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## UNITED NATIONS MILLENNIUM PROJECT TASK FORCE ON EDUCATION AND GENDER EQUALITY INTERIM REPORT: FROM PROMISES TO ACTION

### Recommendations for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women Executive Summary

#### INTRODUCTION

Many decades of organising and advocacy by women's organisations and Networks across the world have resulted in the global recognition of the contributions that women make to economic development and the costs to societies of persistent inequalities between women and men. The success of those efforts is evident in the promises made by nation states over the past two decades through international forums. The inclusion of gender-equality and women's empowerment as the third Millennium Development Goal is a reminder that many of those promises have not been kept, while simultaneously offering yet another international policy opportunity to implement them.

2. The UN Millennium Project Task Force on Education and Gender Equality, an expert advisory group commissioned by the UN Secretary General, has been assigned to take a systematic look at the means to achieve significant improvements in gender equality and the empowerment of women in the developing world. This interim report, a main product of the Task Force's deliberations, is an input to a longer-term project and builds on the analysis presented in the Task Force's background paper, "Promises to Keep" (Grown et al. 2003). It is not the "final word" of the Task Force, but a channel through which the Task Force can convey its current thinking about priorities to be taken by donor countries, key international technical agencies, and developing country governments. The Task Force will consult with a wide range of stakeholders over the next year on the main recommendations in this report. The results of these consultations will inform the final report of the Task Force.

3. Over the past three decades women have made some gains, particularly in health and education. Despite these gains, it is clear that the first deadline for the MDG target of Goal 3 - *eliminating gender disparities in primary and secondary education preferably by 2005 and at all levels of education no later than 2015* - will be missed. This will be the first visible MDG failure. But instead of serving as an opportunity to underscore the failures of

the international community, 2005 should be used to issue a clarion call for re-energising efforts so that the second deadline for the target - 2015 is honoured.

### **THE TASK FORCE PERSPECTIVE**

4. The Task Force has adopted an operational framework of gender equality that consists of three dimensions:

- The *capabilities domain* refers to basic human abilities as measured through education, health and nutrition. These are fundamental to individual well-being.
- The *access to resources and opportunities domain* refers primarily to equality in the opportunity to use or apply basic capabilities through access to economic assets (such as land, property or infrastructure) and resources (such as income and employment) as well as political opportunity.
- The *security domain* is defined to mean reduced vulnerability to violence and conflict, which result in physical and psychological harm and lessen the ability of societies to fulfil their potential.

5. Task Force members affirm that gender equality is central to the achievement of all the Millennium Development Goals. Development policies and actions that fail to take gender inequality into account and fail to address disparities between males and females will have limited effectiveness and serious cost implications. The recommendations in this interim report, therefore, represent a necessary and minimum set of actions to achieve the third goal. But achievement of all the Millennium Goals depends on the direct integration of gender equality and women's empowerment into the actions taken to achieve all those MDGs.

### **TARGETS TO ACHIEVE GOAL 3**

6. The MDG goal for gender equality has only one target: eliminating disparities in primary and secondary education, preferably by 2005, and at all levels of education no later than 2015. The focus on education as the target for Goal 3 is justified by the evidence that investing in girls' education yields high returns. Yet, education alone is insufficient to eliminate the range of gender inequalities or to empower women to participate in society because it ignores the other two domains of gender inequality as well as other components of capabilities. Gender equality and the empowerment of women can remain elusive goals without the opportunity to use that education to obtain decent employment or to participate fully in decision-making in the political arena. Nor can female education eliminate violence against women.

7. This has led the Task Force to suggest the inclusion at the country-level of selected additional targets and indicators for Goal 3 to cover the other domains of gender equality and women's empowerment. These, and others like them, can be used at the country level to focus efforts and monitor progress. Examples of such targets to be achieved by the year 2015 are:

- *Ensure universal access to sexual and reproductive health services through the primary health care system;*
- *Eliminate gender inequality in access to economic 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.*

8. The Task Force recognises that even if all suggested gender equality targets were achieved, the second part of Goal 3, the empowerment of women, may still remain elusive. To be empowered, women must not only have equal capabilities (such as education and health), access to opportunities (economic and political), and security (freedom from

violence), they must also have the agency to use those capabilities, opportunities, and security to make strategic choices and decisions that affect important life outcomes. Empowerment is a process that marks change over a period of time and requires that the individual being empowered is involved as a significant agent in that change process) The core of the concept of empowerment lies in the ability of women to control their own destiny. Thus, empowerment is greater than the sum of the parts of gender equality, although achieving gender equality is a critical step in that process.

