

MDG 3 Promote Gender Equality and Empower Women

Target 3a: Eliminate gender disparity in primary and secondary education preferably by 2005, and at all levels by 2015

3.1 Ratio of girls to boys in primary, secondary and tertiary education

3.2 Share of women in wage employment in the non-agricultural sector

3.3 Proportion of seats held by women in national parliament

1. Introduction

It is now widely accepted that achieving gender equality and women's empowerment is a human right and a moral imperative with far-reaching consequences for the lives of poor women and girls across the world. It is also central to the achievement of the other MDGs: three in every five adults living with HIV in sub-Saharan Africa are women, with young women making up the largest percentage of new infections¹⁸; 57% of primary-age children out of school are girls¹⁹; and three quarters of deaths among babies in the first four weeks of life could be prevented if women were adequately nourished and received appropriate care during and after pregnancy²⁰. Reducing maternal mortality – the most off track MDG goal – relies most heavily on improving the status of women²¹.

Yet, progress on MDG 3 has been uneven and slow. Women's share of waged non-agricultural employment has increased by only 3% since 1990²² and only one in five members of parliament worldwide are women²³. As shocks from the global financial crises continue to reverberate, with gender-differentiated impacts particularly evident via changes in labour markets and new obstacles to women's employment²⁴, fragile progress on gender equality is coming under renewed threat.

2. Tracking progress and barriers to further progress

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3.1 Ratio of girls to boys in primary, secondary and tertiary education

Positive advances in gender parity in education, especially at primary levels, have demonstrated what can be accomplished when governments are prepared to invest. Yet, five years after the target date, gender parity in education has still to be achieved. Of countries with available data, 63% have achieved gender parity at primary level, 37% at secondary, and less than 3% at the tertiary level²⁵. South Asia and sub-Saharan Africa are lagging behind at all levels, most severely at the tertiary level. Ten of the 22 fragile states for which data is available are also badly off track²⁶.

Intensified investment in strengthening opportunities for girls' secondary and tertiary education is a priority, not least because of compelling evidence that post-primary education has far greater impact on women's empowerment and well-being, and that of their families and communities. Investment in girls' access to secondary and tertiary education also yields sustainable development results: a 100 country survey by the World Bank found that

increasing the share of women with a secondary education by just 1% boosts annual per capita income growth by 0.3%²⁷.

Progress on girls' education has been further hampered by insufficient attention to school attendance and completion rates, and quality of learning, as well as a reluctance to tackle the causes of high drop out rates among girls, such as heavy domestic workloads, violence against girls in school, early marriage, lack of or poor quality sanitary facilities, and poor infrastructure and transport. Girls from minority ethnic and indigenous groups often face particularly severe obstacles, including ethnic discrimination on the part of teachers, lack of access to mother tongue education, and lack of investment in areas where minorities and indigenous communities live. Girls with disabilities may also face 'double discrimination', which has been well-documented in development policies²⁸.

3.2 Share of women in wage employment in the non-agricultural sector

Results are disappointing in this key dimension of women's empowerment: women's share of waged non-agricultural employment has improved only marginally over the past decade²⁹. In Northern Africa and Western Asia, just 23% and 21% of working-age women, respectively, are employed³⁰. Even where women are accessing the wage labour market they are generally failing to secure decent jobs, with close to two thirds of all employed women in vulnerable employment³¹. The global financial crisis has compounded the obstacles women face in securing decent employment, with female-dominated industries and services especially hard hit³². Yet the MDG framework gives no attention to monitoring or improving the quality of women's employment, nor to reducing women's heavy care and domestic workloads which limit their ability to take up paid work or push them into poorly paid and insecure work³³.

3.3 Proportion of seats held by women in national parliaments

Women's equal participation in governance is a human right as well as being key to more effective allocation of public financial resources. While the percentage of women in national parliaments has increased slightly in the past decade – including some very positive results in some of the world's poorest countries – the rate of progress remains unacceptably slow. At the current rate, not only will few countries achieve a critical mass of 30% by 2015, it will take another 40 years for women to constitute 40% of parliamentary representation in developing regions³⁴. More rapid progress is possible, with quotas and reservations having been shown to significantly accelerate the rate at which women move into public decision making at national and local levels³⁵. Once elected, women also need the institutional support and capacity to be effective decision-makers and remain in formal politics – for example, through the provision of training and mentoring.

