Developing countries are working to create their own national poverty eradication strategies based on local needs and priorities. UNDP advocates for these nationally-owned solutions, works to ensure their effectiveness, and leads efforts to help countries integrate the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) into their national development frameworks.

In most developing countries, gender inequality is a major obstacle to ending poverty and meeting all the MDG targets. Indeed, achieving the MDG poverty target – to cut in half by 2015 the number of people living in absolute poverty – 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. The 'feminization of poverty', which refers to the widening gap between men and women living in poverty over the last



decade, makes addressing the multiple causes of women's poverty more pressing than ever. The majority of 1.5 billion people living on less than one dollar per day are women, and worldwide, women on average earn about half of what men earn.

Although globalization has opened up new opportunities for women to enter the labour market, particularly in manufacturing and the service sectors, the trade-off between unpaid domestic work and paid employment is not always profitable. Women often enter at the bottom of the salary scale and occupy precarious jobs with little security and few benefits.

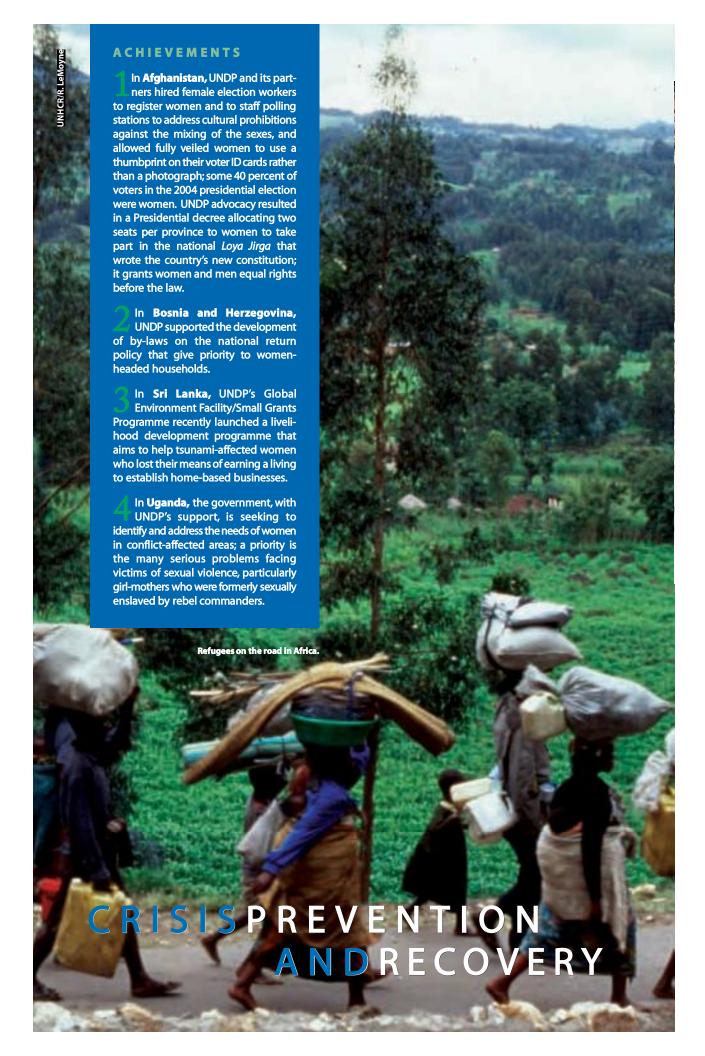
## THE CARE ECONOMY: WOMEN'S INVISIBLE CONTRIBUTION TO THE GDP

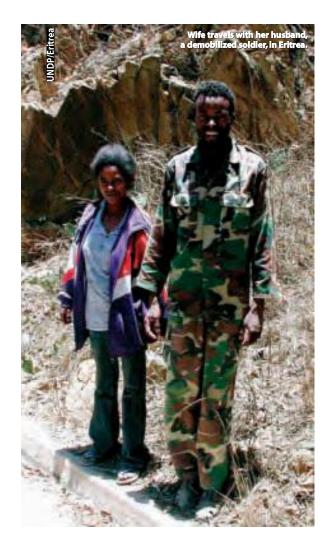
The 'care economy' refers to the unpaid work done in the domestic sphere that keeps the current labour force fed, clothed and healthy enough to work as well as raises the future labour force. Much of women's contribution to the economy takes place in this hidden area of production, which includes caring for children, the sick and the elderly; voluntary work in the community; and subsistence production. Estimates show that the value of unpaid work can be equivalent to at least half of a country's Gross Domestic Product (GDP).<sup>2</sup>

The recent trend towards privatization of basic services has increased the burden on poor women; since the poorest families cannot afford the cost of privatized water and energy services, women must spend more time hauling water and gathering fuel. As public services and formal safety nets disappear, the burden of care, especially in countries hardest hit by HIV/AIDS, falls increasingly on women and girls. When care services shift to girls and younger women, they are less able to attend school – perpetuating the cycle of feminized poverty across generations.

A UNDP-commissioned study conducted by Columbia University on unpaid work and the care economy is being used to influence pro-poor economic policy formulation and raise awareness about the ways in which unpaid care services performed by women and girls sustain human capital and bolster the productive economy. The study highlights best practices from around the world in measuring time-use and quantifying the contribution of women's unpaid work to national economies.