## **PROGRESS TOWARD THE GOAL**

9. The United Nations proposed four indicators for tracking progress toward Goal 3:

- The ratio of girls to boys in primary and secondary education;
- The ratio of literate females to males among 15-24 year olds;
- The share of women in wage employment in the non-agricultural sector, and;
- The proportion of seats held by women in national parliaments.

10. Because of these indicators' shortcomings, the Task Force recommends supplementing them with other indicators that provide a fuller picture of gender equality in the domains of capability, opportunity and agency:

- Completion rates for primary and secondary education;
- Region-specific economic indicators such as gender gaps in earnings in paid and self-employment, sex-disaggregated unemployment rates, and occupational segregation by sex, and;
- Prevalence rates of domestic violence in the past year.

11. Given current data limitations, the interim report examines progress on three of the indicators proposed by the UN (primary and secondary enrolment rates, the female share of paid non-agricultural employment, and the share of female-held seats in national parliaments), as well as completion rates for primary and secondary education. The analysis shows that, for the primary and secondary education enrolment indicators, few countries will achieve a ratio of 1.0– or gender parity – either by 2005 or 2015. Many countries that are on track to meet the target will do so in ways that are not empowering to girls because they will not increase overall female enrolment rates. With respect to the economic indicator, in 91 percent of countries the female share of non-agricultural wage employment is less than 50 percent. Regarding political representation, there has been remarkable progress made over the last decade, with the most significant gains being made in Latin America and sub-Saharan Africa. Despite this, only 14 countries of the 171 countries for which there are data available have reached the target of 30 percent of women in legislative bodies.

12. Overall, then, by most indicators discussed in the report, women fare less well than men.

13. In some regions, females do better than males, but only on some of the education indicators. The goal of gender equality is, therefore, still elusive.

## **SIX STRATEGIC PRIORITIES**

14. The Task Force has selected six strategic priorities for international and national-level action that should be achieved by the year 2015. These six priorities represent first generation development problems that have not yet been solved. They are inter-related and empowering women and gender equality entails action on all of them.

15. The Task Force has identified two sub-populations for whom the strategic priorities have the greatest relevance. These sub-populations need priority attention and must receive preference in terms of the implementation of the strategic priorities and the allocation of resources.

16. The first sub-population is poor women, both in the poorest countries and in countries that have achieved increases in national income, but where poverty remains significant.

17. A focus on poor women is justified for several reasons. Gender inequalities exist among the rich and the poor, but they tend to be greater among the poor; this is especially true for inequalities in capabilities and opportunities. Moreover, the well being and survival of poor households depends on the productive and reproductive contributions of their female members, and increasing numbers of poor households are headed or maintained by women. A focus on poor women, therefore, would reduce the vulnerability and insecurity of these households.

18. The second sub-population is adolescents and youth, who currently constitute two-thirds of the population in the poorest countries and the largest cohort of adolescents in the world's history. The sheer size of the current adolescent cohort in poor countries means that interventions to improve their lives will affect national outcomes.

19. Additionally, adolescence is a formative time of transition - between childhood and adulthood - and is therefore amenable to interventions that can dramatically alter subsequent life outcomes.

20. Within the adolescent cohort, the Task Force has given priority to the needs of adolescent girls because the overall social, economic, and health disadvantages they experience are greater than those of boys. Therefore, investments to help girls complete good quality secondary schooling, support the transition from education to work, develop healthy sexuality, and guarantee physical safety are urgently needed and can simultaneously accelerate progress toward several of the Millennium Development Goals.

21. The Task Force recognises that there are cases where interventions must target boys, e.g., in those countries with reverse gaps in secondary education. In addition, boys and men must be included in interventions to promote gender equality and women's empowerment.

### **Strategic Priority #1: Strengthen Opportunities for Secondary Education for Girls and Eliminate Gender Gaps at That Level**

22. In order to achieve Goal 3, evidence suggests that among all levels of education, secondary education has the greatest pay-off for women's empowerment. This implies that investments in primary education must be made in order to create the pipeline for secondary education. The actions that need to be taken to achieve gender equality in primary education are discussed in Task Force 3's report on universal primary education. However, global efforts must not be limited to guaranteeing only primary education. The Task Force recommends that interventions to promote gender equality in capabilities must prioritise girls' secondary education. Interventions proven to be effective for increasing girls' participation in primary school may also apply to the secondary level. These include: making schooling more affordable by reducing costs and offering targeted scholarships,

building secondary schools close to girls' homes, making schools girl- friendly, and improving the content, quality, and relevance of education.

