



Smart Development:
Gender Equality Key to Achieving the MDGs

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Check against Delivery

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Mr. Chairperson, Distinguished Delegates, Colleagues, and Friends,

I would like to congratulate you, Mr. Chairperson, and other members of the bureau on your election to this committee.

I thank you for this opportunity to present the [Secretary-General's report on the activities of the United Nations Development Fund for Women](#) (UNIFEM). As the report before you (A/61/292) illustrates, UNIFEM work addresses four priority areas — reducing feminized poverty and exclusion; promoting gender equality in democratic governance and post-conflict development; ending violence against women; and halting and reversing the spread of HIV/AIDS. Our programmes focus on bringing UN partners together with governments, civil society and the private sector to form strong and effective partnerships to advance gender equality and women's empowerment and achieve national development goals.

UNIFEM programmes take a *holistic approach* — linking normative frameworks with institutional reform to bring concrete change to women on the ground. This includes: (1) formulating and implementing laws and policies to promote gender equality and women's human rights; (2) building institutional capacity to allocate sufficient resources and establish accountability mechanisms to ensure implementation; (3) strengthening gender equality advocates to monitor and track progress and mobilize constituencies to bring about change; and (4) ending harmful practices and attitudes that perpetuate gender inequality worldwide.

These strategies work because they operate at multiple levels and across sectors to build strong partnerships and bring about sustainable change. The results can be seen in our work on gender-responsive budgeting, where we took the lead at a High Level Conference in 2001 with a campaign for gender-responsive budget initiatives to be done in 45 countries by 2015. Today, we can track results through programmes we have supported in 30 countries. In all of these, we work across sectors, building relationships with ministries that most directly affect women, such as health and education, and building on these to upscale results through finance and planning ministries, working directly with budget offices.

In Morocco for example, we began working in 2003 with women's leaders and the ministry of education to secure additional allocations for on-site services to increase girls' school enrolment, and with the ministry of agriculture to increase women's access to vocational training and credit. Today, through a partnership with the Ministry of Finance and Privatization, concrete budget measures are spelled out in the gender budget statement that accompanies the national budget, outlining for the first time precisely how the allocation of public resources will address gender equality priorities as a strategic part of achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Similarly, a partnership with the Finance Ministry in India has resulted in the inclusion of gender budget analysis in the Economic Survey that accompanies the presentation of the Annual Budget. In both cases, our support has facilitated the development of a gender-responsive budgeting knowledge network, through which governments and UN agencies obtain up-to-date knowledge and technical support to undertake new partnerships.

Concrete and complementary results can also be seen in our two-year programme with UNDP to showcase holistic strategies for incorporating a gender perspective in planning, monitoring and reporting around the MDGs. Strategies included poverty dialogues among government, civil society and the media, especially in rural areas, to amplify women's priorities in national discussions on MDGs and encourage the development of local gender and MDG action plans; multi-stakeholder meetings on gender and the MDGs focused on poverty reduction as it relates to the impact of trade reform on women's economic security; and the development of gender-responsive indicators to monitor progress and harmonize reporting on the MDGs, the Beijing Platform for Action and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). Three of the five pilot countries have engendered their MDG reports and are linking with poverty reduction strategy processes, one has started localizing MDG planning at the district level, and all have stimulated increased use of analysis and data in reporting and monitoring and increased accessibility of sex disaggregated data. Working through the Gender Theme Groups in UNCTs, the programme was able to influence national planning frameworks, including the CCA

and/or UNDAF processes in two countries, the PRSP process in another, and the National Strategic Development Plan in still another.

These and other examples show that to deliver on gender equality, the issue is not lack of good practices or effective strategies. We know how change happens. The issue is how to implement strategies on a scale that is large enough to turn the tide for gender equality and women's rights and achieve national development goals. The review of the implementation of the Triennial Comprehensive Policy Review provides an opportunity to develop concrete recommendations to increase the sharing of strategies and practices among agencies on the ground, monitoring and accountability mechanisms, and sustained partnerships and resources, especially at the country level.

