is not feasible given country capacity and workload considerations as well as the availability of data. Instead, the report recommends providing sex-disaggregated data and qualitative information on gender issues across goals and targets, and gives practical suggestions on how to do so:

- Involve women's groups and gender experts in consultations on all the goals;
- Support independent studies using rapid participatory methodologies to collect qualitative information on key gender dimensions of goals and targets;
- Share draft reports with independent gender experts for review;
- Support efforts to sensitize statisticians involved in collating and processing MDG tracking data to the gender dimensions of the mandatory indicators under each goal;
- Support the collection of sex-disaggregated data;
- Provide training to country teams and others involved in the MDG reporting process.

## **WHERE TO GO FOR HELP**

Gender Equality and the Millennium Development Goals (<http://www.mdgender.net/>) is a website with resources and tools for addressing gender equality in all of the MDGs – from literature on gender equality as it relates to each goal, to tools for advocacy and action. UNDP best practices can be found in *National Reports, a Look Through a Gender Lens*, available at: <http://www.undp.org/gender/docs/mdgs-genderlens.pdf>

<sup>1</sup> See the final reports of the UN Millennium Project Task Force on Education and Gender Equality, *Toward universal primary education: investments, incentives, and institutions and Taking action: achieving gender equality and empowering women* at: <http://www.unmillenniumproject.org/reports/reports2.htm#02>

<sup>2</sup> *National Reports, a Look Through a Gender Lens*.