### **Strategic Priority #2: Guarantee Sexual and Reproductive Rights and Health**

23. Goal 3 cannot be achieved without the guarantee of sexual and reproductive health and rights for girls and women. Priorities for action are reducing persistently high rates of maternal mortality, strengthening women's and girls' ability to protect themselves from HIV infection, and providing adolescent girls with full access to sexual and reproductive health information and services. Interventions must occur both within and outside the health system. At a minimum, national public health systems must provide quality family planning, safe abortion, and emergency obstetric services. Other essential services include the prevention and treatment of sexually transmitted infections, including HIV, and interventions to reduce malnutrition and anaemia. Outside the health system, comprehensive sexuality education programs are essential for laying the foundation for improved sexual and reproductive health outcomes. Ultimately, these interventions must be supported by an enabling policy and political environment that guarantees women's and girls' sexual and reproductive rights. Current threats to those rights must be opposed if Goal #3 is to be achieved.

### **Strategic Priority #3: Invest in Gender-Responsive Infrastructure to Reduce Women's and Girls' Time Poverty**

24. Gender-responsive infrastructure investments are needed to reallocate women's time and energy away from routine maintenance tasks to more productive and fulfilling activities.

25. As long as poor rural women and girls are burdened with having to expend large amounts of time and energy on collecting water and fuel, they will find little time to attend school or work on adopting the new practices suggested by development programs. Investments in the appropriate infrastructure to relieve women's time poverty are essential to maximise the impact of all the strategic priorities discussed in this report.

### **Strategic Priority #4: Guarantee Women's Property and Inheritance Rights and Reduce Discrimination in Labour Markets**

#### ***1. Property and Inheritance Rights***

26. It is now widely recognised that ownership and control over assets such as land and housing provides economic security, incentives for taking economic risks which lead to growth, and important economic returns including income. Yet, women in many countries around the globe lack this right. Ensuring female property and inheritance rights empowers women and rectifies a fundamental injustice. The Task Force calls for immediate action to be taken, including legal reform, legal literacy, and recording women's share of land or property. In the short term, institutional arrangements that allow women collective or individual lease and use rights are important first steps.

#### ***2. Reduce Gender Inequality in the Labour Market***

27. Gender inequalities in labour markets take multiple forms and are persistent, insidious, and not easily amenable to policy intervention. Yet, the Task Force underscores the importance of addressing this challenge in order to achieve Goal #3 because discrimination in labour markets contravenes women's right to decent work and is costly for women, as well as their households and communities.

### **Strategic Priority #5: Increase Women's Representation in Political Bodies**

28. Without equality of opportunity for participating in decision-making in all political arenas, Goal 3 cannot be met. There has been noticeable progress made in women's representation in political bodies in several countries since 1991. The experience of these countries has shown that gender quotas and reservations are the most effective policy tools to increase women's representation in national and local legislatures.

### **Strategic Priority #6: End Violence Against Women**

29. Violence against women exists in epidemic proportions in many countries around the world. Because it has serious health and development impacts and is a gross violation of women's rights, it must be eliminated if Goal #3 is to be met. There is no single intervention for ending violence; rather, it requires a combination of infrastructural, legal, judicial, enforcement, educational, health, and other service-related actions aimed at prevention, protection, and punishment. Most importantly, ending this epidemic requires formative change in the acceptability of violence against women that can only be brought about through a global campaign, combined with a scaling-up of effective community based interventions and analyses that documents the costs of violence against women.

### **MAKING IT HAPPEN**

30. Ultimately whether gender equality and women's empowerment are achieved is mostly in the hands of policymakers in the developing countries. The nature and composition of governance, public policy, spending decisions, and political will in those countries will determine whether and how the six strategic priorities are implemented. At the same time, the Task Force believes that even the best effort and policy change at the country level will not be enough. For the poorest countries in particular, that are most at risk of falling short on this and the other goals, the input, leverage and sustained commitment of the donor community is critical

### ***National Level Actions***

31. At the national level, an enabling national environment for gender equality consists of four components.

*1. An effective national women's machinery.* Lessons learned from the implementation of NWMs over the past two decades shows that an effective NWM must have a strong mandate that is supported by legislation, goals and priorities, and coherent lines of responsibility and accountability; a policy oversight and advocacy role; an appropriate location within the government that allows for cross-sectoral influence; an adequate budget that is commensurate with the mandate for monitoring and accountability; a technically qualified staff that has a wide range of sectoral skills and experience; links to national networks of civil society organisations to maintain legitimacy, credibility, and accountability; and finally, institutional autonomy that protects it from political interference and manipulation.

