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Structural and policy constraints in achieving the MDGs for women and girls

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**Opportunities and challenges in achieving the MDGs:
A gender-based analysis**

Background paper prepared by:

Jayati Ghosh*
India

* The views expressed in this paper are those of the author and do not necessarily represent those of the United Nations.

This paper is concerned with examining the progress of the MDGs as the deadline for their completion approaches. The purpose is to consider the achievements thus far, specifically through a gender lens, worldwide and by major regions. The reasons for progress (or the lack of it) are considered in terms of the possible internal and external causes, as well as whether the MDGs themselves could have been framed differently so as to achieve the desired outcomes. This in turn leads to a consideration of the other issues that may have been relatively neglected as well as the policies and processes that would facilitate better achievement of commonly desired goals in an internationally feasible way. This is intended to inform the ongoing discussions about the global policy agenda post 2015.

I. The evidence so far

The declaration of the MDGs, the global monitoring of targets and the associated outcomes have been described as “the most successful global anti-poverty push in history” (MDG Report 2013). On the face of it, several MDG targets have been met or are close to being met, around two years before the deadline. This can certainly be a cause for some satisfaction, at least in terms of meeting some of declared global goals. However, it should be borne in mind that the MDGs were modest in their ambition in the first place: many of the targets were simple extrapolations of the time trends of improvement over the previous quarter century. Therefore it is not surprising that some targets have been met. Indeed, what is more surprising is that even with this limited aim, several targets are still far from being met. Further, it is evident that while global indicators have improved on many counts, this masks extreme regional variation, such that much of the improvement is driven by one or two regions, with little progress elsewhere and even deterioration in some places. This is particularly evident with a gender-disaggregated lens, as will become evident in what follows.

MDG 1: Eradicate extreme hunger and poverty

Target 1A: Halve between 1990 and 2015 the proportion of people living in extreme poverty (defined as \$1.25 a day)

There is a sense of complacency about this target, since it was apparently achieved by 2010. In developing regions, the proportion of people living on less than \$1.25 a day fell from 47 per cent in 1990 to 22 per cent in 2010. About 700 million fewer people lived in conditions of extreme poverty in 2010 than in 1990. However, there are some important caveats and concerns.

First, this target itself is a significantly watered down version of the original promise in the UN Millennium Declaration, which promised to end extreme poverty. Instead, the proportion was to be halved, rather than brought down to zero. At present the complete eradication of extreme poverty is very far from being achieved.

Second, there has been wide regional variation in this regard, with the bulk of the poverty reduction occurring in East and Southeast Asia, and the target still not met (or even likely to be met) in South Asia and Sub Saharan Africa. In terms of the aggregate decline, China has been the most impressive, with poverty rates falling from 60 per cent of the population to 12 per cent in 2010. However, Chinese poverty reduction was not really causally related to the MDGs, being

the outcome of domestic policies that reflected domestic political economy forces. In any case, in South Asia, the rate of reduction was slower, with poverty falling from 51 per cent in 1990 to 30 per cent in 2010; while in Sub Saharan Africa the decline has been marginal, from only 56 to 48 per cent over the period. In fact in Sub Saharan Africa the number of extremely poor people has actually gone up, from 290 million in 1990 to 414 million in 2010. It should be noted that actual trends in poverty reduction in Sub Saharan Africa have been much more mixed; indeed recent research points to some improvements in distribution and acceleration of poverty reduction in certain countries in the region, such as Rwanda and Ethiopia, among others (Cornia 2013; UN-DESA 2013). Where the poverty reduction has been less evident (as in Nigeria, Botswana or South Africa), it is likely that worsening distribution has played an important role, for example when the benefits of increased growth and natural resource exports have disproportionately accrued to a small group (including foreign owners) that have controlled the resources.

This is related to the fact that this period has been marked by significantly increased inequalities. Indeed, it has been pointed out that “had the world’s poorer half been allowed to gain the extra 3.49 per cent of global household income gained by the richest five per cent between 1998 and 2005, severe poverty could have been overcome” (CROP 2013).

The third problem relates to the definition of poverty. The current estimates use household survey data from different countries for the most recent year, which can relate to either income or expenditure, with the latter typically being lower. These are then deflated by PPP exchange rates, which are themselves quite problematic because they rely on even more infrequent price surveys in different countries and assume a common basket of goods (the US norm) that may not be relevant especially for poor people in developing countries (and are likely to inflate their incomes because prices of food and other basic needs have gone up faster than other prices in recent times). It has been found that the PPP \$1.25 standard based on a global basket of goods and prices extrapolated from rather old surveys is a poor indicator of the actual price increases faced by the bottom half of the population in many developing countries. So these data are dubious in terms of defining income poverty according to some common global standard and also may not accurately capture the real trends.

Third, even if the data could be made more reliable, they relate to a unidimensional measure of income poverty, which is increasingly recognized to be inadequate and even misleading. The experience of poverty covers many aspects including poor health, nutrition, lack of adequate sanitation and clean water, social exclusion, low education, bad housing conditions, violence, shame, disempowerment and so on. The Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) developed by the Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative has found significantly higher incidence of poverty than is suggested by income poverty figures arrived at by using PPP per capita incomes. MPI poverty is experienced by around 31 per cent of the population in the 102 countries whose data were analysed (OPHI 2013). It is true that even MPI came down in most countries over this period, with some star performers like Nepal, Rwanda and Bangladesh showing significant absolute declines in MPI (Alkire and Roche 2013). However, recognition of the different dimensions of poverty would have been a more meaningful way of approaching the matter.

Fourth, what little gender disaggregated data we have suggest that for women alone, the results are not so impressive and the MDG target may not already have been reached, even in terms of the admittedly problematic income criterion. While data for women in poverty are hard to find because income and/or consumption is typically measured at the household level, female-headed households show significantly higher poverty in both income poverty and MPI terms. Further the evidence is that for them the rate of reduction of poverty has been slower than for male-headed households (Alkire and Roche 2013). In pockets with persistently high incidence of poverty, women are more likely to be poor than men.¹

Target 1B: Achieve full and productive employment for all, including women and young people

This target was nowhere near being achieved even before the global economic crisis dramatically worsened labour market conditions in most regions and countries. Overall employment to population ratios had initially improved in the 1990s, followed by a blip around 2001-02 and then moderate increase from 2003 to 2007. They have worsened since the global crisis. This has been due to a combination of falling labour force participation and rising open unemployment. The worst affected have been young people, and particularly young women: while some of the decline in labour force participation rates among the young is because of the (welcome) increase in tertiary education, a significant part is also because they have stopped searching for employment after being unable to find even a first job (ILO 2013b)

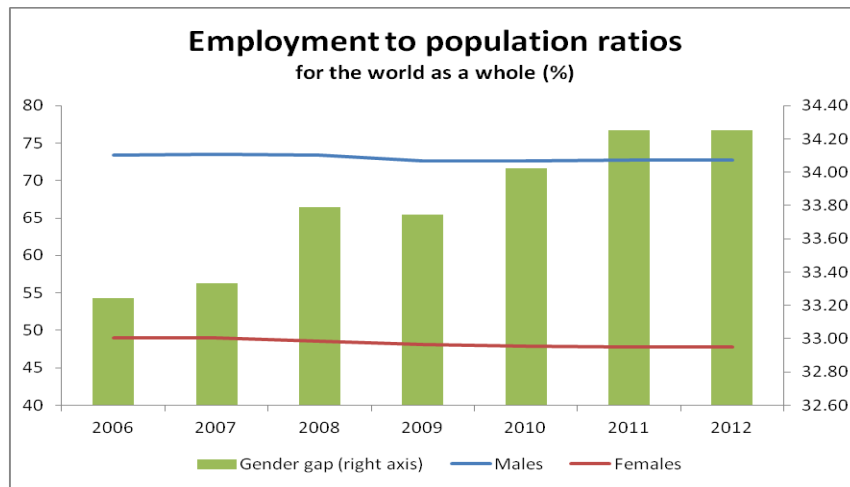
Figure 1 provides data on employment to population ratios of people of working age by sex, for the world as a whole. In the last six years, employment rates have fallen slightly for both men and women, but the fall has been somewhat sharper for women, such that the gender gap in employment has actually increased. (Bear in mind that this refers to only paid or recognised employment, and often leaves out a significant chunk of household labour for domestic work or the care economy.)

The global gender gap in employment was broadly constant until 2008 and even declined in some regions, but it increased after the crisis. In the developed countries, particularly in US and Europe, the gender employment gap decreased, but that was largely because in the first phase of the crisis, male workers in construction and manufacturing were more likely to lose their jobs.² Thereafter, as the policies of fiscal austerity have kicked in and as public employment looks set to shrink, it is in fact more likely that women workers in such public employment in service activities will disproportionately lose their jobs. This in turn reflects the continuing gender segregation of work in the sectors: industry remains dominated by male workers despite the phase of higher female employment in export-oriented manufacturing, while women have been moving out of agriculture not into manufacturing but into services, even in developing countries.

¹ <http://www.theatlantic.com/sexes/archive/2012/11/the-wide-poverty-gap-between-women-and-men/264375/>

² In the US, labour force surveys showed that nearly 40 per cent of jobs in manufacturing and construction were lost between 2007 and August 2009, whereas there was a slight increase in the number of health workers – where more women are employed especially as nurses and care workers (ILO 2012). However, in the UK, the government is planning to cut 850,000 public sector jobs, mostly in health services, over the next five years. Similarly the crisis-ridden countries in the eurozone have started slashing public services and laying off workers, which will disproportionately affect women (ILO 2012).

Figure 1

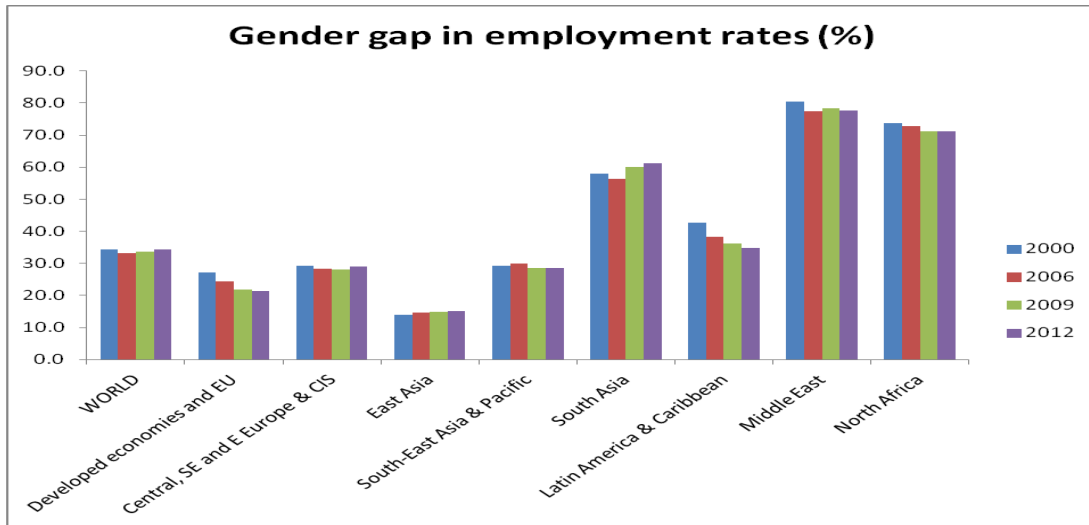


Source: ILO Global Employment Trends for Women, December 2012

There have been very wide divergence across regions, as is evident from Figure 2. Gender gaps in employment rates (measured as the difference between male and female work participation rates as percentage of the male rates) are lowest in East Asia, where they have gone up slightly. They are highest – in fact, exceptionally high, indicating complete lack of recognition of much women’s work and many restrictions on work done outside the household by women - in the Middle East and North Africa, where they have however come down a little bit. But they are also quite high (more than 50 per cent) in South Asia, where they have increased throughout the recent period.

