

**“Women and Leadership: The Missed Millennium Development Goal.”**

**Distinguished Lecture Series, Trinidad and Tobago**

**Ministry of Community Development, Culture and Gender Affairs  
In collaboration with  
United Nations Development Programme**

**Lecture Delivered by**

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## Introduction

1. On behalf of UNDP, I would like to thank the Minister of Community Development, Culture and Gender Affairs, Senator Joan Yuille-Williams, for hosting this event and for providing me with the opportunity to address this distinguished group of people today. It is a great honour for me to participate in the Ministry's Distinguished Lecture Series.
2. The topic of my lecture is "Women in Leadership: the Missed Millennium Development Goal". Unlike the other MDGs that are to be achieved by 2015, the third MDG, on gender equality and women's empowerment was to be achieved by year 2005 but it was not. In that sense, it is a missed goal. The goal is tracked using three indicators, one of them on women's political representation. This will be the focus of my lecture. However, I will go beyond the scope of this indicator to include a discussion of women's leadership roles in the private sector as well, because, in addition to the public sector, the private and civil society sectors contribute greatly to national development outcomes, and there should be more women contributing their knowledge and insights through leadership roles in these areas.
3. I will begin by explaining the importance of achieving equality in decision-making. I will then provide some data on the trends in female political participation, and on women's access to leadership positions in the corporate sector. Within this discussion, I will discuss the reasons behind the slow progress in achieving equal access to leadership in both the public and private sectors and what could be done to accelerate progress. I will conclude by highlighting a few of UNDP's recent efforts to support gender equality in decision-making.
4. Before I begin, let me first commend Trinidad and Tobago for the efforts to integrate the principle of gender equality in your policies, and for the progress you are making towards MDG3. The growing numbers of women candidates standing for election in your country are very encouraging.
5. The key message of my speech today is that: **the participation of women in decision-making roles in the public and private sectors is a human right, and will lead to more equitable development outcomes.** However, for women, access to leadership does not always equal decision-making power. Hidden barriers in organizational cultures, social stereotypes, lack of skills and resources, including information and time, often work to undermine women's ability to succeed in leadership roles. We need to not only ensure access, but to provide women with the enabling environments and the tools with which they can succeed in public roles. UNDP is working with countries on all these fronts to strengthen women's voices in decision-making.

## The value of women in decision-making

1. At UNDP, we prioritize women's increased political participation because it is our mandate to support countries to achieve the MDGs, and women's political representation is one of the three indicators for tracking progress towards the third goal on gender equality. **But more so, equality of opportunity in politics is a human right.** In the Beijing Platform for Action, the world's leaders committed to set a target of one third of seats for women in national parliaments. This target, which was intended to be a floor and not a ceiling, was set more than a decade ago and, despite progress in some countries, the world has not reached it yet. The latest statistics from the Inter-Parliamentary Union show that, as of August 2007, globally, women still hold only 17.4% of seats in both houses of parliament combined.
  
2. **The second reason why we focus on increasing women's political participation is to ensure that women's interests are fairly represented in decision-making.** Evidence suggests that women who participate directly in decision-making bodies press for different priorities than those emphasized by men. They are often more active in supporting laws that benefit them, their families and children. **In other words, increasing the numbers of women political leaders will assist us in achieving gender equality faster, and will also have positive development impacts.**

a. For example, A national constitutional amendment in India, which gave women the right to be elected to village councils rather than being appointed, resulted in nine villages voting for all women's slates<sup>1</sup>. Outcomes in three of the villages four years later showed collective action by both men and women to increase fuel, water and fodder in households. Results also included an increase in women's mobility and decision-making, closure of liquor dens - resulting in less wife-beating - and more girls attending schools.

3. However, it is important to note that women are more likely to promote such laws and policy commitments when there is a critical mass of women leaders and when there are mechanisms to institutionalize collective action, such as women's caucuses or multiparty women's alliances.
  
4. The third reason behind UNDP's focus on increasing women's presence in legislatures is that women's participation in political decision-making bodies has been shown to improve the quality of governance. Three recent studies found a positive correlation between

women's increased participation in public life and a reduction in the level of corruption.

- a. Two of these studies came out in 2001; and one of them utilized a large cross-section of countries to show that the level of corruption fell as women's representation in parliament increased.<sup>1</sup> Another study used a cross-country comparison of the impact which female participation in politics and commerce has on overall corruption in a country. Their measure to determine women's participation included the proportion of female legislators in the national parliament, the proportion of female ministers and high-level government bureaucrats, and women's share of the labor force. The results showed that corruption is less severe where women constitute a larger share of the labor force and hold a larger share of parliamentary seats<sup>2</sup>.

