

Women and The Millennium Development Goals

The Millennium Declaration

In 2000 the world's governments adopted the Millennium Declaration, the stated aim of which is to address people's needs for the new millennium. The hope held out by the Declaration is that there is a consensus among rich and poor countries that poverty is a collective focus, and that the resources needed to eradicate poverty exist. The Declaration calls for the political will to achieve such a fair distribution.

The Declaration recognises women's centrality in development processes, and includes a commitment to "promote gender equality and the empowerment of women as effective ways to combat poverty, hunger and disease and to stimulate development that is truly sustainable." The Declaration also addresses "the equal rights and opportunities of women and men" and pledges "to combat all forms of violence against women and to implement the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against women (CEDAW).

The Millennium Development Goals

The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) were published in 2001 as a 'road map' for the implementation of the Declaration. The MDGs comprise eight goals supplemented by 18 numerical and time-bound targets and 48 indicators intended to improve living conditions and remedy key global imbalances by 2015. Many of the targets are not new, but reflect commitments made at the UN conferences of the 1990s (e.g. The Rio Summit, the Beijing Fourth World Conference on Women, the Cairo Conference on Population and Development). With the MDGs world governments have, for the first time, set out a joint framework to co-ordinate approaches and pool resources in order to address issues such as world poverty and health.⁶ The goals are presented as the way to enable people in the South to hold political leaders to account, to encourage democratic debate, and to deliver political reforms and participatory processes.

The eight goals are:

- 1 Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger
- 2 Achieve universal primary education
- 3 Promote gender equality and empower women
- 4 Reduce child mortality
- 5 Improve maternal health
- 6 Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases
- 7 Ensure environmental sustainability
- 8 Develop a global partnership for development.

The first 7 MDGs are aimed at developing countries and the last, Goal 8 is aimed at donor countries.

The MDGs, the Beijing Platform for Action and CEDAW

The MDGs address several of the 12 Critical Areas of Concern in the Platform for Action adopted at the 1995 Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing, namely poverty (1), education (2), health (5) and environmental sustainability (7). The Millennium Declaration explicitly includes a commitment to implement CEDAW. The UN Commission on the Status of Women at its Beijing+10 Review in March 2005 adopted this perspective. The Political Declaration of the CSW emphasises that "[t]he full and effective implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action (BPfA) is essential to achieving the internationally agreed development goals including those contained in the Millennium Declaration". The declaration further recognises that the "implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and CEDAW are mutually reinforcing in achieving gender equality and the empowerment of women."

The World Summit 2005

At the World Summit held in September 2005 to review progress on the MDGs, women's rights emerged as a key set of agreements in the final Summit document and a number of important gains were made.

In addition, world leaders agreed to repeal all laws that discriminate against women and promised to implement the Security Council resolution 1325 which promotes women's increased participation in peace and security processes.

However, the opportunity to strengthen Goal 8 and to give the UN a role in challenging the negative impacts of trade on development was not taken up by world leaders. There are no references to the negative impacts of trade liberalization, the need for fair trade rules and policies, or the need to ensure that trade rules are in line with existing UN agreements on human rights, including women's rights, and the environment.

Women and the MDGs

Gender equality is not only a goal in its own right, but an essential ingredient for achieving all the MDGs. Attempts to achieve the MDGs that do not incorporate a gender perspective will both increase the costs and minimize success.

Goal 1: Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger. The majority of the 1.5 billion people living on 1 dollar a day or less are women. In addition, the gap between women and men caught in the cycle of poverty has continued to widen in the past decade, a phenomenon commonly referred to as "the feminisation of poverty". Worldwide, women earn on average slightly more than 50 per cent of what men earn. (UN Women Watch)

Goal 2: Achieve universal primary education. Of the 150 million children aged 6-11 who don't attend school, over 90 million are girls. (WEDO). Education, especially for girls, empowers families to break the cycle of poverty. Evidence gathered over 30 years shows that educating women is the single most powerful weapon against malnutrition — even more effective than improving food supply. (OXFAM)

Goal 3: Promote gender equality and women's empowerment. Of the world's 876 million illiterate people over 15 years two-thirds are women; working women have less social protection and employment rights; a third of all women has been violently abused; and rates of HIV/AIDS infection among women are rapidly increasing. (WEDO)

Goals 4 & 5: Reduce child mortality; Improve maternal health. Evidence from countries around the world demonstrates that gender equality is key to improving maternal and child health and stemming the spread of HIV/AIDS and other diseases. Some 500,000 women—the majority in poor countries—die each year due to pregnancy-related causes. Reducing maternal mortality depends on the extent of health care availability for expectant mothers, particularly when dealing with complications. (WEDO)

Goal 6: Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases. Women cannot achieve empowerment and equality unless their reproductive rights are fully and legally realized.

Globally, just under half of adults living with HIV/AIDS are women and in many regions women make up the majority of infected adults. The gendered impact of HIV/AIDS is acute, due both to women's physical susceptibility to infection, as well as women's typically weaker position in terms of power in sexual relations. In addition, women tend disproportionately to bear the physical, economical and emotional costs of caring for those who are sick. (Dóchas, Population Institute).

Goal 7: Ensure environmental sustainability. Men's and women's different roles and responsibilities are strongly linked to environmental sustainability. Women perform the majority of the world's agricultural work, producing food for their families, as well as other goods that are sold in national and international markets.

Goal 8: Develop a global partnership for development. In order to achieve MDGs, Northern governments need to provide financial resources, fairer trade regimes and fiscal measures to respond to the needs of the South. This goal is directed at Northern governments. However, under this goal there are no time frames, quantifiable benchmarks, or instruments that can hold industrialized countries, economic institutions, and corporations accountable.

The World Summit and Goal 3

No new targets or indicators were agreed, but Goal 3 was extended to include:

- an end to impunity for violence against women;
- the goal of universal access to reproductive health;
- the right to own and inherit property;
- equal access to labour protection;
- increased representation of women in government decision-making bodies.

Governments must now include these issues when reporting on the MDGs.

In 2005, five years into the 15-year time-frame set in 2000, the MDGs are far from being achieved. Progress towards the goals has been uneven. Estimates on the amount of additional aid required to achieve the MDGs range from US\$50bn to US\$76bn.