In general, the only region where there has been notable improvement in this regard is Latin America and the Caribbean, which is also the region where many countries have instituted policies to draw more women into formal work by increasing the provision of public social services, formalising certain types of employment including domestic work and raising minimum wages. Unfortunately, there has not really been much improvement in the regions where there was already a significant gap, suggesting that much more needs to be done if recognising women’s work, easing the constraints upon women’s involvement in labour markets and improving the conditions of women’s recognised work are genuinely seen as common social goals.

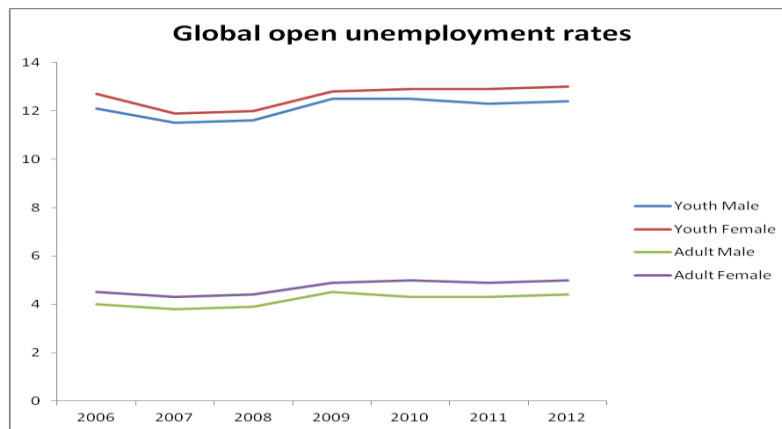
Figure 2



Source: ILO Global Employment Trends for Women, December 2012

Despite the problems associated with recognising women’s work, it is also the case that women are more likely to be openly unemployed – that is, actively looking for paid work but not finding employment. Figure 3 shows that global youth unemployment rates are significantly higher (nearly double) those for adults, but in both cases, female rates are higher than those for males. This is also notable because studies have found that women are more likely to withdraw from the labour force in case of prolonged unemployment (the “discouraged worker” effect).

Figure 3

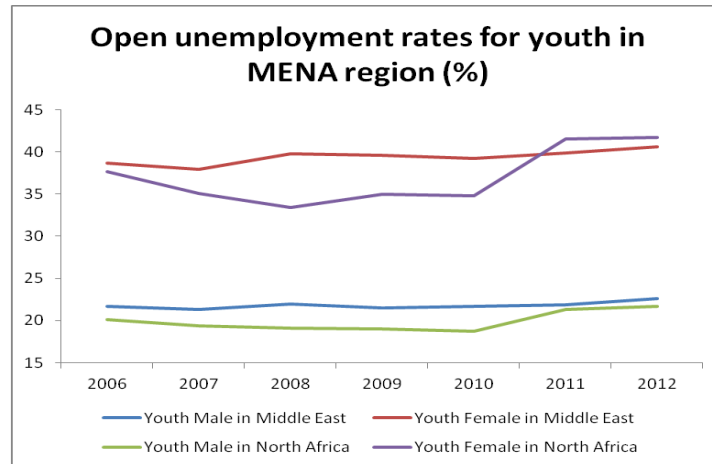


Source: ILO Global Employment Trends for Women, December 2012

There are some regions that are particular “hotspots” with respect to very high rates of open unemployment among the youth. The MENA region (Middle East and North Africa) is one such region as shown in Figure 4. The association of recent social and political turmoil with these high rates of open unemployment among the youth is too obvious to go unnoticed. It is worth remarking that open unemployment rates among young females are even higher than for young males, typically more than double, pointing to a huge waste of productive potential in these societies and revealing the difficulties of effectively incorporating women into recognised and

paid work. Meanwhile, in the developed world recent economic processes have generated high rates of open unemployment among young people of both sexes.

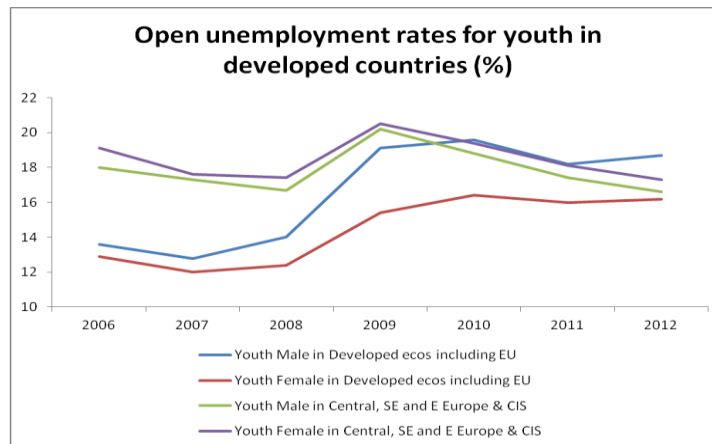
Figure 4



Source: ILO Global Employment Trends for Women, December 2012

Figure 5 highlights the increase in open unemployment among young women in developed countries including the EU, so much so that the rate is now higher than in the central and east European countries, when it was lower just a few years ago. While there has been some decline in open unemployment in recent years in the latter region, the rate still remains higher for young women. The full implications of fiscal cuts leading to public employment retrenchment are often not adequately recognised: not only do they lead to job losses for women workers, but they also add to the burden of unpaid work dominantly performed by women, since publicly provided care services become less available, or more expensive, or worse in quality. Of course, they also operate to reduce the quality of life for everyone in that society.

Figure 5

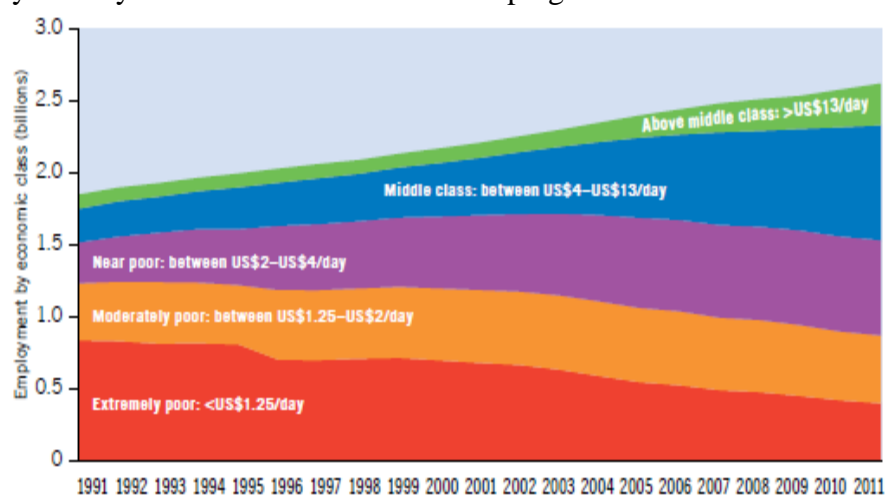


Source: ILO Global Employment Trends for Women, December 2012

An important issue with respect to conditions of employment relates to the working poor, those whose wage incomes are so low as to keep them in poverty. In the developing world, as shown in Figure 3, there has been some increase in the so-called "middle classes", that is those whose

incomes (measured by the still questionable PPP exchange rates) are above US\$ 4 per day. (It should be noted that this is a very loose definition of middle class and mostly includes those who would clearly be classified as "poor" in any developed country, even in crisis-ridden countries in Europe.) But the absolute numbers of those earning less than that have barely budged at all, despite two decades of global boom. Women workers are heavily represented in the bottom part of this distribution.

Figure 6: Employment by economic class in the developing world



Source: Kapsos and Bourmpoula (forthcoming) quoted in ILO 2013, page 41

Target 1C: Halve, between 1990 and 2015, the proportion of people who suffer from hunger

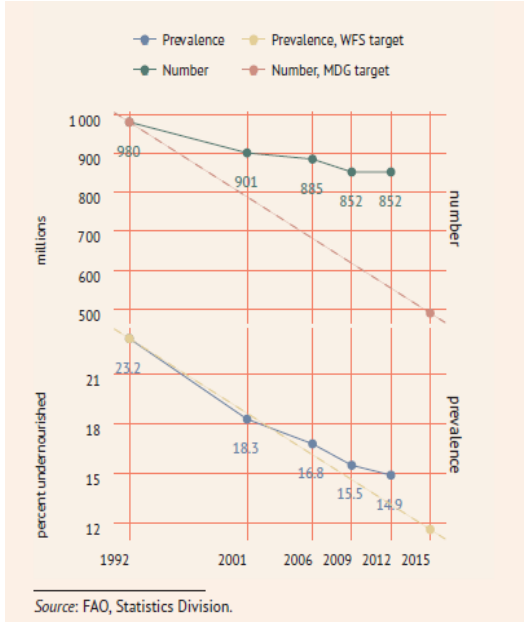
This target seems to be within reach if the latest FAO estimates of chronic hunger are taken on board, although this is not necessarily what is implied by the target itself, which does not specify chronic hunger. The proportion of chronically undernourished people worldwide decreased from 23.2 per cent in 1990-1992 to 14.9 per cent in 2010-2012 (FAO SOFI 2012). However, this is on the basis of a rather extreme definition of chronic hunger (defined by a lower calorie requirement) that was adopted by the FAO rather than a broader definition of hunger or food insecurity (including seasonal food inadequacy). It has been pointed out (“Framing Hunger: A response to the State of the World Food Insecurity Report 2012”) that this does not capture the hunger impacts of short-duration events such as food price spikes. Further, this estimate represents a lower bound because it is based on food availability and the caloric requirements required for a “sedentary lifestyle.” However, most of the world’s poor still do not lead sedentary lifestyles and their food requirements are correspondingly greater, a fact that is ignored by the aggregate estimate.

Based on this very restrictive estimate, currently 868 million, or one out of every eight people, suffers from chronic hunger. (A less restrictive FAO threshold leads to an estimate of 1.33 billion, which covers those with “inadequate food intake”, and which was presumably the real intent of the stated MDG.) 98 per cent of these hungry people live in developing countries. Figure 6 shows the extent of decline in chronic undernourishment in developing countries. This shows that the decline in proportion of hungry over the first decade was more or less on track with meeting the MDG target, but there has been a deceleration of improvement since then. In

terms of absolute numbers, the decline since 2006 has been marginal at best, such that globally progress in reducing hunger has slowed down and levelled off since 2007. Some of this is related to the high levels of food prices in most developing countries since then, which has in turn been driven by global market volatility especially in commodity futures markets with the involvement of financial players (Ghosh, Heintz and Pollin 2012). It is also related to the global crisis, which has affected employment and livelihoods in many countries where hunger was already widely prevalent.

Once again there is very wide regional variation, to the extent that only two countries (China and Vietnam) account for more than 90 per cent of the total reduction in the chronically hungry population. Undernourishment also went down in Latin America (6.5 to 5.6 percent). But chronic hunger actually *increased* in South Asia (32.7 to 35.0 percent), Sub Saharan Africa (17.0 to 27.0 percent), and West Asia and North Africa (1.3 to 2.9 percent). Further, FAO (2013, page 70) also notes that “the difference between the prevalence of undernourishment and the prevalence of food inadequacy seems significant, showing that a considerable share of the population is suffering from inadequate food intake, even though chronic undernourishment is not widespread. This is the case of countries that do not rank among the highest in terms of undernourishment, such as Bangladesh, India, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Swaziland and Kenya.” This may be why the IFPRI’s Global Hunger Index 2012, with a slightly higher calorie-based definition of undernourishment, finds only marginal improvement in many countries (IFPRI 2012).

Figure 7 Global incidence of undernourishment



Source: FAO World Food Situation 2013, page 70.