The UN is at a turning point on gender equality. We have worked hard to secure frameworks and mechanisms, even models for change. We must now take up the far more difficult task of implementing strategies and practices that have delivered for women. Today, in the context of UN reform and the renewed commitment to achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), the international community has an unprecedented opportunity to build on strategies and practices that have worked and bring together the system to assist countries to deliver on all international development goals.

To take advantage of this opportunity, we need to address three priorities:

1. Strengthening a coherent and integrated approach across the UN system. As the TCPR resolution on gender recognized, development effectiveness requires that gender equality is addressed in a coherent way throughout the UN system, implementing normative standards and agreements through its operational activities on the ground. In response, the undg Task Team on Gender Equality, which UNIFEM chairs, coordinates action among its 16 member agencies in mainstreaming gender equality and women's empowerment and ensuring these are incorporated into the tools and guidance the undg gives to UN country teams. The Task Team has recommended bringing together good practices in each organization to "raise the bar" on accountability for gender equality across the UN system. It proposes two actions, endorsed by the undg Principals, to support UNCTs to move from improved analysis to more coherent implementation and accountability: (1) an "Accounting for Gender Equality" scorecard that sets minimum standards for UNCTs to assess their performance and identify gaps and progress across the system; and (2) an "Action Learning" process with a number of UNCTs to generate strategies to undertake rights-based, change-oriented programming that supports government and civil society to move forward on gender equality and women's empowerment.

2. Strengthening gender equality in national development strategies. Action plans for gender equality are in place in over 120 countries; laws and action plans to end violence against women have been passed in 89 countries. What is needed is an implementation strategy. In response to requests for assistance in next steps, UNIFEM is providing technical support to governments to adopt harmonized gender equality indicators for monitoring and reporting on commitments under the Beijing Platform and CEDAW and strategies for achieving the MDGs. We are strengthening capacity among stakeholders to incorporate harmonized indicators and sex-disaggregated data into national development planning and poverty reduction strategies. In the context of the aid effectiveness agenda, together with the European Union, we have mobilized a critical mass of change agents committed to a more gender-equitable society. They include leaders at all levels of government who control critical levers for change and financial resources as well as international and regional organizations that provide support to both national governments and civil society organizations. In so doing we are working to ensure that national ownership means bringing women's voices and perspectives into the development process, that gender equality principles and strategies are incorporated into all coordination mechanisms, including PRSPs and sector-support strategies, and that national plans of action for gender equality as well as action plans to end violence against women are integrated into national development planning and strategies.

3. Strengthening monitoring and accountability by women on the ground. Accountability means different things to different people, depending on where they are located *vis à vis* the power to bring about change. For gender equality and social justice advocates, accountability means ensuring

sufficient resources for implementation as well as expanding community-level participation in defining targets and tracking progress towards them. This not only supports greater inclusion in national planning but also supports organizing by grass-roots and women's organizations to exercise a watchdog function to ensure national resources are allocated all the way to the ground, and bring realities from the ground to inform policy direction. In so doing it works to bring underrepresented and excluded groups, such as HIV-positive women, women informal workers, indigenous women, and rural poor women into the development process.

In the context of UN reform, there is general agreement that “the gender equality architecture” must be strengthened — at both the global and the country level. We know so much more now than we did even ten years ago about supporting gender equality and women's empowerment. What we need is the courage to build on what we know to bring about the radical changes needed to enable the UN system as a whole to respond to the new opportunities for — and current threats to — gender equality and women's rights, providing the kind of policy advice and technical expertise that will help countries to deliver on these goals. A consolidated gender entity will be able to make the much needed difference to the extent that it has sufficient presence and authority at the UN Country Team table and can inspire and mobilize partnerships and agents for change. To make this kind of difference, it must be connected to a constituency at the country level that can ensure that the system is responsive to the actual lived realities of women, particularly poor and excluded women. And finally, it must be able to operate as a driver that can stay ahead of the curve to take on emerging issues and push the system to take them on.

If the UN is to remain a legitimate development player in the 21st century, it must stay at the forefront to assist countries to deliver on gender equality and women's empowerment, which will at the same time enable them to make real progress in achieving all of the MDGs. This is the key to smart development.

We thank you for your partnership and support.