2. Elson, D., 1999, 'Gender-neutral, gender-blind, or gender-sensitive budgets? Changing the conceptual framework to include women's empower-ment and the economy of care', in Commonwealth Secretariat, Gender Budget Initiative – Background Papers, London: Commonwealth Secretariat







Violent conflicts and natural disasters can erase decades of development and further entrench poverty and inequality. Through its global network, UNDP seeks out and shares innovative approaches to crisis prevention, early warning and conflict resolution. Post-crisis, UNDP helps bridge the gap between emergency relief and long-term development.

Analyzing the gender dimensions of conflict and crisis and taking concrete action to address them before, during and after an emergency is not a theoretical exercise. The use of sexual violence to terrorize whole ethnic groups in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Rwanda and Somalia is a striking contemporary example of how very real gender issues are in shaping the impact of conflict and crisis. Moreover, evidence suggests that conflicts increase the risk and impact of HIV/AIDS by dislocating communities and bringing fighters into contact with civilians in situations where women and youths are highly vulnerable to sexual violence and exploitation.

Despite profound hardships, conflict and post-conflict situations can provide women opportunities for enhancing their public role. With the collapse of the traditional order and the absence of men, women can - and often must - assume visible leadership responsibilities. An excellent example is Rwanda, which now has the world's highest proportion of women members of parliament. The static image of women as helpless victims of war is giving way to a more nuanced and accurate understanding of not only the challenges women face, but also the active role they play in dealing with and recovering from crisis situations. UNDP has an important role to play in addressing the gender dimensions of conflict and post-

conflict reconstruction. Attention must be given to early-warning protection and assistance, women's role in peace processes, and their full participation in post-crisis reconstruction. Support to women's organizations is a particularly strategic area of intervention.



Women and men living in poverty rely heavily on natural resources for food, fuel, shelter, medicines and livelihoods and are disproportionately affected by environmental degradation and lack of access to affordable energy, water supply, and sanitation services. UNDP helps countries strengthen their capacity to address these challenges through policy support and programming in the areas of national sustainable development strategies, water governance, energy services, land management, and biodiversity conservation.

For women and girls, the heavy burdens imposed by the need to gather biomass fuels like wood and dung for cooking and heating and to haul water for domestic and productive uses define their daily routines. The ways in which water scarcity and contamination as

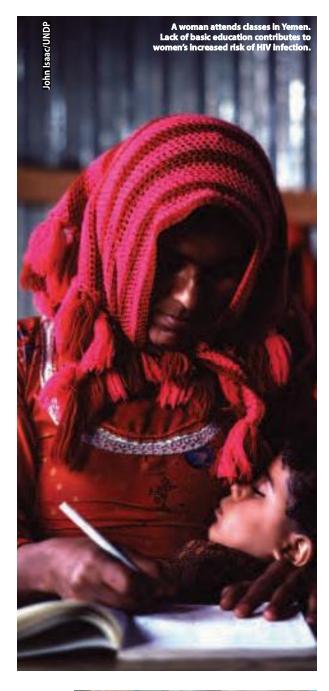


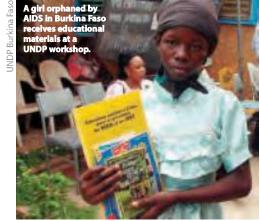


well as deforestation make these tasks more time-consuming, physically taxing, and even dangerous is well documented. So too is the transformative impact that clean, modern energy services and improved water supply and sanitation can have on the daily lives and future prospects of women and girls. Despite their reliance on natural resources, however, rural women often have limited access to and control over them, and women's use and knowledge of biodiversity are comparatively invisible to policy makers.

Some important gender mainstreaming priorities in this area are developing more systematic strategies for bringing the voices and views of women into strategies for sustainable development, making women's expertise as farmers and herbalists as well as the role they play in biodiversity management and conservation more visible, and ensuring that women are involved in participatory resource planning. Strengthening policy and regulatory frameworks to protect and enlarge poor women's access to natural resources is also key, as is addressing larger issues of land tenure, inheritance rights and accountable, transparent local governance.







To prevent the spread of HIV/AIDS and mitigate its impact, developing countries need to mobilize all levels of government and civil society. As a trusted development partner, UNDP advocates for placing HIV/AIDS at the centre of national planning and budgets; helps build national capacity to manage initiatives that include people and institutions not usually involved with public health; and promotes decentralized responses that support community-level action.

In many developing countries, the spread of HIV is embedded in a socioeconomic context in which men have greater social, economic and legal status and access to resources, and women have comparatively little power, limited legal rights, less access to information, and fewer ways to earn a living. Women often lack the power to refuse sex or to negotiate safe sex in their intimate relationships, and sexual violence is a driver of the epidemic among women. For married women, a significant risk factor is the present or past sexual behavior of their husbands. For women with limited opportunities, transactional sexual relationships ('survival' sex) can be an important survival mechanism. AIDS not only threatens women's health and lives; it also increases their domestic burdens. Women and girls provide the lion's share of home-based care for those who are ill, as well as support for affected families.

Globally, women make up nearly half the 37.2 million adults (aged 15-49) living with HIV. In sub-Saharan Africa, 57 percent of those living with HIV are female. In the Caribbean, young women aged 15-24 are almost twice as likely to be infected as young men. And in South Africa, Zambia and Zimbabwe, young women are three-to-six times more likely to be infected than men of the same age group.

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