

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.



A Salvadoran woman shells beans. Women’s work in the domestic sphere remains invisible to policy-makers.

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).²

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 empowerment and the economy of care’, in *Commonwealth Secretariat, Gender Budget Initiative – Background Papers*, London: Commonwealth Secretariat

ACHIEVEMENTS

1 In **Afghanistan**, UNDP and its partners hired female election workers to register women and to staff polling stations to address cultural prohibitions against the mixing of the sexes, and allowed fully veiled women to use a thumbprint on their voter ID cards rather than a photograph; some 40 percent of voters in the 2004 presidential election were women. UNDP advocacy resulted in a Presidential decree allocating two seats per province to women to take part in the national *Loya Jirga* that wrote the country's new constitution; it grants women and men equal rights before the law.

2 In **Bosnia and Herzegovina**, UNDP supported the development of by-laws on the national return policy that give priority to women-headed households.

3 In **Sri Lanka**, UNDP's Global Environment Facility/Small Grants Programme recently launched a livelihood development programme that aims to help tsunami-affected women who lost their means of earning a living to establish home-based businesses.

4 In **Uganda**, the government, with UNDP's support, is seeking to identify and address the needs of women in conflict-affected areas; a priority is the many serious problems facing victims of sexual violence, particularly girl-mothers who were formerly sexually enslaved by rebel commanders.

Refugees on the road in Africa.



CRISIS PREVENTION
AND RECOVERY



UNDP/Eritrea

Wife travels with her husband, a demobilized soldier, in Eritrea.

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-



Françoise Gerber/UNDP

This shack has become a home to a refugee in Azerbaijan.

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.

ACHIEVEMENTS

1 In **China**, a biodiversity conservation project for upland ecosystems in the Yunan province funded by UNDP's Global Environment Facility fostered women's empowerment by bringing local women into the process of monitoring biodiversity and by supporting a microcredit scheme.

2 In **Nepal**, with the support of the World Bank and UNDP, the Rural Energy Policy developed targets for enhancing women's access to energy in remote areas. In rural Nepal, UNDP supported the creation of a gender-balanced community organization to manage a micro-hydro energy fueling system and irrigation scheme.

3 In **Tanzania**, UNDP has promoted the use of solar energy and biogas to improve energy services to the poor and reduce the carbon emissions produced when wood and dung are used as fuel. These emissions are harmful to the health of women, who traditionally use these fuels for cooking. The noxious smoke from indoor fires and stoves is associated with 1.6 million deaths per year in developing countries, mostly among women and children under five. One life is lost every 20 seconds to what the World Health Organization calls 'the killer in the kitchen'.

4 In **Ukraine**, the "Sustaining Women Farmers" project is offering information technology services to rural women farmers through local information centres; women are able to access information on their rights, changes in agrarian legislation, markets for their products, and credit lines for purchasing seeds and machinery.

A Salvadoran woman walks home, balancing on her head wood she has gathered for cooking and heating. Gathering traditional fuels is time-consuming and physically onerous.

ENERGY AND ENVIRONMENT



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



Using traditional fuels for cooking harms women's health.

UNDP El Salvador

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.



More than one billion people lack access to safe drinking water, and poor women bear the brunt of inadequate water supply services.

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ACHIEVEMENTS

1 In **Belize**, the rights of women, including migrant sex workers, have been specifically addressed in the national HIV/AIDS policy, whose formulation UNDP supported.

2 In **Ethiopia**, The National Coalition for Women against HIV/AIDS, spearheaded by women ministers, was a direct outcome of the UNDP-sponsored Leadership Development Programme. The Coalition championed HIV testing and undertook an advocacy campaign led by the Prime Minister. The group is now focusing on policy approaches to slowing the spread of HIV/AIDS and mitigating its impacts.

3 In **Honduras**, a network of women living with HIV/AIDS has been formed to challenge the stigma and discrimination HIV-positive women are subjected to, and to help them reintegrate into family and community life.

4 In **Ghana**, with UNDP support, women leaders and chiefs in the Manya Krobo area have prioritized reducing the spread of HIV, increasing support to orphan girls, and increasing the number of income-generating activities for girls; there has been increased recognition of the leadership role of women (such as Queen Mothers) in addressing the epidemic.

Johannesburg, South Africa: Participants gather at an Arts and Media Workshop sponsored by UNDP's HIV/AIDS Group.



HIV/AIDS

A woman attends classes in Yemen. Lack of basic education contributes to women's increased risk of HIV infection.



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.

A girl orphaned by AIDS in Burkina Faso receives educational materials at a UNDP workshop.



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.

The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) is the UN's global development network, advocating for change and connecting countries to knowledge, experience and resources to help people build a better life.

We are on the ground in 166 countries, working with them on their own solutions to global and national development challenges. As they develop local capacity, they draw on the people of UNDP and our wide range of partners. In all our activities, we encourage the protection of human rights and the empowerment of women.



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