Outcome indicators of nutrition are also of concern and have shown much less improvement over time. The global incidence of stunting among children under 5 years has come down from 38 per cent in 1990 to 26 per cent in 2011, but the proportions remain well above 30 per cent in most of Sub Saharan Africa, India and Indonesia. The incidence of moderately or severely underweight children is still quite high in South Asia (31 per cent) and Sub Saharan Africa (21 per cent) – and even in Southeast Asia (17 per cent), a region that otherwise shows much better overall nutrition

indicators. Globally, around 100 million children under five years of age are underweight, and 2.5 million children are estimated to die every year from malnutrition. In terms of these nutrition outcome indicators, this MDG target is unlikely to be met at current rates of progress.

There are clear gender gaps in nutritional outcome indicators. Vulnerable women are at greater risk of malnutrition than men, and more girls die of malnutrition than boys (FAO 2012b). Different forms of nutritional deficiency are of particular relevance for women at various stages of their life cycles. Half the pregnant women in developing countries are said to suffer from iron deficiency anaemia (FAO 2012), which affects their own and their children's health and chances of survival. In India, the National Family Health Survey of 2005-06 found that only 57 percent of men and 52 percent of women were at a healthy weight for their height, with less than desired weight dominating. This was more prevalent among women in rural areas and those with less education, where the gender gap was also greater. Similarly, 55 per cent of women were found to be anaemic, compared to 25 per cent of men, and this gap had actually increased since the previous survey in 1998-99 (NFHS-3, 2005-06, Main Results).

MDG 2: Achieve universal primary education

Target 2A: Ensure that, by 2015, children everywhere, boys and girls alike, will be able to complete a full course of primary schooling

On current trends, this target is not likely to be met. Figure 4 indicates that Sub Saharan Africa and Southern Asia are the regions where the target seems currently most distant, despite progress since 1990. While enrolment ratios have gone up everywhere and at the early stages of primary education there is near universal coverage (except in Africa), dropout rates remain significant. One of four children who start primary school is likely to drop out before reaching the last grade. What is more significant is that progress in this indicator has stalled since 2008. Household poverty, rural residence and gender are the three most significant factors determining school enrolment and attendance. An analysis of household surveys from 63 countries shows that girls are more likely to be out of school than boys in primary age groups, and the gender gap in school attendance widens in lower secondary education, even for girls living in better-off households (MDG Report 2013). However, while girls are less likely to start school than boys, once they are enrolled, they are more likely to reach the last grade of primary school, except in Western Asia and Eastern Asia.

Literacy rates remain a concern, especially among youth in developing countries who are likely to have missed the benefits of the recent push towards increasing primary schooling because they were already too old. While literacy rates have improved and gender gaps in this area are declining, women still account for two-thirds of all the illiterate people in the world. The gap between young men and women is lower, but it is still significant.

MDG 3: Promote gender equality and empower women

There is a forceful critique of the way in which this goal has been translated into specific targets, because of the policy effect of creating “development silos” and distorting the very meaning of women's empowerment (Sen and Mukherjee 2013). Actual progress in women's empowerment

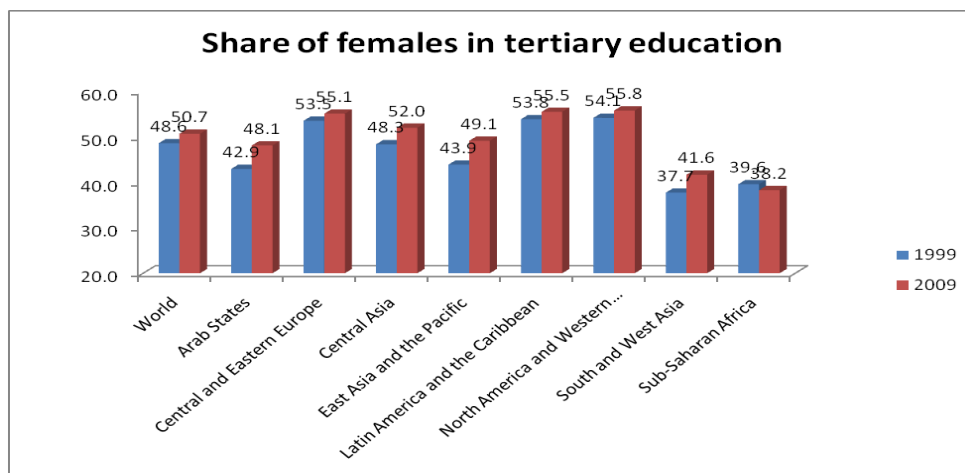
would require making a human rights approach central to the process, and acknowledging the politics of such transformation, particularly the role of women’s movements in pushing this agenda. The multiple dimensions in which women’s rights need to be ensured – economic, political, legal, social, sexual, reproductive – are ignored by the reduction of this broad goal to very limited targets. Given the inter-relationship between all of these, it is then scarcely surprising that even these limited targets have not been met.

Target: Eliminate gender disparity in primary and secondary education by 2005 and at all levels of education by 2015

This seemed like an achievable target given the trend of expansion in educational enrolment in the developing world in particular. However, it is only the gender gap in primary education that is remotely near being met. The 2005 target for secondary education was missed for all developing regions except East Asia and Latin America and the Caribbean. Southeast Asia and the Caucasus and Central Asia are likely to meet the 2005 target by 2015, and these regions along with Latin America may even make the target for tertiary education by 2015.

The gender gap typically widens at higher levels of education, although this appears to have been corrected in some regions such as Central and Eastern Europe, Central Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean. However, this does not take into account the explicit or implicit gender specialisations delivered by such tertiary education. Across the world, the gender gap is particularly large in science and technical education, reinforcing stereotypes about women's capabilities in certain subjects even in higher education. It is also worth noting that even tertiary education (and even technical/professional) education has a much lower probability of translating into employment for women generally and young women in particular.

Figure 7



Source: UNESCO online database

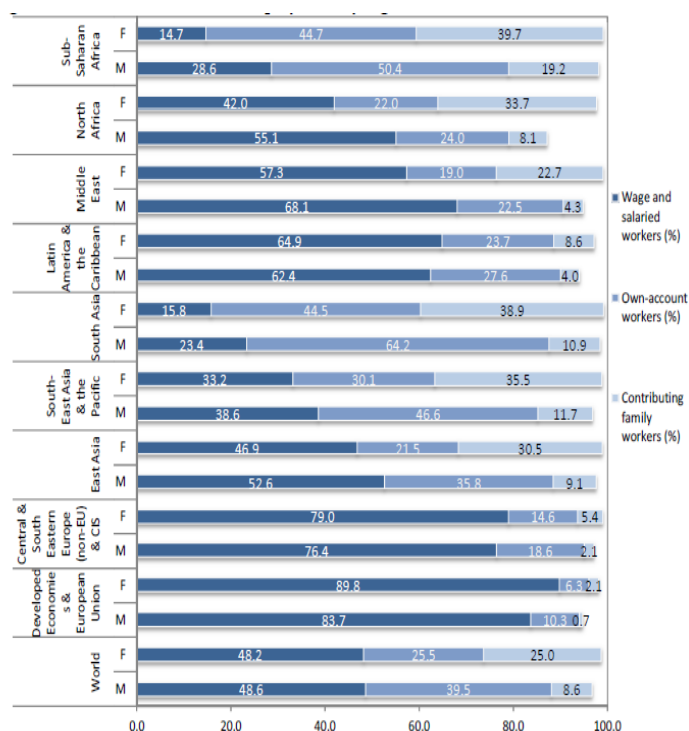
Increase the share of women in wage employment in the non-agricultural sector

It is now more generally accepted that most women work, even when they are not recorded as “workers” by official and other data sources. The tasks associated with social reproduction and the care economy are largely (though not solely) borne by women, but in many societies these are not counted among economic or productive activities. Similarly many women are engaged in what is recognised otherwise as productive work, but as unpaid household helpers who are therefore only marginally seen as workers in their own right. The general invisibility of women’s work is itself a mostly accurate reflection of their status in society: where women’s official work participation is low, this is typically a sign of less freedom and mobility of women, lower status and lower empowerment. Indeed, where more women are active in the labour market and are employed (especially in formal activities), the share of unpaid work tends to come down and even the unpaid labour performed by women is more likely to be recognised and valued. This is why looking at the extent, coverage, conditions and remuneration of women’s work is often a useful way of judging the extent to which their broader status in society has improved. This is important in the context of this goal, which is explicitly about empowering women. The indicators and specific targets that were taken into consideration for this goal were rather limited, but to the extent that they also focussed on work, it is worth examining whether recent global trends indicate a real improvement in this regard.

Nevertheless, it should be borne in mind that wage employment is not always a clear sign of empowerment of women, particularly in situations when it results in a double burden of paid and unpaid work because of the social construction of gender and the gendered division of labour in society and within households. Even so, since so much of women's work tends to be unrecognised and unpaid, wage employment can be an empowering force, not least because it increases women's mobility, autonomy and control over money income.

The proportion of women in non-agricultural employment is still significantly below half in most of the developing world and there are considerable regional variations. Significant improvements are evident only in Latin America (where there has been a push towards increasing women's involvement in formal work driven by expansion of public employment in health, education and related services) and in South Asia, where the share of women has increased but still remains very low at only one-fifth, and is still concentrated in the less skilled and lower paying activities.

Figure 8



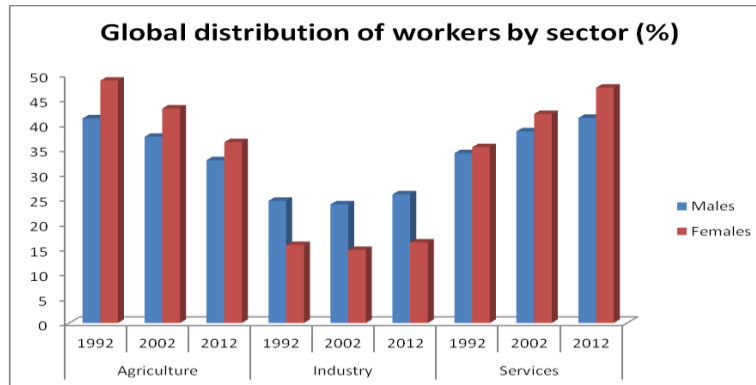
Note: 2012 are preliminary projections. The shares do not add up to 100 because the category for employers is not presented in the figure for the sake of a clear presentation.
 Source: ILO, *Trends Econometric Models*, July 2012.

Source: ILO 2013.

Figure 8 similarly shows that in most developing regions, women workers still dominantly work as own account workers and unpaid family workers. Latin America and the Caribbean show a slightly different pattern, which reflects the increase in regular salaried work for women in several countries that have placed much greater emphasis on social protection, the expansion of social services and improvement in their quality. Overall, women wage workers tend to hold less secure jobs than men workers, with fewer benefits and very limited or even non-existent forms of worker protection.

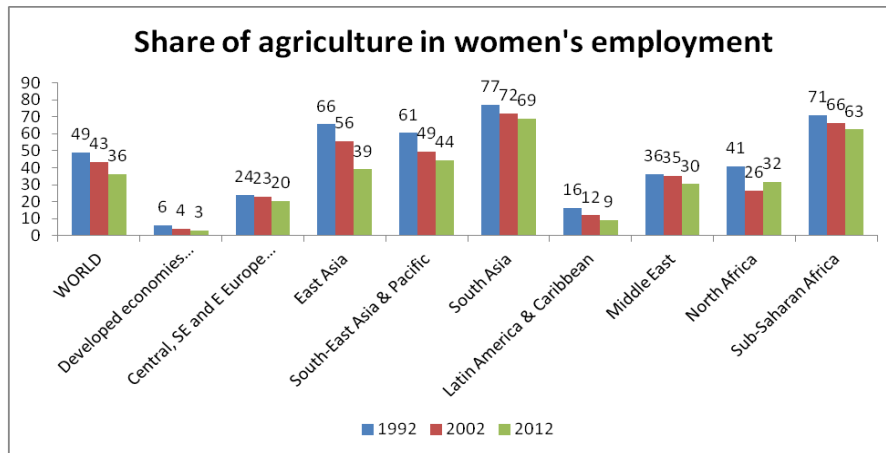
Even when they are recognised as being employed by official statistics, women workers tend to be disproportionately concentrated in primary activities and in low grade services. Figure 9 indicates that while the share of agriculture in total employment has come down for both men and women, it is still higher for women. And services are more overwhelmingly dominant for women workers. The concentration of women into agricultural activities is particularly marked in some regions. This is evident from Figure 10. In the developed world including all of Europe, as well as in Latin America and even in the MENA region, the share of women workers involved in agriculture is relatively small. Further, it has come down substantially in the past two decades in East Asia and Southeast Asia, although the proportion in Southeast Asia is still close to half. But in South Asia and Sub Saharan Africa, agriculture still accounts for around two-thirds of all women workers, and the rate of decline in this share is also quite slow.