Another important finding worth noting from this paper was that **where women are better represented in parliament, they also tend to be better represented in top ministerial/bureaucratic positions and even in the labor force more generally.** These findings therefore backup my previous point about the impact that female political leadership can have on advancing the gender equality agenda, through opening up the political and economic spheres of public life to women: both through leading by example, and through pushing through actual laws that benefit women.

- b. In terms of corruption, another valuable measure is public perception of how susceptible their female and male leaders are to corruption. A poll conducted by Gallup and the Inter-American Dialogue in five Latin American countries in 2000 found that most of those surveyed believed that **having more women in power improves government and that women are better able than men to handle a wide range of policy issues.**<sup>3</sup> Virtually all the respondents to this poll said they would vote for a female candidate for president, mayor or community leader if she were the most qualified person running. Additionally, a strong majority of those who say they have had an opportunity to vote for a woman said they have in fact voted for a female candidate. **Political parties in Latin America and elsewhere should be mindful of these perceptions and should use them to their advantage in their electoral campaigns.**

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<sup>1</sup> Dollar, D., R. Fisman, and R. Gatti. 2001. "Are Women Really the 'Fairer' Sex? Corruption and Women in the Government." World Bank Gender and Development Working Paper Series 1. Washington, D.C.

<sup>2</sup> Swamy, A., S. Knack, Y. Lee, and O. Azfar. 2001. "Gender and Corruption." *Journal of Development Economics* 64(1): 25-55.

<sup>3</sup> Gallup. Latin American Women Leadership Study. [www.iadb.org/sds/doc/GallupStudyEnglish.pdf](http://www.iadb.org/sds/doc/GallupStudyEnglish.pdf)

5. Turning to women in the private sector, there is considerable evidence from the US, UK and Ireland that the presence of women in managerial roles is helping national businesses thrive. In the USA, according to Catalyst, a leading research and advisory organization working to advance women in business, women comprise 13.6 percent of the boards of the largest 500 U.S. companies. According to recent studies, women make 80 percent of all purchase decisions. Forty-five percent of investors are women<sup>4</sup>. This is not only the case in the US, but in other countries. Women make up a sizable consumer base in developing countries too. Their views and concerns can contribute to greater comparative advantage for businesses, whether in the service or manufacturing industries.
6. A recent article from the USA, analysed the relationships between corporate governance, board diversity, and firm value for Fortune 1000 firms. Board diversity was defined as the percentage of women, African-Americans, Asians, and Hispanics on the board of directors. After controlling for size, industry, and other corporate governance measures, the report found significant positive relationships between the fraction of women or minorities on the board and firm value. The report found that the companies that recruit, retain and advance diverse work forces, including women — and boards — will have a competitive advantage in the marketplace.
7. It would be very amiss not to mention the contributions of the leaders of the women's movement to national and international development agendas. Through their leadership in civil society, women have influenced national and international responses to major development and political challenges of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The peace movement, the anti-colonial struggles, the green movement, women's rights, to name a few. Women's leadership, women's visions and organising have influenced global decision-making.

### **Global Trends in Women's Political Leadership**

1. Two global reviews that took place in 2005 brought attention to the issue of women's political participation – the Beijing+ 10 and MDG+5. It was noted that the number of women in national parliaments was increasing, but one must add - very slowly! Globally, women represent 17.5 per cent of single and lower houses of parliament, up from 13 per cent in 1990. At this speed, it will take 108 years for the world's legislatures to have equal representation of women and men! We therefore need to revise our strategies to increase the number of women candidates, and to improve their chances of winning elections.

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<sup>4</sup> <http://mitsloan.mit.edu/newsroom/2004-corpgov.php>

**We should not forget though, that this is not just a game of numbers. It is only when we achieve 50 percent female representation, and when that 50 percent possess the same agency as men to shape decisions and outcomes, that we will have reached true gender equality.**