Overall progress on the goal area

Achieving gender equality and meeting the other MDGs will require action on a much broader range of women's rights issues than those captured by the existing indicators, including guaranteeing women's property, land and

inheritance rights, combating sexual and gender-based violence against women and girls, and reducing women's unpaid care and domestic workloads. The European Community (EC) and EU Member States have a key role to play in addressing these gaps.

3. The role of the EU

The EU has strongly committed itself to promoting gender equality and women's rights in all its actions, and is both legally and politically bound to promote gender equality in its development policies and assistance. Despite these commitments³⁶, gender mainstreaming has not been systematically implemented and has remained a low priority in EU development cooperation, hampered in particular by inadequate resources and lack of political will. The advancement of gender equality in development has been further stalled by the lack of policy coherence with other EU policies in the area of external relations, such as the non-integration of gender equality obligations in the ongoing bilateral and multilateral free trade agreement negotiations, as well as with the EU's international women's rights commitments.

2010 marks a pivotal year for the EU to review, reaffirm and accelerate its commitment to achieving gender equality and promoting women's human rights, particularly with the emergence of the new UN agency for women. The drafting of an EU Gender Action Plan (2010-15) offers another important opportunity to accelerate action on gender equality through development cooperation. In a year which will also see the 15 year review of the ambitious Beijing Platform for Action to which the EC and EU Member States are signatories, we call on the EU to ensure its far-reaching existing commitments become a reality for women and girls across the world.

4. Recommendations to the EU

We urge the EU to translate its own far-reaching commitments on gender equality and women's empowerment into concrete action, utilising a rights-based approach as laid out in Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and the Beijing Platform for Action (BPfA). We also ask for continued leadership at the international level to ensure that gender equality and women's empowerment is central to the MDG call to action. In particular, we call upon the EU to:

- **Make aid a more effective tool for achieving gender equality and women's empowerment, including by building capacity for gender responsive budgeting within the context of general budget support** to track investments in gender equality and ensure public expenditure matches gender policy commitments. Capacity for gender responsive budgeting should be developed as part of mainstream public financial management and public sector reforms.
- **Reinforce commitments on gender equality and women's rights in EU external policies** by ensuring the new EU strategy for gender equality is a Strategic Action Plan for Effective Equality, with concrete commitments and measures and strong accountability mechanisms; and making sure the future EU Gender Action Plan on Gender Equality and Development (GAP) is linked to the EU gender strategy and is a binding document with a specific budget and specific accountability mechanisms.

- **Ensure that significantly increased funding reaches women's organisations as key actors in the promotion of gender equality** by earmarking funds to support work on gender equality and women's empowerment – following, for example, the Dutch MDG 3 fund – and channelling money through women's funds and other mechanisms to directly support women's organisations, as well as creating political spaces for policy dialogue for women's organisations, and working with women's organisations to develop specific targets and strategies, including at country-level, for significantly scaling up support for, building the capacity of, and expanding the programmatic reach of women's organisations
- **Call for specific targets to motivate action on women's economic empowerment and participation in public decision-making, and rapidly accelerate investment by the EC and EU member states in these key dimensions of women's empowerment.** Particular efforts are needed to reduce women's reliance on vulnerable employment, expand the provision of social protection measures for vulnerable women workers including those with caring responsibilities, promote positive action and quotas to accelerate women's representation in public decision-making, and support elected women to be effective political actors.
- **Take action on a much broader range of women's rights issues than those currently included in the MDG framework, drawing on the Beijing Platform for Action indicators approved at EU level.** In particular, the EC and EU member states must demonstrate bold leadership on ending sexual and gender-based violence against women and girls – referred to as the 'missing MDG' by the UN Secretary General – including through the implementation of SCR 1325 and 1820.
- **Work with governments to re-galvanise efforts to reach gender parity in education** by strengthening opportunities for post-primary education for girls, tracking completion and attendance rates alongside enrolment rates, and tackling the barriers – such as violence in schools – that inhibit girls' from completing their education or achieving positive outcomes.
- **Improve national level capacity to monitor and report on gaps and progress on gender equality** by improving the coverage, quality and frequency of collection and use of sex-disaggregated data and statistics, particularly in the areas of time-use and violence against women.
- **Strengthen the UN's capacity to combat gender inequality and advance women's rights by pushing to conclude negotiations on the creation of a new, powerful UN agency for women.** In particular, we ask for continued leadership to ensure the agency has the authority, funding and mandate to be able to hold governments and UN agencies to account for meeting international commitments and targets on gender equality, and to be able to design, finance and deliver programmes that will make a real difference to women's lives. The UN Women's Agency must be ambitiously funded by at least US\$1 billion initially.