Figure 9



Source: ILO Global Employment Trends for Women, December 2012

Figure 10

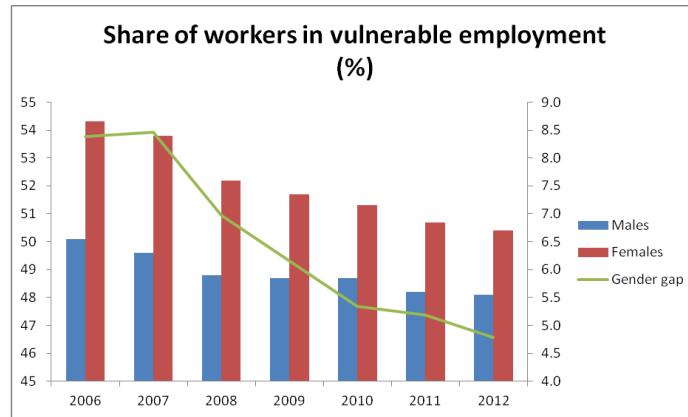


Source: ILO Global Employment Trends for Women, December 2012

This is closely aligned to another indicator of the quality of employment: the proportion of workers who are engaged in “vulnerable work”, that is self-employed or workers or unpaid helpers in household economic activities. As might be expected, women are much more likely to be engaged in such work in most regions, except for where (as in MENA) their work is not recognised. Figure 11 suggests that there has been some recent improvement in this indicator. The data suggest a decline in the extent of vulnerable work for the world as a whole for both men and women, and furthermore a decline in the gender gap in this regard as well. (The gender gap is here defined as the proportion of women in vulnerable work minus the proportion of men in such work, divided by the proportion of men in such work.)

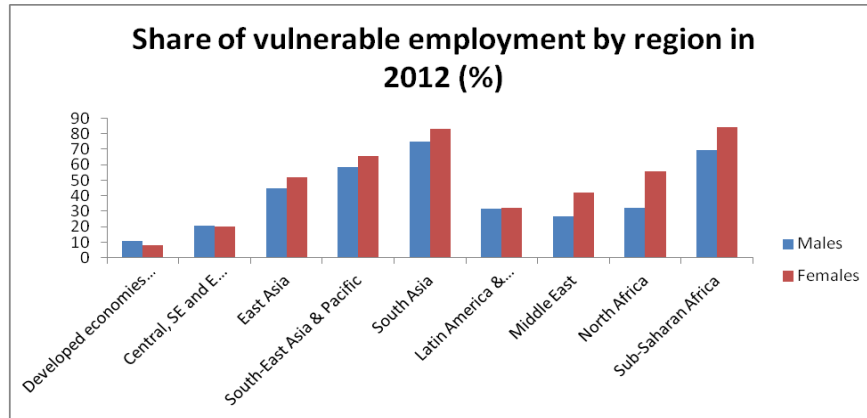
While such a trend is to be welcomed, these data should be interpreted with caution. First, this excludes a lot of other work that is also vulnerable: part-time work, employment in insecure contracts, and so on, and there is other evidence that these types of work have increased in recent years. Second, as shown in Figure 12, some regions of the world still have very high proportions of women workers involved in such work, particularly South Asia, Sub saharan Africa and Southeast Asia.

Figure 11



Source: ILO Global Employment Trends for Women, December 2012

Figure 12



Source: ILO Global Employment Trends for Women, December 2012

Overall, therefore, even a cursory examination of the trends suggests that if labour market involvement and conditions of work are to be taken as criteria, the world is still very far from achieving any kind of gender parity or true empowerment of women. What makes matters worse is that crisis response measures of governments have had effects on gender segregation in labour markets as well as on absolute levels of employment of men and women. In both developed and developing countries, stimulus packages and austerity measures often targeted specific sectors, impacting differently on male and female employment. Stimulus packages immediately following the start of the crisis were directed mainly towards male-dominated sectors. In many countries, stimulus measures benefited male-dominated industries like construction, some manufacturing (especially transport equipment) and public infrastructure that employs more male workers (ILO 2012a). Other countries have adopted measures that benefited female-dominated sectors, and have sought to introduce gender-friendly practices in other sectors (as in several countries of Latin America, particularly Argentina). Austerity measures targeting reduction of numbers or wages in the public sector have had disproportionately severe effects on women workers.

Increase the proportion of seats held by women in national parliament

The proportion of seats held by women in national parliaments is at best a rather vague and inexact indicator of women's political voice and power. There has been a significant increase recently, mostly because of elections held in 2012, and largely driven by a quota system where it was applied. In countries with legislated quotas, women took 24 per cent of seats; in countries with voluntary quotas, 22 per cent; and in countries without any quotas, only 12 per cent. Obviously quotas are therefore important, but they are neither necessary nor sufficient for women's political empowerment. Even in countries with effective quotas, women's representation is still well below the half that should be the norm (with the highest share of women in parliamentary seats in Senegal, at 43 per cent) and in any case it does not follow that women's political voice is adequately heard throughout the political system or within political parties.

It is clear that overall, this goal of ensuring gender equality and empowering women is very far from being met, and even that there is hardly any improvement on this front over the declared MDG period. This is especially striking since this goal was characterised by very limited targets and indicators that have been specified to judge progress on this front. There is no mention of gender wage gaps, representation in managerial positions in work places, violence against women within and outside the home, women's physical security, their freedom of mobility, legal forms of discrimination against women, their autonomy in decision making even with respect to crucial decisions affecting their own lives, much less decisions with respect to their families or communities. These are all precisely the areas where recent evidence suggests that things may have got worse rather than better in several parts of the world, where political changes and instability have led to significant diminution of physical security and mobility for women. The erosion of women's basic rights as citizens, their autonomy and mobility, has been a significant aspect of recent social change in several developing regions, such as in some Middle eastern countries, where hard won freedoms have been rather quickly lost and decades of progress in achieving human rights have been reversed by changing political tendencies and revanchist cultural mores. Violence against women, which is still inadequately documented, has been described by WHO (2013) as an epidemic of global proportions, with one out of every three women estimated to experience physical and/or sexual violence at the hands of a partner or sexual violence by a non-partner, while the proportion nearly 40 per cent of women in South and Southeast Asia and sub Saharan Africa.

Obviously, if the goal of women's empowerment is to be genuinely strived for, a more comprehensive approach needs to be developed that takes into account CEDAW, the Beijing Platform for Action and similar international rights-based demands. Such an approach must also recognise the very significant role played by wider economic and social policies and processes, and factor in those effects, without which even wonderfully formulated goals are likely to become irrelevant.

MDG 4-6: Reduce child mortality, improve maternal health and combat HIV/AIDs, malaria and other diseases

Target: Reduce by two-thirds, between 1990 and 2015, the under-five mortality rate

The mortality rate for children under five dropped by 41 per cent between 1990 and 2011, but this still falls far short of the target of a two-thirds reduction in child deaths by 2015 (Figure 9). Several regions have already met their targets – East Asia, North Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean. Elsewhere (Southeast Asia and West Asia) the target seems within reach. As a result, the bulk of child mortality (83 per cent of all child deaths in 2011) is now concentrated in just two regions: Sub Saharan Africa and South Asia, where the progress has been much more limited than elsewhere. Here the chances of reaching the target seem to be slim. These are the regions where other targets in terms of nutrition, women’s empowerment and maternal health are also not likely to be met, and the link between these is obvious. Within countries, inequalities in child mortality remain very high: children are at much greater risk of dying young if they come from poor families, live in rural areas, or are born to mothers who have been denied basic education. Gender gaps in child mortality are evident in the regions with high mortality (particularly South Asia).

The link between child mortality and women’s empowerment across different dimensions is very strong and has been well documented in many countries (Sen and Ostlin 2010). The nutritional status of mothers is an obviously significant factor in determining the survival chances of both mother and child. According to The Lancet Series on Maternal and Child Nutrition, June 2013, (http://press.thelancet.com/Nutrition1_FINAL.pdf) nearly half of all child deaths are caused by malnutrition of either mother or child. Maternal nutrition is crucial, not just for the mother’s own survival, but for her child’s chances of survival and development. The study found that “undernourished women are more likely to die in pregnancy, to give birth prematurely, and to have babies who are born premature or too small for their gestational age”, which in turn contributes to higher mortality rates for such children.

Early marriage and teenage pregnancies have been found to be strongly associated with higher rates of infant and maternal mortality (Caldwell 1979, Maitra and Pal 2007). Women’s education and other indicators of empowerment such as women’s access to information and media, communication between spouses and women’s agency within and outside the household, have been found to be strongly associated with improved conditions of child survival (Dasgupta 1990, Murti, Guio and Dreze 1995, Forte and Salway 2006, Pande and Astone 2007). Some indicators of women’s agency are often very important even though they are less recognised: for example, Bloom, Wypij & Das Gupta (2001) in a study of Varanasi in north India, found that freedom of movement of women had a positive strong effect on utilization of maternal health care, even after being controlled for socio-demographic factors, and this in turn contributed to both lower maternal mortality and lower infant mortality. Obviously, therefore, the ability to meet this particular MDG is closely linked with any advances made in the goal of women’s empowerment, expressed not just in the relatively restricted indicators chosen, but more generally.

Target: Reduce by three-quarters, between 1990 and 2015, the maternal mortality ratio, and achieve, by 2015, universal access to reproductive health

Maternal mortality ratios are known to be notoriously difficult to measure for both statistical and practical reasons, and are therefore not so well suited to being used as national planning devices, — although this is precisely what happened (Yamin and Boulanger 2013). In any case, despite significant progress, this target is unlikely to be met. Thus far, only East Asia has met the target, while it also seems within striking distance for Latin America, Central and Western Asia and Northern Africa. All other regions will not meet the target even with a significant push in the next two years. Within regions, there are wide disparities across countries, which cannot always be explained by differences in per capita incomes. Partly this is because there has not been the required attention to the health and nutrition of women of reproductive age, including pregnant mothers. There has also been inadequate public spending on improved access to emergency obstetric care and ensuring skilled personnel to assist at delivery, especially in rural areas of developing countries. Only around half of women in developing regions receive access to expected antenatal care, and the proportion is much smaller in rural areas. The persistently high proportion of child bearing below 19 years is another concern. This has come down in Southern Asia (from 88 to 46 per 1000 women) but has barely budged in Sub Saharan Africa (125 to 118 per 1000 women).

Target: Have halted by 2015 and begun to reverse the spread of HIV/AIDS, and achieve, by 2010, universal access to treatment for HIV/AIDS for all those who need it.

