



HIV/AIDS Patient in Mozambique.  
Photo courtesy of UN Photos: Eskinder Debebe

## ■ FACT SHEET

# GENDER AND THE MILLENNIUM DEVELOPMENT GOALS

**“Gender equality and the empowerment of women are at the heart of the MDGs and are preconditions for overcoming poverty, hunger and disease” – UNDP (2010) Millennium Development Goals Report**

### Key Statistics

- **More than one billion people live on less than one dollar a day with over 70% of these being women or children**
- **Every year, 536,000 women and girls die as a result of complications during pregnancy, childbirth or in the six weeks following delivery**

### Overview

At the Millennium Summit in September 2000 the largest gathering of world leaders in history adopted the UN Millennium Declaration, committing their nations to a new global partnership to reduce extreme poverty and setting out a series of time-bound targets, with a deadline of 2015 that have become known as the Millennium Development Goals

There are 8 key goals:

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

### Millennium Development Goals and Gender

**Social, political and economic equality for women is integral to the achievement of all Millennium Development Goals. Until women and girls are liberated from poverty and injustice, all our goals – peace, security, sustainable development – stand in jeopardy.- Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon June 28, 2010**

The advancement of women is critical in achieving the MDGs as all touch on essential aspects of women’s rights and empowerment. Gender is one of a host of social conditions that limit the potential of achieving the MDGs.

Gender discrimination intersects with and significantly affects a wide range of discriminating factors. Therefore how this discrimination limits one individual from accessing services over another must be considered if we are to advance progress on some of the most debilitating social, health, political, economic and cultural issues today.

While there have been considerable gains since 2000 on many of the MDG targets, progress has been slowest on the gender equality dimensions of these targets – from improving maternal health and access to decent work to eradicating hunger. This was widely acknowledged during the 2010 Millennium Development Goal Review Summit in New York which sought to establish and advance a program for action to achieve the MDGs in the remaining 5 years before 2015. Key to these concerns was not only incorporating gender into achieving the MDGs but that progress was slowest in regard to specific gender targets, including MDG 5 - to improve maternal health.



Liberian Women Take Literacy Class through UN Project.  
Photo courtesy of UN Photos: Christopher Herwig.

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The MDGs are not only about 8 goals in a 15 year time span. They are about pushing for political will and action on some of the most rampant inequalities in modern society – with gender at the heart of this inequality. Therefore, targeting how gender informs and shapes the circumstances of each MDG is crucial to the realisation of the MDG targets.

### What is the relationship between each MDG and gender?

#### Goal 1 Eradicate Extreme Poverty and Hunger

The target of this goal is to halve the proportion of people whose income is less than one dollar a day and the proportion of people who suffer from hunger.

The issue of poverty reduction must include a gender aspect given prevailing social stereotypes, cultural behaviours, and a lack of equal access to health, education and rights associated with land and financial assistance that continue to face women's livelihoods. Tackling poverty and hunger significantly depends on improving access to decent work, particularly for women who face additional caring responsibilities in the home.

Moreover, women continually lack access to social support services hindering opportunities for overcoming inequality in poverty and hunger. In particular, poor and rural women and girls who are especially reliant on public services are often left behind.

#### Goal 2 Achieve Universal Primary Education

The target for this goal is to ensure that by 2015 children everywhere, both boys and girls will be able to complete a full course of primary schooling.

With 150 million children aged 6-11 not in school and 90 million of these being girls, education is an essential aspect of achieving gender equality and in turn the Millennium Development Goals.

There are several ways in which to achieve universal primary education including the abolishment of school fees in developing countries, incorporating nurseries into schools in order to allow female children who have the responsibility of looking after siblings to be educated, the abolition of school uniforms and the provision of free text books which take the financial pressure off those families who are unable to provide these for their children.

A remaining major barrier to girls' enrolment and completion is the violence they face at school and on the way to school. Effective protection and support mechanisms for girls and women greatly contribute to their access and continuation in education. Moreover, ensuring a quality education is vital in achieving gender equality. This includes overcoming gender stereotypes and curricula that portray women in subservient roles which can reinforce gender inequality.

#### Goal 3 Promote Gender Equality and Empower Women

The focus of this goal is education, especially primary and secondary education, the representation of women in waged employment in the non-agricultural sector and the proportion of seats held by women in national parliaments.

### Education

It has been proven that there is a direct link between education and reducing poverty. Unfortunately in some developing countries, the education of female children is viewed with less importance. This is highlighted through the number of female primary and secondary students compared to that of males. This is a result of females bearing the responsibility of being the primary care givers. Many female children are responsible for caring for their siblings.

Since the first World Conference on Women in 1975 there has been progress within this area however there is still a long way to go in order to achieve this MDG. Conditions of rural location and poverty, ethnic and racial discrimination against women in addition to violence, exacerbate the persistent lack of access of women to educational outlets.

### Waged Employment

In developed countries, women in the wage sector earn an average of 77% of what men earn; in developing countries, they earn 73%. This wage gap highlights that we still have a way to go in order to achieve gender equality in employment.

