

CONCLUSION

GENDER
EQUALITY
AND THE
MILLENNIUM
DEVELOPMENT
GOALS



This nurse uses a motorcycle to bring health care to outlying villages in Zimbabwe.

moving forward

The information in these tables and charts indicates that although women have made great strides in recent years, there is still much to be done, both to move forward and to prevent falling back. At this critical time in international politics, world leaders must find a way to ensure growth, development and hope for everyone — women and men alike. Public policy for the empowerment of women has to focus on new ways of including women and enabling them to shape the institutions that structure their lives. Empowerment is essentially about the ability to make choices and exercise bargaining power; to have a voice; to have the ability to organize and influence the direction of social change; to create a just social and economic order, nationally and internationally (UNIFEM 1997).

Goal 8, which envisions a global partnership for development and which is one of the more innovative of the Millennium Development Goals, could help to assure women's empowerment. It is therefore disappointing to see no mention of women's inclusion and participation in the targets set for this goal. Many women's organizations have also pointed out this lack, and have expressed concern that the targets as specified may not promote desirable forms of development. For example, Target 12 seems to suggest that liberalization of trade and finance is beneficial — but many scholars and activists have shown that unless it is carefully managed, it makes

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the lives of many poor women even more insecure than they were before. Moreover, some of the targets fall short of what many advocates for social justice think is required. For example, Target 15 calls for measures to make debt sustainable, rather than the cancelation of debt. The targets implicitly assume that the key partners are governments of rich and poor countries, working in conjunction with private businesses, especially pharmaceutical and information technology companies. There is no mention of women's organizations, or indeed of any civil society organization or NGOs. The vision embedded in the targets for Goal 8 is currently that of a top-down partnership.

Women's and other civil society organizations must begin organizing now to create and present strategies for reversing this by proposing bottom-up partnerships which hold governments and corporations accountable for plans that truly create development that is beneficial to all. At the same time, advocates must continue to press forward on the many commitments made to women by the international conferences of the 1990s that are not included in the Millennium Development Goals but are central to women's empowerment. There is no one path to gender equality, but there can be no gender equality unless all the different paths and different issues are confronted. Economic empowerment without reproductive rights and health care will leave women less than full citizens. Education without an end to harassment and violence against women will make it difficult for girls and women to make full use of their education. For this reason and many more, UNIFEM has spearheaded major UN inter-agency campaigns, in particular with women's organizations and the media to end violence against women in Latin America and the Caribbean, Asia, Eastern Europe and the CIS countries and Africa.

As UNIFEM has argued elsewhere, persistent gender inequality is a human rights violation that must be addressed through a variety of remedies, many of which are contained in CEDAW. The Convention provides guidance when considering ways in which to end gender inequality and can provide useful recommendations on the most critical next steps in a wide range of areas relevant to the MDGs.

The world can no longer afford to make commitments that cannot or will not be kept. Future stability and progress itself depend upon the decisions we make now — to fulfill commitments and to ensure that the world's most desperately poor people, many of whom are women, have the guarantee of a better future.