Target: Reduce the prevalence of other diseases like malaria and tuberculosis

Worldwide, the incidence of those newly affected by HIV-AIDS has fallen by 21 per cent from 2001 to 2011. The sharpest decline was in the Caribbean (by 43 per cent) and the other region of high incidence, Sub Saharan Africa, also showed a decline by 25 per cent. However, the disease still persists, with an estimated 2.5 million new infections in 2011, nearly half of which (1.02 million) were in Sub Saharan Africa. In the Caucasus and Central Asia the number of new infections actually increased over the decade. So it is far from being halted or reversed. Knowledge of HIV among young people is well below target: still only 36 per cent for young men and 28 among young women in Sub Saharan Africa, for example, with correspondingly low use of condoms for protection. (This is compared to the target of 95 per cent for all young people agreed to in 2001.)

However, it is certainly true that improvements and increase in treatment with antiretroviral therapy have meant that fewer people are dying of the disease and more people are living with HIV. Currently around 8 million in developing regions received such treatment, relative to the goal of 15 million people by the end of 2015. However, this is significantly less than the people who actually need the treatment. In 2011, only 55 per cent of the 1.4 million people in developing countries who were in need of treatment actually received it (63 per cent of women and 46 per cent of men). Furthermore, there is still inadequate treatment of HIV positive pregnant women, increasing the risks of transfer through childbirth. However, some countries with generalised HIV epidemics (Botswana, Namibia, Rwanda, Swaziland and Zambia) and some with low and concentrated epidemics (Cambodia, Cuba, Dominican Republic, Fiji, Guyana

and Mexico) had achieved at least 80 per cent provision of antiretroviral therapy to those who needed it.

Across the world, mortality rates from malaria have fallen by 25 per cent. Nonetheless, nearly 100 countries still have ongoing malaria transmission, and only half of them are likely to reduce their malaria incidence by 75 per cent by 2015. Only two countries (DR Congo and Nigeria) account for 40 per cent of all reported deaths from malaria in the world. Within countries, there is huge variation depending on poverty and location: the prevalence of malaria among children under 5 years is highest among the poor and those living in rural areas. The recent resurgence of malaria with additional complications is a new threat in several countries.

The rate of decline of tuberculosis has been slow, with an estimated 8.7 million newly diagnosed with this disease in 2011 for the world as a whole. Although the incidence of the disease continues to be high, the halving of the 1990 death rates from TB may be achieved by 2015 for all regions.

MDG 7: Ensure Environmental Sustainability

Target: Integrate the principles of sustainable development into country policies and programmes and reverse the loss of environmental resources and biodiversity

Most environmental targets are far from being achieved. Forest cover continues to decline in developing countries, with the largest net losses in Africa and South America. Overexploitation of marine resources is emerging as a major problem. There has been an increase in protected areas (for both land and water resources) since 1990 but this is not sufficient to address the problems of excessive exploitation and degradation in general. The rate of extinction of natural species is also estimated to have accelerated. Global greenhouse gas emissions are increasing once again. While the extension of the Kyoto Protocol from 2013 to 2020, the continuing exclusion of some large countries and the apparent stalling of climate change talks appear to have reduced the pressure for both developed and developing countries to make significant changes in patterns of investment, production and consumption.

These are obviously important issue for the future of the planet and for human beings on it. But they have particular relevance for women who are disproportionately at the receiving end of natural disasters that maybe due to climate change, as well as the adverse of effects of ecological damage. In addition to the effects on their health and physical security, there are adverse effects in terms of the resultant increase in time and difficulty of unpaid labour in the form of collection of essential items like fuel and water. However, adaptation plans to deal with climate change remain stubbornly resistant to incorporating gender perspectives: for example, a review of 423 National Adaptation Programmes of Action for climate change adaptation found that only 10 per cent percent included any mention of women (<http://www.unwomen.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/04/UNIFEM-MDG-Brief-2010.pdf>). This is unfortunate because it is now increasingly recognised that women play a critical role in effective adaptation as well as in strategies aimed at mitigation of climate change.

Target: Halve, by 2015, the proportion of people without sustainable access to safe drinking water and basic sanitation

According to official data, the proportion of population with access to improved drinking water has increased substantially, and only two developing regions (Oceania and Sub Saharan Africa) are significantly short of target. However, there are reasons to be sceptical of the official data, which describe 90 per cent of the population in Southern Asia (beyond the MDG target) having access to safe drinking water in 2011, when it is clear that even in the major cities and towns, municipal water supply does not actually provide potable water. Even with these dubious data, the rural-urban gaps are very large in most developing regions, with piped drinking water still available only to a minority of rural dwellers in the developing world. Safe drinking water has direct links with nutrition and health, and affects the other MDG targets like child mortality and maternal mortality. Access to potable water within or close to the home is also important for reducing unpaid labour particularly performed by women.

Improved sanitation remains inadequate. The greatest gains in this regard were made in East Asia. While rates of open defecation have come down in the areas where they were widely prevalent, they still remain unacceptably high: nearly 40 per cent in Southern Asia and 26 per cent in Sub Saharan Africa. Access to safe and improved sanitation is a serious gender concern, not only for reasons of health and personal dignity. In many developing countries, the lack of such safe and private access to improved sanitation is also a matter of physical security, with women and young girls at risk of attack or insult or other forms of abuse during such activities.

Target: Have achieved by 2020 a significant improvement in the lives of at least 100 million slum dwellers

Improvements in conditions for some slum dwellers have tended to be continuously outpaced by the increase in their overall numbers. In terms of absolute numbers, the MDG target has been reached, as it is estimated that between 2000 and 2010, over 200 million slum dwellers gained access to improved water sources, sanitation facilities, durable housing or large living space. However, the number of slum dwellers is estimated to have increased from 650 million in 1990 to 863 million in 2012. There are serious concerns about both the level of facilities available in slums and the degree to which planning and investment in slums is gender-sensitive and recognises the particular safety, privacy, health and other needs of women and girls. This remains a serious concern even when slum dwellers live in supposedly “improved” conditions. Indeed, the link between slums and gender is a very strong one. It has been found that “One third of the population in the developing world live in slums, and women and girls often suffer the worst effects of slum life, such as poor access to clean water, inadequate sanitation, unemployment, insecurity of tenure and gender-based violence (exacerbated at home by stressful and over-crowded living conditions, and in public areas by poor security and eviction threats).” (UNHABITAT 2010: iii)

MDG 8: Develop a Global Partnership for Development

Targets:

Develop further an open, rule-based, predictable, non-discriminatory trading and financial system (includes a commitment to good governance, development, and poverty reduction both nationally and internationally)

Address the special needs of the Least Developed Countries (includes tariff- and quota-free access for Least Developed Countries' exports, enhanced program of debt relief for heavily indebted poor countries [HIPCs] and cancellation of official bilateral debt, and more generous official development assistance for countries committed to poverty reduction)

Address the special needs of landlocked developing countries and small island developing states

Deal comprehensively with the debt problems of developing countries through national and international measures in order to make debt sustainable in the long term

In cooperation with developing countries, develop and implement strategies for decent and productive work for youth

In cooperation with the private sector, make available the benefits of new technologies, especially information and communications technologies

Most of these targets have not been met in either letter or spirit. Foreign aid declined in the aggregate, and in any case moved away from the poorest countries. ODA as a proportion of GDP of donor countries was only 0.33 per cent in 1990, but it was even lower at around 0.29 per cent in 2012. Further, gender criteria were rarely applied to aid disbursements. In 2008, gender equality was a primary aim in only 4 per cent of the programmes supported by OAC-DAC donors, while financial commitments to organizations working on gender equality (including multilateral organisations like UNIFEM) were only 0.6 per cent of the total. (Source: <http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/57/38/49732892.pdf>)

However, it is a mistake to see the global partnership only in terms of aid, since trade and investment patterns are substantially more important, not only in driving outcomes that affect conditions of human development and gender empowerment but also affecting the ability of states to ensure public action to meet goals and the rights of citizens, and therefore also of women and girls.

The Doha Development Round of the WTO, which was meant to address the many concerns of developing countries with the international trade regime, has stagnated and will require a major push if it is to move forward at all. In particular, the development concerns that were supposed to be the framework for the Doha Round appear to have been forgotten. The policy requirements of industrialisation and economic diversification that have been constrained by some forms of trade liberalisation in less developed countries, as well as the concerns of overcrowding into particular markets because of the pressure of export-oriented growth, have generated new problems that stem from the global context, and inhibit the ability of many countries to meet their internal (or

indeed, global) development goals. The rising global imbalances and then the global crisis led to a renewal of protectionist sentiment in many developed countries. While the number of items afforded duty free access to developed country markets appears to have increased, this is not indicative of the extent of protection because of the continuing and widespread use of non-tariff barriers. Further, the control of knowledge through intellectual property rights has emerged as a major concern for development, and international cooperation in this regard appears to be absent.

Debt service ratios of HIPC countries have indeed come down, but that is not because of concerted international action to reduce it or greater benevolence of creditor countries in writing down debt. Rather, debt service ratios have come down largely because the exports of many HIPC countries improved with the commodity boom of the 2000s. Since then and after the crisis, reduction in exports has caused these ratios to rise once again in many indebted countries. The lack of adequate international action to contain and eliminate tax havens has led to substantial loss of fiscal resources that could have been crucial in public spending to deliver economic and social rights. Meanwhile, the instabilities created by global finance remain a source of volatility and the crisis – actual and potential – unleashed by the activities of financial markets continue to endanger not just the MDGs but the delivery of basic rights to all citizens, including women.

It is evident that a true international partnership to deliver any globally agreed goals must take on board the need to reform the international institutions, rules and systems that continue to place constraints on the abilities of governments in developing countries to meet the goals and deliver the rights of their citizens.

II. Understanding the trends

II.1. What went wrong?

The preceding discussion has indicated that many – if not most – of the MDG goals and targets are far from being achieved. This is also the case for some of the most important targets relating to conditions of life, such as employment and health. What makes this more surprising is that most of the goals and targets were actually simple extrapolations of past trends of progress, or required only slight improvements. Meanwhile, the world has experienced a relatively prolonged period of economic boom that was only latterly punctuated by the Global Financial Crisis of 2008-09, in other words a period when it should have been easier to achieve these goals. While the MDGs did focus global attention and often forced policy makers in individual countries to put more resources and energy into some areas that may otherwise have been relatively ignored, it is necessary to recognise that in some of the most important areas progress has been limited and has not matched up to promise. The overall success for the world as a whole has largely been on account of the better than average performance of two regions in particular: East Asia and Latin America. Elsewhere, there has been significantly less achievement, particularly with respect to the indicators that affect the lives of women and girls. Even within the more successful regions, there are countries and pockets where the indicators are still not so impressive.

So what went wrong? The goals in themselves were not over-ambitious, so that cannot be the reason. It is possible that the Global Financial Crisis and its continuing effects (including the high global prices of food and fuel) have had adverse effects: certainly it is clear that the pace of

progress in achieving several MDGs has slowed down considerably after 2008, and in some countries even reversed. But that alone is not sufficient. After all, for most of the period until 2008, the process of working towards the MDGs has been in the presence of a more favourable global environment than has occurred for a very long time previously (in terms of improved export incomes and terms of trade, as well as access to newer forms of international finance from emerging economies) – indeed, possibly one was more favourable than was originally expected.

One significant reason why the progress in meeting MDGs has been disappointing on several counts could be that in some ways they missed the point, by focusing exclusively on certain outcome indicators, without adequate recognition of the policies and processes that would enable or assist the achievement of the proposed targets. Particularly, the significant role played by macroeconomic, trade and industrial policies cannot be ignored; nor can the recent emergence of particular political and economic processes that shape the possibility of achieving these targets. Clearly, reducing child mortality and maternal mortality require a range of interventions in nutrition, sanitation and public health as well as women's access to education and employment, but not specifying these leaves the field a bit of a free-for-all, with sporadic interventions (either by governments or well-meaning global and national NGOs) taking the place of systematic strategies that are planned for a sufficiently long period. It also allows macroeconomic fluctuations (such as slumps, sudden moves towards fiscal austerity and the like) to disrupt policies that have been initiated towards meeting such goals. So it is impossible to think of goals in the abstract, divorced from the overall social and economic policies of governments and the associated processes unfolding in those societies.