2. It is interesting to note that women's political participation is not an issue of rich or poor or north and south. Rwanda, coming out of genocide and among the least developed countries of the world is leading the way, and is close to parity with 49 per cent of parliamentary seats occupied by women, followed by Sweden and Costa Rica, where women's representation is 47 and 39 per cent, respectively. At the other end of the spectrum, is Oceania, the region lagging most behind, and women lawmakers are absent altogether in some countries of the region. In the 2006 elections in the Solomon Islands and Tuvalu, no women were elected to the lower houses of parliament.
3. In the Arab States, where progress has been very slow, there are some encouraging signs. Last year (2006), for the first time, women were able to contest parliamentary elections in Kuwait, 2 of them successfully. In the United Arab Emirates, women won 23 per cent of seats. In Bahrain, a woman was elected to the lower house of parliament for the first time in that nation's history. The journey has started but there is still a long way to go.
4. In terms of a regional comparison, Latin America and the Caribbean saw an increase from 15% to 20% in a seven year period. The region comes second only to Europe by a margin of only a few decimal places. However, it is often the case that there are far more female candidates running for election, and far fewer women who are actually elected. **We therefore need to provide further assistance to women candidates during elections.** I will come back to this point.
5. In contrast, there is no clear positive trend in the number of women in the **highest positions of state or government**. Thirteen women were heads of state or government in 2006, compared to 9 in 2000 and 12 in 1995. A record number of women took up these top positions in 2006 – six in all – in Chile, Jamaica, the Republic of Korea and Switzerland, and as acting president in Israel. In Liberia, Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, took her place in history as the first African woman to be elected head of government. Exciting as this is, the global trend is stagnant. There is need to focus on political party reforms. Without transforming parties into spaces where women politicians can enter, thrive and grow to their full potential, we are not likely to see an increase in the numbers of women leading governments. In liberal democracies, the political party

is central in the competition for political power. If women cannot rise to lead political parties, they will not lead governments.

### **Trends in Latin America and the Caribbean**

6. There is something to learn from the Latin American region. Since the 1990s, women have been gaining political momentum; some in senior government positions, others in Parliament or serving as mayors and judges. This progress has been due to a combination of factors, including greater democratic consolidation in the region, recognition of women's political rights, improved access to education and the implementation of gender quota laws. The first country in the region to pass a quota law, ensuring that a minimum number of women be put forward as candidates in an election and occupy a certain percentage of government positions, was Argentina in 1990. Today, there are similar laws in 12 Latin American countries. In Colombia, for example, it is a legal requirement that women comprise 30 percent of the appointed positions in the executive branch. Although quotas have not been favoured in the Caribbean, Scandinavian, Latin American and African countries have found them to be an effective way to increase the numbers of women in legislatures.
7. Like other countries in the Caribbean Region, Trinidad and Tobago is inching slowly towards greater parity, with women winning approximately 19% of seats in the lower house of parliament in the last election, which is up from 11% in 2000. There are other countries in the region that have made even greater strides, including Grenada (27%) and St. Vincent and the Grenadines at 23% of all lower seats of parliament.
8. In the Caribbean, out of six countries<sup>5</sup>, studied by UNIFEM<sup>6</sup> in 2004, Trinidad and Tobago had the second highest percentage of women holding cabinet positions, at 21%, just below the Bahamas, where women make up 25% of cabinet. However, when we look at the real numbers and which ministries women are leading, we realize that by and large, we have a lot more to do in terms of increasing the gender ratio and in supporting women's access to more traditionally male-dominated ministries. Currently, the Bahamas is leading in this effort, by placing four women as ministers of National Security, Financial

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<sup>5</sup> The other countries were Anguilla, The Bahamas, Belize, Dominica and Jamaica.

<sup>6</sup> Linnette Vassel and Samora Vassel. **2004.** *Women in Power and Decision – Making in the Caribbean.* Prepared for the ECLAC/CDCC/UNIFEM/CIDA/CARICOM Fourth Caribbean Ministerial Conference on Women: Review and Appraisal of the Beijing Platform for Action and the Outcome of the Twenty- Third Special Session of the General Assembly (2000), 12-13 February 2003, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines

Services and Investment, Transport and Aviation and Social Security and Community Development.

9. I was delighted to read that the Police Commissioner in your country is going to ensure that women police officers have equal access to senior positions. Your National Security Minister, Mr Martin Joseph, was recently quoted as saying that the motivation behind getting more women into the force and into higher ranks was two decades of studies which reveal that women bring a unique and beneficial style to policing. He said increasing the number of female police officers was the key to the success of community policing, as well as reducing crimes of brutality, domestic violence and rape. In addition to being in the legislature, it is important that women rise to senior levels of the public service and the judiciary.
10. Increasingly, governments and citizens are seeing the importance of including women in decision-making because of the nature of the emerging policy questions faced by the region. Women are also gaining visibility because they are the main group affected in the Caribbean by poverty, health challenges like the HIV/AIDS pandemic, and social violence. The regional response has been to create legislation that seeks to safeguard women's interests, and these new laws have created wider awareness of gender inequity. If women are the target population of development assistance, then women, in partnership with men, are best placed to devise strategies to address these issues.