*2. A strong presence of women in legislative bodies.* The representation of women in legislative bodies serves as an indicator of society's commitment to gender equality and women's empowerment and has the potential to trigger more fundamental changes in gender relations and beliefs about appropriate gender roles.

*3. Mechanisms for assessing progress and holding stakeholders accountable.* The three most important mechanisms to hold stakeholders accountable for gender equality at the

national level are: sex-disaggregated and statistics to assess progress made toward the gender equality targets discussed above, a legal framework such as offered by the Convention to Eliminate All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), and strengthening the participation of women's organisations in national-level budgetary processes

32. Data are a critical tool for accountability. There are large gaps in data at the country level, particularly in women's economic participation and violence against women. The Task force recommends focusing on data collection efforts in these two areas.

33. CEDAW provides a powerful mechanism for stakeholders at the country level to hold their governments accountable for meeting Goal 3. The Convention has had a positive impact on legal and other developments in countries throughout the world, including the strengthening of provisions in constitutions. Recommendations for strengthening the implementation and enforcement of CEDAW within countries will be developed by the Task Force for the final report.

34. In addition, the Task Force is developing recommendations on strengthening civil society participation in national level budgetary processes to ensure that budgets reflect national level policies on gender equality. These recommendations will be included in the Task Force's final report

*4. Knowledge of the costs of gender inequality and expenditures to promote equality and women's empowerment.* No study has attempted to estimate the costs of gender inequality across all domains because it is difficult to do so without addressing the underlying data requirements that are necessary for such analysis. Many methodological issues also need to be addressed; experimentation and innovation will be required to move this effort forward.

35. To date, there have been some estimates made of the costs of gender inequality in education to productivity and economic growth, the costs of poor reproductive health, and the costs of violence against women. The costs of gender inequality in these domains have been estimated in different ways. For instance, countries in which the ratio of female-to-male enrolment in primary or secondary education is less than 0.75 can expect levels of GNP that are roughly 25 percent lower than countries in which there is less gender disparity in enrolments. In the arena of sexual and reproductive health, current estimates show that reproductive health problems account for 18 percent of the global burden of disease and 32 percent of the burden among women ages 15-44 worldwide.

36. Finally, to give one example of the costs of violence against women, it has been estimated that in Chile, domestic violence reduced women's earnings by \$1.56 billion (more than 2 percent of GDP in 1996); in Nicaragua, earnings were reduced by \$29.5 million (about 1.6 percent of 1996 GDP).

37. Because gender inequality is multi-dimensional and multi-sectoral, assessing the financial costs of efforts to reduce it are difficult to calculate. The Millennium Project is developing a model for estimating comprehensive costs for countries with different levels of gender inequality which will be reported in the final report of the Task Force.

### ***International Level Actions***

38. An enabling international environment requires donor policies and programs that support gender equality in nation-states. An enabling international environment has four characteristics.

1. *Gender mainstreaming within international agencies.* Although most international agencies seek to integrate gender issues into their policies and sectoral activities, the rhetoric has not been translated into strong implementation because gender mainstreaming within these institutions has faced many of the same challenges as the experience of NWMs at the country level. The interim report discusses ways to overcome such obstacles as lack of budgeting for gender units or departments, inadequate technical and analytical skills and supervision during implementation, lack of commitment of mid-level operational staff, and policy evaporation.

2. *Mainstreaming of gender into donor-country policy processes.* By far the most common policy framework currently used in aid cooperation is the Poverty Reduction Strategy process. Recent reviews of the evidence to date on how well Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs) have addressed gender issues and women's empowerment are not very encouraging. The Task Force will be making specific recommendations in its final report on how PRSPs can be aligned with Goal 3.

3. *Donor incentives for countries that institutionalise gender considerations.* The Task Force is developing recommendations for mechanisms to provide incentives to "reward" countries that make progress on the six strategic priorities and take steps to create a national governance structure that is conducive to gender equality.

4. *Improved international data systems.* The Task Force recommends that donors commit to strengthening ILO and WHO efforts to work with countries in collecting, standardising, and disseminating gender-disaggregated data and statistics in the areas of informal employment, gender wage gaps and prevalence rates of violence against women

## **CONCLUSION**

39. Relative to the past, current international development rhetoric places gender inequality high among the list of development priorities. Having an independent MDG goal on gender equality is a reflection of this new emphasis. Achieving this goal, however, requires concrete steps to achieve all the Millennium Development Goals, but it cannot be business as usual. Each of the steps taken toward the MDGs must have a gender lens, and policies and programmatic interventions must be designed in ways that advance women's empowerment. Moreover, for Goal 3 to be achieved, countries and donors must provide resources and coordinate efforts to achieve the six strategic priorities outlined in this interim report.