This links to the problem that several important aspects of the conditions of life have been missed even while formulating the targets. Given the strong interlinkages and feedback loops that operate in social, cultural, political and economic forces, ignoring those features has made it harder to achieve the stated goals and targets themselves. There are some crucial indicators that were not given adequate prominence while framing the MDGs and associated targets. Prominent among these are indicators like reducing extreme inequalities in assets, incomes and opportunities; providing universal access to affordable and good quality basic amenities and public services; recognising the social value of unpaid work and at the same time reducing its extent and drudgery; preventing extreme volatility and vulnerability to crises that affect material life; reducing violence, especially social and personal violence against women. Not considering how social, political and economic processes impact on these can hinder or even subvert the progress towards achieving the MDGs. Thus, for example, it is difficult to achieve enhanced empowerment of women in a context of continued or increased violence against women, which in turn can be affected by rising inequality, insufficient employment opportunities and a range of similar forces.

The international context in which countries have sought to achieve the MDGs has been at once conducive and constraining, in often unexpected ways. At one level, the success of the MDGs reflects the success of East Asia and within that of China in particular, not only in relatively rapid growth that was associated with significant income poverty reduction, but with the associated push towards meeting several of the MDGs ahead of time. This in turn was part of a wider tendency whereby there has been some easing of the stranglehold that some Northern countries have had on geopolitics and on international financial and other economic resources for

more than a century. As a result, although Northern aid (both bilateral and multilateral) shrunk further despite the promises made, for several poor developing countries this was more than compensated for by the expansion of aid, trade and other resources from China and other BRICS countries. The rapid expansion of China was also associated with a commodity boom, which did more to improve economic conditions for many primary exporting countries than all the foreign aid flows put together. In such an apparently dynamic and buoyant international context, it may seem surprising that so many developing countries still could not meet the MDGs. But this may reflect another concurrent global tendency: the failure of the international trade regime and the international financial architecture to ensure a stable and secure environment for cross border trade and the flow of finance. This meant that developing countries faced restrictions on their policies to support domestic industrialisation and employment expansion. They were also exposed to substantial volatility and consequent material insecurity because of causes that were generally not of their own making, during the Global Financial Crises as well as before and after that. The impact of such volatility was worse because of the greater openness of all economies over this period, such that many of these countries were both more exposed to global headwinds and more fragile as a result.

This was not universally the case: several countries that followed more heterodox economic policies have shown far greater success not just in terms of relatively stable growth but also in meeting other social goals, including the MDGs. This is certainly apparent in the regions of East Asia and Latin America, as was shown in Section I. So it is necessary to consider not just the specific policies directed to certain targets, but the broader economic policy backdrop within which the MDGs were sought to be achieved in individual countries.

II.2. The context of economic strategies and processes

The economic strategies associated with the boom obviously varied across different developed and developing countries alike.³ Both the boom that preceded the crisis and the evolution of the crisis were associated with significantly increased inequality – between countries and within a significant number of countries. Recent economic growth has been associated with and even depended upon the greater power of capital (both multinational and domestic), reflected in rising shares of profit and interest in national income. In most cases (barring some countries of Latin America) governments have not seen higher wages, more employment and better conditions as economic policy priorities, but rather as eventual by-products of the growth process. Unfortunately, in many economies, income growth has not necessarily been accompanied by more good quality employment, as was evident in Section I. Also, this profit-led growth is not sustainable beyond a point, as has become increasingly evident in the past few years. These poor employment outcomes (which also included higher rates of open unemployment in the past-crisis trajectory) were the result of deflationary policies on the part of the governments of these countries, which sought to suppress domestic consumption and investment. The “excess savings” that were generated as a result were then stored as foreign exchange reserves – partly as insurance against future crises and partly to prevent exchange rate appreciation that would damage the export-driven model. This obviously had effects on current levels of economic activity relative to the potential. But it also negatively affected future growth prospects because of the long-term potential losses of inadequate infrastructure investment, etc.

³ The next few paragraphs draw from Ghosh (2013).

The export-driven model of growth came to be seen as the most successful strategy, driven by the success of China and Germany in particular. The model, sought to be emulated by almost all developing countries, was associated with suppressing wage costs and domestic consumption in the attempt to remain internationally competitive and increase shares of global markets. Managing exchange rates to remain competitive, despite either current account surpluses or capital inflows, was a central element of this strategy. This was associated with the peculiar situation of rising savings rates and falling investment rates in many developing countries, and to the holding of international reserves that were then sought to be placed in safe assets abroad. This is a classic dilemma of a mercantilist strategy: such economies are forced to finance the deficits of those countries that would buy their products, through capital flows that sustain the demand for their own exports, even when those countries have significantly higher per capita income than their own.

The strategy also generated fewer jobs than a more labour-intensive pattern based on expanding domestic demand would have done, which meant that employment increased relatively little despite often dramatic rises in aggregate output. This is why globally the previous boom was associated with the South subsidising the North: through cheaper exports of goods and services, through net capital flows from developing countries to the US in particular, through flows of cheap labour in the form of short-term migration. Despite the current fragile recovery, such a strategy is unsustainable beyond a point, especially when a number of relatively large economies seek to use it at the same time. Further, it was a strategy that relied in an unsustainable fashion on the cheaper labour of women in export oriented activities (Seguino, Berik, Razavi et al). Women tended to be concentrated into the lower levels of the export oriented manufacturing sectors, which earned the foreign exchange needed to finance industrial upgrading and innovation in the more capital intensive sectors where men dominated employment. The requirements of external competitiveness dictated that women's wages could not rise in accordance with productivity growth, but even so the fallacy of composition that occurred as more and more countries attempted to follow the same path has rendered such a strategy increasingly less likely to be successful.

In the pre-crisis boom, domestic demand tended to be profit-driven, based on high and growing profit shares in the economy and significant increases in the income and consumption of newly "globalized" middle classes, which led to bullish investment in certain non-tradeable sectors – e.g. financial assets and real estate – and in luxury goods and services. This enabled economies to keep growing even though agriculture was in crisis and employment did not expand enough. The patterns of production and consumption that emerged meant that growth also involved rapacious and ultimately destructive exploitation of the environment. The costs – in terms of excessive congestion, environmental pollution and ecological degradation – are already being felt in most developing societies, not to mention the implications in terms of the forces generating climate change. The ecological constraints on such growth are already being felt, most unfairly, among those regions and people that have gained the least from the overall expansion of incomes.

There have been other negatives associated with the growth pattern. Within developing Asia, for example, even in the more successful countries, it has led to an internal "brain drain" with adverse implications for future innovation and productivity growth. The skewed structure of

incentives generated by the explosive growth of finance directed the best young minds towards careers that promised quick rewards and large material gains rather than painstaking but socially necessary research and basic science. The impact of relocation of certain industries and the associated requirement for skilled and semi-skilled labour did lead to increased opportunities for educated employment, but it also led bright young people to enter into work that is typically mechanical and does not require much originality or creativity, with little opportunity to develop their intellectual capacities in such jobs. The involvement of young women in the rapidly growing IT-enabled service industries in some countries like India has been largely at the level of repetitive, low-end high burnout jobs with few opportunities for learning or upward mobility (N. Neetha Pillai 2012).

At the same time, crucial activities that are necessary for the economy were inadequately rewarded. Farming in particular became increasingly fraught with risk and subject to growing volatility and declining financial viability, while non-farm work did not increase rapidly enough to absorb the labour force even in the fastest growing economies of the region. Since women workers tend to be concentrated at the lower ends of the employment spectrum in both agricultural and non-agricultural activities, they were particularly adversely affected in terms of greater fragility of work contracts, poor working conditions and low remuneration. The growing feminisation of agriculture that was evident in Section 1 needs to be noted in this context, especially as this is occurring in a context in which women in agriculture are still not adequately recognised as farmers with land titles, access to formal credit and input markets, and face various other social constraints that increase their costs and reduce their viability even relative to male farmers.

The deregulation of finance - particularly in advanced countries but also in some developing countries - had global effects which in turn has direct and indirect implications on the MDGs. These effects were most blatantly obvious in the global financial crisis of 2008-09 that originated in the US but rapidly spread to other regions of the world and generated wild swings in capital flows, trade flows and prices, and for some regions (such as the eurozone) sparked off further crises that are yet to be resolved. This had clearly adverse labour market effects in every region of the world, and in most regions employment has become more fragile and vulnerable and of poorer quality even where absolute levels have recovered. For developing countries the impact was also felt sharply in the extreme volatility of food and fuel prices around higher levels, as these were affected by the financialisation of commodity markets that was yet another consequence of financial deregulation (UNCTAD 2012). For obvious reasons the rise in price of essential items like food impacts negatively on the consumption of the mass of citizens, and within households particularly on the consumption of women and girl children.

These processes bred and increased global inequality, expressed primarily in increasing within-country inequality (UN-DESA 2013) Therefore this particular economic strategy sowed the seeds of its own destruction for both external and internal reasons. Externally, in the post crisis world, deficit countries will either choose or be forced to reduce their deficits through various means, including protectionist responses. Indeed this process is already well under way in the US economy, where both external and fiscal deficits have shrunk since 2009. Internally, suppression of wage incomes and domestic consumption will meet with political resistance. In either case, the pressures to find more sustainable sources of economic growth, particularly through domestic

demand and wage-led alternatives, are likely to increase, suggesting that countries must diversify their sources of growth, looking for other export markets as well as for internal engines of growth. This is confirmed by the UNCTAD Trade and Development Report 2103: “reverting to pre-crisis growth strategies cannot be an option. Rather, in order to adjust to what now appears to be a structural shift in the world economy, many developing and transition economies are obliged to review their development strategies that have been overly dependent on exports for growth.”

In addition, there are serious concerns that there has been inadequate re-regulation of finance since the various emerging market crises and the Global Financial Crisis of 2008-09, so that the associated financial fragility and vulnerability to shocks in both developed and developing countries, continues to have the potential to destabilise economies and prevent future progress, and even to reverse past achievements, including in achieving MDGs. So far, attempts to re-regulate of financial markets have been limited and halting. Financial deregulation led to a large, opaque and undercapitalized “shadow banking system”. It increased concentration in the traditional banking segment in a few “too big to fail” institutions and increased systemic risk. Post-crisis, governments’ lender-of-last-resort support to the financial system has even extended to the shadow banking system, creating massively increased moral hazard. Global commodity markets have also been affected by financial speculation, causing food and fuel prices to spiral with grave consequences for people across the world and particularly those in poor countries and the lower part of the distribution in middle income countries. This context makes strong re-regulation of finance urgent and essential. Controls have to be tighter on the “too-big-to-fail” institutions; cover the “shadow banking” institutions so to avoid regulatory arbitrage; and incorporate a macro-prudential dimension, with anti-cyclical capital requirements and capital controls. But re-regulation alone will not orient credit to real investment or make it accessible to small and medium-sized firms. So there must be restructuring of the financial system: giant institutions must be downsized; the activities of commercial and investment banking should be clearly separated, in order to reduce the risk of contagion; and the aim should be more diverse financial systems, with a bigger role for public and cooperative institutions. Commodity markets, which have been subject to wild price swings related to speculative and herd behaviour, need to be made more transparent, with controls on financial activity in these markets and direct intervention when required to curb price bubbles and prevent sharp declines.