### **What is driving these global numbers?**

11. Looking at these global and regional numbers, we can see that a number of factors are at play in determining women's political representation – including political will, the strength of national women's movements and continued emphasis by the international community on gender equality and women's empowerment. However, the most decisive factor remains the gender quota systems. In 2006, countries with quotas nearly doubled the number of women elected, compared to countries without any form of gender quota system. Other countries have supported women's election bids through training and funding, including the kind of training and funding needed to help women candidates during the campaign periods. New constitutions in countries emerging from conflict have also been especially effective in this regard: After the 2005 elections in Afghanistan and in Iraq, for example, women represented 27 and 25 per cent of parliamentary seats, respectively.

### **What more can we do?**



12. There are a number of actions that governments can take to increase the number of women in their parliaments, and in senior positions in the public service and the judiciary.
- a. Enabling women to juggle paid work and family responsibilities, promoting equal opportunities for women in employment and tackling direct and indirect gender-based discrimination in remuneration and are three of the most pertinent actions needed. Studies demonstrate that countries that provide welfare, on average, tend to elect 5 percent more women to national legislatures than countries without these policies<sup>7</sup>.
  - b. Political mobilization by women's organisations can be as effective as quotas and reservations. Supporting women's autonomous organizing is therefore critical. This was demonstrated in the East Timor elections after independence. The Timor Leste Women's Network (REDE), a network of 14 organizations successfully campaigned to receive UN support for training women candidates and parties that had at least 30% female candidates. As a result, 27% of parliamentary seats were won by women.
  - c. As the experience of Trinidad and Tobago shows, sustained training and mentoring of female candidates and educating voters on the value of women in politics can also have a positive impact on numbers.
  - d. In the Caribbean, another effective strategy has been that of building strong partnerships between the ministry responsible for gender equality and civil society organizations. Such partnerships can be an effective avenue for showcasing women's potential and contributions, attracting interest by political parties and voters in women candidates.
  - e. It is time to put the torch on political parties. Parties are the gatekeepers of the political process. They are the spaces where leaders are groomed and selected to take on roles in government. Political party decision-making, financing, cadre development and other internal norms and procedures affect women's political opportunity. Governments, civil society and international agencies such as ours should do more to challenge and support parties to be more inclusive and accountable to their voters, both men and women. Capacity building and advocacy, targeting party leaders at various levels is required. So too is effective regulation of party financing.

### **In the Corporate Sector**

1. In terms of women's leadership in the corporate sector, there are few studies at present on women's leadership status in developing countries.

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<sup>7</sup> McDonagh 2002, cited in the Task Force Report on Gender Equality. (2005)

This is because in many developing countries, women are still struggling to get into formal, non-agricultural employment, let alone rise to equal numbers in managerial positions in firms. In many developing countries, women are concentrated in household production and micro-enterprises in the informal sector. Data on women in the corporate sector is more available for middle-income countries. The ILO is trying to fill this gap by collecting information from lower-income countries.

2. **A clear pattern does emerge from the data we have: After several years of work, a woman is more likely to be found in a lower position than a man with the same qualifications who joined the labour market at the same time.**Data from middle and high income countries consistently shows that women are getting the qualifications, but not the access to the labour market to utilise them. In most countries, developed and developing, women fall short of parity with men in employment. In addition to lower employment figures, there is a striking gap between female employment and women's access to managerial positions.
3. World-wide women are trapped in a vicious circle of lack of economic empowerment. They face discrimination in hiring and promotional practices and unsupportive conditions of employment. These factors together translate to a double burden of labour for those women who combine childrearing with employment. Moreover, due to culture and gender roles, in many countries, significant numbers of women tend to look for employment in traditionally female sectors, and are staying at a lower level than management. This perpetuates cultural stereotypes about which careers men and women are "better at", causing occupational segregation, wage gaps, and promotional barriers.
4. The connection between issues of family –unpaid care activities, work and management needs to be made. Better policy making in this area is a pre-condition for greater female employment and entry into management positions.