For many nations this includes considering women's control over land and as this assists in reducing poverty and increasing food security. Where women control land, they gain greater livelihood security and access to other resources, including credit and other financial products such as seeds and extension services.



First Day of Voting in Southern Sudan Referendum.  
Photo courtesy of UN Photos: Tim McKulka.

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### The goal of achieving more female political representatives is vital to achieving gender equality.

#### Political Representation

The goal of achieving more female political representatives is vital to achieving gender equality. Women's leadership and representation is crucial in the public and private life of women, ensuring that decisions from the everyday household level to government programs incorporate the needs and experiences of women.

#### Goal 4 Reduce Child Mortality

The target of this goal is to reduce by two-thirds the mortality rate of children under the age of five.

Education is seen to be an essential part of aspect in reducing child mortality rates. It has been found that in between one and three years of maternal schooling would reduce the child mortality rate by 15%.

In addition, child mortality rates are affected by the social norms of a community, for example some societies consider the male child to be more important than the female child, therefore, female children have a lower chance of survival. Further, tackling child mortality is highly dependant on improving the status and well-being of women.

#### Goal 5 Improve Maternal Health

Every minute a woman dies in pregnancy or childbirth, with the overall number of these women being located in developing countries. The target for this Goal is to reduce by three-quarters the maternal mortality rate.

This Goal is dependent upon on a greater equality for women both within society as a whole and also in access to health care. The ability of women to choose how many children they have, and when, has a critical bearing on whether they can access education, decent work and participate in decision-making.

#### Goal 6 Combat HIV/AIDS, Malaria and Other Diseases

Globally, women account for 50% of HIV/AIDS infected adults, however the percentage is much higher in developing countries compared to developed countries.

Malaria and other communicable diseases are a result of poverty. Due to lack of education and access to health care, poor women are extremely vulnerable to these diseases. Evident in cases of sexual violence as a means of warfare, women are similarly infected with HIV as a means of inflicting maximum stigma and humiliation. Additionally, stigma, lack of access to information and the burden of care-giving in the home present barriers to women in participating in HIV/AIDS policy making resulting in inadequate treatment and prevention services.

#### Goal 7 Ensure Environmental Sustainability

The target for this goal is to integrate the principles of sustainable development into country policies. The limited or in some cases no access of women to ownership of land and agricultural financial assistance plays an integral role in the success of this goal. Furthermore, with restricted access to land and assistance, the access of new technologies to female farmers is also limited.

In addition to issues of land, access to sustainable drinking water is included within this goal. Over one billion people having no access to safe drinking water, this lack of access directly affects other Millennium Development Goals such as eradicating extreme hunger and poverty, reducing child mortality and improving maternal health.

#### Goal 8 Develop a Global Partnership for Development

This Goal relies on establishing a reliable aid financing climate, reducing developing countries crippling debts and addressing many of the problems that remain in the world's least developed countries.

The key motivation behind this goal is to encourage an atmosphere of cooperation and strategy towards addressing development concerns. Within this goal, democratic governance, development and poverty reduction strategies are of core importance – therefore gender issues must be front and centre to how these strategies are formed.



Darfur Women March, Campaign against Gender-Based Violence. Photo courtesy of UN Photos/Albert Gonzalez Farran.

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### UN Women and the MDGs

UN Women remains deeply committed to the MDGs through four critical areas: monitoring, analysis, advocacy and operational programs.

**Monitoring Progress:** UN Women helps women evaluate whether or not their countries are on-track to meet the MDGs through analysis of data.

**Analysis:** UN Women and partner's background papers, proven strategies and network of gender experts have made essential contributions to knowledge in how to achieve the MDGs.

**Advocacy:** Longstanding partnerships with women's organisations have ideally positioned UN Women to spread awareness, spark debate and encourage participation in MDG activities.

**Operational Programs:** The branches of UN Women's operational programs contribute to the MDGs: reducing feminised poverty, ending violence against women, halting the spread of HIV/AIDS and achieving gender equality in democratic governance.

### MDGs and Australia

The MDGs remain at the forefront of aid and development programming in the Australian government, informing all development targets and programs.

Increasingly the Australian Government has been affording more funding to development assistance with a current target of achieving 0.5% of Gross National Income by 2015. However, this remains below the internationally recognised goal of 0.7% and lacks a timeline for implementation.

Programs remain concentrated in the Pacific region with increased attention to violence against women and gender concerns in addition to expanded programs into the African region.

### Useful Publications and Resources

**AusAID (2005), A global partnership for development: Australia's Contribution to Achieving the Millennium Development Goals.**

**ACFID (2010), Position Paper: Millennium Development Goals Review.**

**United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (2007), Gender and the MDGs, ESCWA Centre for Women.**

**United Nations Development Program (2009), The Millennium Development Goals Report.**

**UNIFEM (2009) Who Answers to Women? Gender and Accountability 2008/2009.**

**UNIFEM (2010), Gender Justice: Key to achieving the Millennium Development Goals.**

**UNIFEM Australia (2010), UNIFEM Australia Position Paper: Millennium Development Goal Review Summit.**