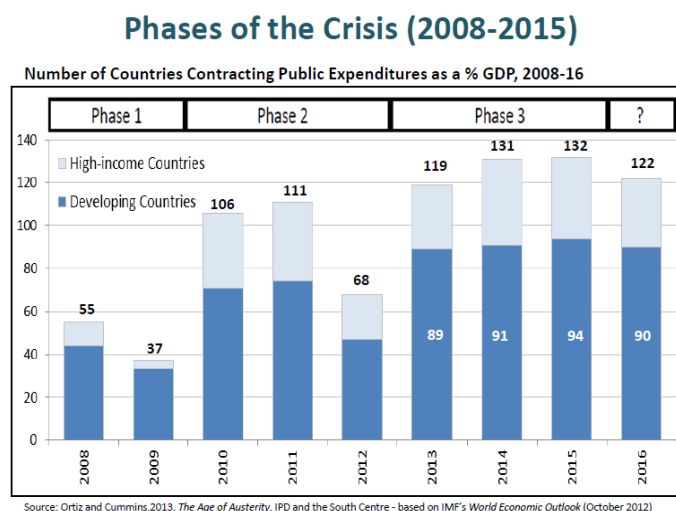
However, within this broad policy trajectory, there have been variations in several countries that point to the possibility of progressive changes because of shifts in national policies. In several countries of Latin America, as well as some countries in Sub Saharan Africa, there has been greater attention to social policies, and particularly to public spending for the provision of universal good quality public services, which has had a number of macroeconomic as well as social effects. In addition, there have been important interventions in the labour market and in social protection, such as the emphasis on higher minimum wages and on better implementation of minimum wages; increased social protection including universal pensions, child support and unemployment benefits; renewed emphasis on public employment and on formalisation of work and provision of social security to previous informal activities such as domestic work. First, it has shifted the locus of new effective demand to the domestic economy rather than exports, which makes it a more sustainable strategy (Ghosh 2011). Second, it has improved income distribution (Cornia 2013) as well as reduced relational inequality particularly gender inequality:

by increasing access to basic goods and services that assist in the fulfilment of social and economic rights; improving the conditions of paid and unpaid work performed by women; reduced inequalities across social groups in some basic health and education indicators (UN-DESA 2013). These examples show that it is possible to implement progressive policies that improve distribution, advance development goals and provide a stable basis for economic expansion even in highly “globalised” regions of the world.

However, such progressive strategies are still not the norm in most of the world, and indeed are becoming more unlikely even in some parts of the developed world where the ensuring of certain rights of citizens was earlier taken for granted. This has obvious adverse implications not only for broader social goals but for the rights of women and gender empowerment generally. In the recent period a particular concern has arisen because of the impact of austerity measures that are sweeping across the world as the preferred form of response to the rapidly changing economic environment. Ortiz and Cummins (2013) have noted that thus far in different parts of the world there have been broadly three phases of response to the crisis: an initial reaction to the crisis in 2008-09, during which the focus was on “promoting employment” and the subsequent phases from 2010 to the present, which they describe as “abandoning labour” through the second phase of onset of fiscal contraction and the current phase of intensification of fiscal contraction from 2013 onwards. This has been particularly evident in terms of fiscal strategy, with fiscal expansion dominating in the first phase and contraction in the second and further contraction proposed in the third phase, as indicated in Figure 12.

The study by Ortiz and Cummins of 132 countries showed that 120 increased spending (by an average of 25 per cent) in 2008-09 compared to 2005-07, while only 10 reduced it (by an average of 8.6 per cent). However, the crisis was associated with declining revenues in many countries, especially in the developing world, and a major problem facing governments has been that of trying to maintain and increase public spending in critical areas that affect livelihoods and conditions of living, such as nutrition, sanitation, health and education. In the second period (2010-12 compared to 2008-09), only 70 countries increased public spending (by an average of just 2.6 per cent) while 60 countries reduced spending, also by an average of 2.6 per cent. In the first phase, social protection measures formed an important part of the stimulus packages of governments, accounting for an average of 27 per cent of the total announced amount in high-income countries and 24 per cent in developing countries. However, in the second phase, budget cuts have also included allocations to sectors like education, health, agriculture and social protection – and this is expected to worsen in the ongoing phase. It would be remarkable if such policies were to have no adverse impact on the MDG targets. Indeed, such evidence as is available for very recent years already suggests a slowing down or even reversal in progress in several countries as a result of such austerity.

Figure 12



The current trends towards macroeconomic austerity are in fact classic examples of the three biases that have been argued to drive macroeconomic policies in gender-insensitive directions. The three interlinked biases which continue to prevent the required integration of social policy with macroeconomic policy in most countries from happening: deflationary bias, male breadwinner bias and commodification bias (Elson and Cagatay 2000, Elson 2004). Eliminating these biases would allow a transformatory approach to macroeconomic policy; unfortunately, the approach that is still globally dominant (with some important national and regional exceptions) is one of "adding on" some social policies within a broader macroeconomic context in which these biases are firmly entrenched.

III. Continuing and emerging issues

It was pointed out in Section I that the while the MDGs played a positive role in focussing international attention on critical aspects of human life, they were relatively lacking in ambition at several levels. First, they set targets that were broadly trend extrapolations of previous patterns rather than aiming for fundamental transformation. Second, they framed the issues in terms of quantitative targets rather than recognising and addressing the underlying policies and processes that could enable and assist or undermine the results. Third, they ignored several issues that are fundamental for determining conditions of life and development, and which have increasingly emerged as so important as to dominate public perceptions as well as to affect the ability to achieve social progress. Some of these continuing and emerging concerns that were not adequately covered in the MDGs are briefly enumerated here. It is important to discuss these not only because ignoring them has limited the success of the MDGs, but because it is clear that such issues must be taken on board in any post 2015 global policy agenda.

III.1. Inequality in various dimensions

Significant increases in inequality characterised the boom that preceded the Great Recession. This was marked in terms of incomes, assets, wage inequalities and other social inequalities. As noted by the UN's Report on the World Social Situation 2013 (forthcoming), while international

economic inequality has somewhat receded in recent years with the faster growth of some emerging nations, inequalities have risen within many countries, such that global inequality has increased quite significantly. The wealthiest individuals have become wealthier while the relative situation of the poorest segments of the population has not improved. Wage shares of income have declined in most advanced and developing and transition countries, even as wage inequalities (particularly between more skilled and less skilled workers) increased. The redistributive effect of the government fiscal strategies – the combination of taxes and transfers – was marked in the 1980s especially in the developed world, but since the mid 1990s it has swung the other way, reinforcing the unequal trends emerging from market-driven processes.

These trends of higher inequality are generally adduced to the twin forces of globalisation, which has reduced the bargaining power of workers and increased that of capital in general; and technological change, which has reduced demand for unskilled workers and been associated with higher rewards for particular types of skill. This creates a sense that the somehow ineluctable and desirable forces of global integration and technological advance have the unfortunate by-product of greater inequality, to thwart which individual countries can do little without affecting the progress itself. But this would be a misreading of the recent past. In fact, while it is widespread, the trend towards greater inequality is not universal, even in heavily "globalised" regions of the world. It should be noted that in a small minority of countries (mostly in Latin America) wage shares of national income improved over the past decade, wage inequalities reduced, and the positive redistributive effect of government fiscal policies was marked. This shows that it was possible for individual countries to buck the global trend of rising inequality through determined policy efforts. It should further be noted that these are also countries that have performed well in terms of meeting their MDG targets.

Meanwhile, other social inequalities - particularly those driven by gender, as well as other social, ethnic or cultural distinctions, continue to survive and create patterns of intersecting inequalities and "inequality traps" characterised by persistent and even intergenerational hierarchies and lack of mobility. The ability of economic elites to influence political processes and - especially through the media - cultural norms and broader social awareness, has also been substantial, contributing to both a faster reification of existing structures of inequality and a greater degree of dissatisfaction among the general population. This is why it is increasingly recognised that we are fast reaching the limits of social tolerance of inequality in many societies, and that growing inequality - through its impact on social division, tensions and violence - is making for unpleasant societies for everyone, not just those who are materially deprived as a consequence.

This in turn means that addressing inequalities must obviously be an integral part of the post 2015 agenda. This is particularly important because it is now clear (as shown in Section I) that existing and increasing inequalities actually worked to inhibit the possibility of achieving several MDGs even when they were modest to begin with. Concentration of wealth and assets, wage inequalities, unequal access to essential social services and to amenities all operated to worsen the conditions under which goals like access to education and reduction of infant and maternal mortality rates could be met, while the goal of gender empowerment is obviously rendered much more difficult in conditions of increased inequality in all of these dimensions.

Framing goals in this regard must recognise the multidimensional nature of inequality. Economic inequalities - in the form of differences in asset ownership, incomes, wages - are of course crucial. But inequalities in conditions of life are also strongly driven by differential access to essential amenities (such as housing, electricity, all weather roads and transport facilities, sanitation and so on) and basic services (health, education). These are also very important in determining opportunities and possible mobility. These in turn underlie the significant differences in vulnerability to natural and economic shocks that are faced by different groups of people. Very often legal systems and institutional structures also generate inequality. Relational inequalities that are defined by hierarchies of domination or social/cultural perceptions of difference intersect with all of these and therefore also need to be explicitly addressed. Since gender is a cross cutting form of inequality that encompasses and complicates other dimensions of inequality, it is in turn absolutely necessary to incorporate this element into all other goals and targets, however defined.

III.2. Ecological concerns

Ecological concerns were supposedly addressed by MDG 7, which focuses on environmental sustainability. However, the manner in which this broad goal was converted into relatively minor and bloodless targets has meant that in some crucial respects, the MDGs have been somehow irrelevant to the global environmental discussion. Yet this is an issue that simply cannot be ignored in the future agenda. In this period the world as a whole and particular countries and regions have been severely affected - not only by the implications of climate change to which they are inadequately adapted, but by the impact of pollution, degradation and over-exploitation of nature, which have extensive and persistent effects on quotidian life. There is widespread evidence of the unequally gendered outcomes of such changes, which women and girls affected not only in terms of basic living conditions and physical vulnerability, but because of the increase in unpaid labour that ecological problems generate (directly and indirectly) in both rural and urban areas. For example, desertification and proneness to drought makes water collection for family use a more difficult, arduous and time consuming task. Deforestation affects the ability to collect fuel wood for cooking and heating when other energy sources are not readily available or are too expensive. And so on. The concern with the impact on and of the environment has to translate into more systematic strategies and goals that recognise the international nature of the problem and do not hold individual countries responsible for tendencies that may not be of their own making.

III.3. Inadequacy, fragility and poor quality of employment

This is one of the driving forces of heightened inequality, in terms of falling shares of wage incomes as well as greater inequality amongst wage earners. It is also emerging as one of the more potent sources of social tension. The inability - in many developed and developing regions - of the domestic economy to create productive and remunerative jobs that meet the aspirations of the workforce is emerging as a greater problem in the countries that are supposedly beneficiaries of the "demographic dividend" because they have a predominantly young population. The increase in education, including tertiary education, is a double edged sword in this respect. While it is to be valued in its own right, and also plays positive role in reducing inequalities in wage distribution, it also generates aspirations and expectations among the young

and newly educated groups that may be difficult to meet. In many countries the problem is accentuated because of the fact that more and more enrolment is private, especially in tertiary education, and therefore students are responsible for financing their own education to a greater degree. This creates an additional burden and also correspondingly greater frustration and reaction when expensive education is not followed by remunerative employment.

Gender gaps in employment and wages increased in most countries before the global crisis, and where they have subsequently come down, it is essentially due to falling wages of men in the deteriorating labour market conditions, rather than improvement in women's wages. But (as was described in Section I) women continue to be concentrated in fragile, insecure and vulnerable employment. Many developing countries, as well as crisis-ridden developed countries, show very high rates of open unemployment among young women, and educated young women in particular, which is not just a social waste but a reminder of continuing gender discrimination.

III.4. Demographic changes

Life cycle patterns and the specific requirements of different age groups have been very inadequately taken up in the MDGs. Three age groups require specific attention: children, young people and elderly people. Of these, only children have been considered (through MDGs 2 and 4) but even that has been only partial and confined to two of the most basic indicators of survival and education. Children are particularly vulnerable not only because of their dependent status but because it is now well-known that nutrition, health and opportunities for cognitive development in the earliest stages of life create the conditions and capacity for subsequent development and therefore can have long term effects on subsequent capabilities and quality of life.