### ***Trends in Latin America and Caribbean***

1. In the Caribbean, the share of women in managerial positions is higher than for most regions. For example in 2002, the Netherlands Antilles reported 48 per cent and Bermuda reported that 42% of all managerial positions as being occupied by women.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> J.R. Weeks and D. Seiler (2001) *Women's Entrepreneurship in Latin America: An exploration of Current Knowledge*. Inter-American Development Bank, Sustainable Development Department, Technical Papers Series, Washington, D.C.  
<http://www.iadb.org/sds/doc/MSM111WomenEntrepreneurship.pdf>

2. Also, available data shows that globally, women are rising in the corporate ranks, especially as department heads or as directors and managers. Corporations worldwide are increasingly concerned with retaining and promoting women employees **because women form an important part of the talent pool, because women can be a large part of the customer base, and because businesses can create competitive advantage by learning from diversity.**

### **What can be done**

3. To advance women in management, companies are using organizational strategies that fall into four categories:
  - a. programs to count women employees and increase their number;
  - b. professional development programs that especially help women (formal mentoring for example);
  - c. programs that change work practices to accommodate special needs (such as flex-time); and
  - d. efforts to uncover and change gendered perceptions of work practice and organizational culture.
4. Governments need to support such initiatives by providing an enabling policy environment. The most important policy issue is that of reconciling care work with paid work.
5. During my short visit here, I have learnt that in Trinidad and Tobago, women workers have played important roles in the struggles against slavery and colonialism and have to this day remained an important part of the labour force. Trinidadian women's voice in the labour movement has historically been loud and strong and remains so. The current President General of the Public Services Association, Jennifer Baptiste-Primus, and activist Clotil Walcott, who established the National Union of Domestic Employees (NUDE) are inspiring leaders of the labour movement. Clotil's struggle for greater recognition of women's unremunerated work and for recognition of NUDE among other unions put these issues on the policy map. You have a rich heritage, on which to build a corporate sector that gives equal opportunity and treats women and men equally.

### **UNDP's role**

1. You will be pleased to know that UNDP has been working with both the Government of Trinidad and Tobago and civil society organizations to increase women's roles in decision-making.
  - a. We supported the Ministry of Community Development, Culture and Gender to develop the National Gender Policy and provided advisory

- services to the Gender Working Group for the policy's inclusion in the Vision 2020 planning process. The report generated awareness on gender issues nationally, and represents an important reference for future policies that affect women and women's rights.
- b. We have also been working with civil society in Trinidad and Tobago. A UNDEF funded project is being implemented by the Network for the Advancement of Women. The project "Put a Woman" seeks to increase women's participation in politics and decision-making by training women in all parties to understand the role and functioning of local government and parliament and by giving them the skills required to introduce a gender perspective into public policies. In this way, the project aims to create a critical mass of gender-sensitive women in decision-making roles who are aware of how to promote gender equality in their work.
  - c. Early this year, the UNDP, in partnership with UNIFEM, NDI, the IPU and International IDEA launched the International Knowledge Network of Women in Politics, known as "iKNOW Politics". It is an online workspace designed to increase the participation and effectiveness of women in political life by utilizing a technology-enabled forum. On the iKNOW website, users can access resources, including an online library, create knowledge through mediated discussion forums, information exchange and consolidated expert responses to member queries; and share experiences by exchanging lessons learned and best practices of successful projects aimed to increase women's participation in politics. We are proud to be partnering with these agencies in this initiative and I encourage you all to visit the website and browse its contents. [<http://www.iknowpolitics.org>]
  - d. In Mauritania, UNDP has supported a positive discrimination system (20 % quota for women) that led to the increase of women's participation in the local councils (30 %) and in the parliament (17 women out of 95 MPs).

### **Conclusion:**

1. To conclude, I would like to stress the key message of my lecture today: It is a human right of women to have an equal voice over decisions that affect them. This right is captured as Goal number 3 in the MDGs and the deadline for meeting it has already passed, making it a missed goal and increasing urgency for its achievement.
2. The call for us to fulfill this human right is complemented by evidence demonstrating women's abilities and unique contributions in leadership roles. My lecture today highlighted a number of examples of the benefits

of women's leadership, whether in anti-corruption, instigating laws and policies that address societal inequities and bringing needed social services to our communities, or in forging peace and community development in post-conflict zones or situations of violence and repression.

3. In the corporate sphere, women provide companies with comparative advantage when they hold management roles because they represent the needs of their female consumers or stockholders. The research and evidence I presented today demonstrates how the labour market, societal attitudes, and gender roles are all inter-connected and work together to discourage women from entering and remaining in the labour force and rising to managerial positions in corporations. Corporate strategies to address these issues should be backed by national policies to level the ground for women in the market.
4. The Caribbean, like the other regions of the world is inching forward towards equality of women and men in decision making. This progress is slow but we know why and the solutions are not beyond us. Equality in decision-making is a human right that women claim. It benefits women, men children, communities and nations. It is therefore a shared goal, requiring a partnership between women and men. It is a missed Millennium Development Goal, we should re-double our efforts to achieve it. UNDP is committed to working with you and your neighbours in the Caribbean region to achieve the goal of gender equality.

Thank you very much for your attention.