In many societies, youth are becoming increasingly disadvantaged in terms of relative income; youth unemployment is much higher than adult unemployment; they experience high levels of working poverty and other decent work deficits that point to uncertain futures; and are susceptible to a range of health risks and implications of harmful behaviour about which they may not be fully informed. Many of these problems have been exacerbated by the financial and economic crisis and subsequent austerity measures, so much so that this is now seen as an entire generation at risk (ILO 2013). The most striking evidence of the inequalities faced by youth is in labour markets, as young people experience large and growing challenges in finding and keeping jobs. Young women are disproportionately disadvantaged in this respect, as recent trends point to increases in open unemployment among young women across the world, even in supposedly buoyant economies. More work performed by young women is in informal activities, and gender wage gaps among the youth are rising even for those with similar levels of education. In addition, youth face particular health risks (greater exposure to the risk of HIV-AIDS, greater exposure to violence, possibilities of drug addiction, etc.) that are inadequately focussed upon by policy makers.

Rising life expectancies are a sign of success, but they bring their own problems as well. Even as the current demographic trends indicate that most societies are aging quite rapidly, older persons are disproportionately at risk of inadequate and insecure income, insufficient access to quality health care and other services such as finance and accessible transportation and housing, and pervasive discrimination on the basis of their age. That is why increasing numbers of them in

both developed and developing countries, confront increasingly unequal levels of poverty, poor health and social exclusion throughout their later lives. Governments in most countries have simply not paid enough attention to this problem, which will emerge as a major social concern even in countries that currently anticipate reaping the benefits of a "demographic dividend" because absolute numbers of the elderly are rising rapidly. Older women, especially in developing countries, tend to experience significant economic insecurity. In addition to limited access to social protection programmes in developing regions, older women in some countries are further disadvantaged by lifetimes of institutional and cultural discrimination related to property and inheritance laws, divorce laws, access to education, training and employment, wage levels, widowhood, gender-based violence and other factors.

III.5. Growing role of private providers of merit goods and services

The significance of universal access to good quality essential services in the realms of nutrition, health, education and so on has been highlighted repeatedly in this paper. This brings into a focus a major emerging concern: the increasing trend of privatisation of such services across the world, barring a small handful of countries (mostly in Latin America) where public provision is being sought to be extended more rapidly and with better conditions. This can often conflict not just with demands for greater equality but also with meeting the MDGs and even with improved human development conditions in general.

There are several factors behind this tendency to privatise merit goods and services. First, there is the widespread perception the governments at both national and local levels simply do not have sufficient resources to provide these services and therefore it is preferable to promote and facilitate private provision, with appropriate incentives and allowing for commercial profit-making in such activities. Second, there is the sense that private providers will be more accountable and efficient, as well as more flexible in response to specific conditions, given the perceived problems associated with public workers in terms of rigidity and lack of public accountability.

However, there are strong reasons to be concerned about this growing tendency. The most obvious aspect of the implications for worsening inequality have already been noted. inadequate affordable and good quality public provision of such services is an important factor in generating inequalities of both opportunities and outcomes. In many countries, two-tier or multi-tier health and education systems are emerging, with well-funded and specialised institutions that generally cater to the rich because all others are priced out, and poorly funded public institutions that typically cannot cope with the demand. So the poor are forced to crowd into poor quality, overcrowded and badly regulated - and sometimes still relatively expensive in terms of the incomes of the poor – services, even as they are priced out of good quality services. (Incidentally, this then tends to reinforce stereotypes about poor quality of public delivery relative to private.)

Significantly, both health and education are sectors characterised by significant asymmetries of information, which means that consumers are typically not in a position to know about the quality of the service. This can clearly give rise to fraudulent behaviour and exploitation, particularly of poor consumers of the service. This is not only unjust but socially inefficient and

expensive. Therefore such sectors require to be extensively regulated, to the point where the process of effective regulation and monitoring may even become more expensive than actual public provision. Further, the denial of good quality services in these areas obviously affects the extent and difficulty of meeting these requirements through unpaid work in the care economy, which has a direct effect on the conditions facing women and girls as well as on the quality of care received.

III.6. Unpaid work

It is very surprising to note that nearly two decades after the Beijing Declaration, the international policy discussion is practically silent on the issue of unpaid work. As a result of the continuing invisibility and lack of social recognition of such work, which remains crucial to both social reproduction and wider economic activity in most countries, there are few efforts to seek to reduce the amount of time required for such work or bring down the drudgery involved in much of it. Instead, the tendency persists of not just relying on its implicit value, but of transferring the burden of much socially necessary work onto unpaid work. Thus, governments seeking to address fiscal problems through austerity measures have tended to cut down on many publicly funded services that then leans the work has to be done by members of the household in unpaid form. This covers the provision of affordable child care and creche facilities for the young, the public provision of health care and services to look after the elderly and persons with disabilities. The lack of provision of basic amenities, such as piped water or fuel, can require often huge outlays of time in unpaid work to access water or fuel wood. There are many similar instances. There is therefore a strong case for bringing this issue up front in the global policy agenda. It is important to remember that improving the conditions of, reducing the time spent on, and eliminating the drudgery of such unpaid work through the better provision of water and sanitation and other amenities also has direct positive implications on the health of women and children, which in turn links back to the possibility of achieving MDG targets on maternal and infant mortality, for example.

III.7. Violence against women

Violence against women continues to be a huge concern. It is true that information in this regard is scanty and often problematic, and that there is a widespread tendency to under-report such violence. Even so, the reported numbers are startling. A recent global review of available data (WHO 2013), found that 35 per cent of women worldwide have experienced either physical and/or sexual intimate partner violence or non-partner sexual violence. However, some national violence studies show that up to 70 per cent of women have experienced physical and/or sexual violence in their lifetime from an intimate partner. 38 per cent of all murders of women worldwide are committed by intimate partners, and this figure is as high as between 40 and 70 per cent in Australia, Canada, Israel, South Africa and the United States. More than 64 million girls worldwide are child brides, with 46 per cent of women aged 20–24 in South Asia and 41 per cent in West and Central Africa reporting that they married before the age of 18. Approximately 140 million girls and women in the world have suffered female genital mutilation/cutting. Trafficking ensnares millions of women and girls in modern-day slavery. Women and girls represent 55 per cent of the estimated 20.9 million victims of forced labour worldwide, and 98 per cent of the estimated 4.5 million forced into sexual exploitation. Rape has

been a rampant tactic in modern wars. Women in urban areas are twice as likely as men to experience violence, particularly in developing countries. So the violence takes many forms, from quotidian oppression to horrific acts of physical brutality.

However, legal, institutional and cultural institutions are still poorly equipped to handle this and to ensure a safer environment for women and girls. Periods of economic crisis and material insecurity, social flux and political instability have tended to be associated with renewed or heightened violence. High rates of youth unemployment and increasing inequality have given rise to frustrations that are only too often vented through violence against women. The rapidity with which hard won gains for women's freedom and security have been lost through political changes in some countries is also a cause for concern.

IV. Moving forward: Policies, goals and monitoring

The previous discussion has made it clear that simply framing some quantitative goals to be applied equally across regions may not be all that useful if the underlying process and contexts within which such goals are to be met are not clearly recognised. Indeed, as noted by Fukuda-Parr, Yamin and Greenstein (2013:28-19), “As instruments of people centered development – for the realization of human rights and human development - the methodology of setting targets and selecting indicators needs to consider more than statistical criteria. Targets and indicators need to be evaluated for their potential to give information on core human rights and human development priorities in dimensions of equity, participation, transparency and accountability. Selecting indicators on data availability unwittingly creates incentives for policy priorities that neglect dimensions such as distributive consequences, and volatility of outcomes. Tradeoffs between policy relevance and data availability should not systematically favor the latter.”

It has also been noted that aggregate goals that do not recognise inequalities within populations, especially cross-cutting inequalities such as that of gender, may not adequately specify the desired outcome such that even if they are reached in the aggregate, conditions remain less than desirable for many and particularly for more disadvantaged groups. In particular the discussion has highlighted the crucial role of national policies, since it is clear that the wide variation in performance across countries in meeting the MDGs was dominantly the result of different social and economic strategies, which were apparently possible even in countries that faced similar global conditions.

This suggests that a more meaningful way of going about the task of achieving better conditions of life for the people of the world would be not to focus not only on outcomes (which are obviously shaped by a wide variety of forces) but on process indicators that are more directly policy-driven.

Macroeconomic policies

It is clear that fiscal policies must be revised to be more explicitly oriented towards meeting social goals, including MDGs. Therefore equitable revenue mobilisation and expenditure patterns are essential. In a context of fiscal consolidation, the notion of fiscal space needs to be revived with reference to revenue mobilisation and tax opportunities, rather than focussed on

expenditure cuts. Recent tax policies in many parts of the world have shifted to becoming more regressive, by relying more on indirect taxes such as VAT. This needs to be reversed through proactive policies to increase tax collection from the rich. This is particularly important given the increase in asset and income inequalities. There is a strong case for increased taxation of the intergenerational transfer of wealth and higher taxation of the rents from control over natural resources (which after all are the wealth of the entire society, however they may be legally held). The proceeds of this need to be directed towards public spending that serves the people as a whole, in the present and for the future. The incentivising of large capital generally and certain sectors/industries in particular by providing significant tax breaks, which has become the industrial policy of choice in many developed and developing countries, needs to be reconsidered and weighed against other means of ensuring expansion such as infrastructure provision. Globally, this also points to the need for international co-ordination of tax policies so as to prevent tax and regulatory arbitrage by globally mobile capital, as well as actually reducing or even abolishing the role of tax havens.

Expenditure policies are often recognised to be more explicitly redistributive, but the extent to which both the levels and the pattern of spending can influence aggregate and differentiated outcomes is often not sufficiently understood. Gender budgeting has been an important innovation, but there are recent signs that many governments are effectively playing lip service to this by shuffling some spending around budget heads without treating the concept as seriously as it deserves as a determining factor in the allocation of resources.

Monetary policies are also important: the control of interest rates and the availability of credit can be used to affect levels and patterns of not just economic activity but also inequality. For example, actions taken by the central bank to try to deal with inflation by raising interest rates and restricting access to credit in a blanket fashion can cause particular hardship to small borrowers who are more likely to be rationed out of the formal credit system. This in turn brings up a wider developmental issue of the access to finance of small producers and consumers, particularly women who are often denied secure employment or titles to assets that would make them credit-worthy. Not only must financial markets be regulated so as to prevent volatility, excessive risk taking behaviour because of moral hazard, and other concerns that render them more vulnerable to crises; they must also be regulated to ensure access to credit on equal terms for all borrowers.

Some possible process indicators:

- Increase share of taxation from richer groups and corporations at least in line with increases in their shares of national income.
- Eliminate tax havens.
- Allocate sufficient public spending to declared priority areas depending on country (each country could make its own list)
- Ensure allocation of institutional credit to defined categories: small borrowers, women borrowers, rural population, etc

The importance of infrastructure

This paper has emphasised the significance of infrastructural investment and noted that it too has distributive implications. So the pattern of such investment is just as important as the level. Further how it is financed and whether it is expected to result in significant increases in user fees thus reducing real income of the poor, must also be taken into account. There are many aspects of infrastructure availability that are particularly important for women, affecting their very survival, conditions of life and ability to engage in paid labour as well as the burden of unpaid labour. Each of these needs to be considered separately: for productive work (e.g. does it provide access to inputs and markets, and so on, does it enable greater ease to getting to and from the work place), reproductive (e.g. access to essential health and nutrition services; reduction of time spent on fetching water and fuel), as well as political (does it increase potential for organizing and mobilizing at local and regional levels, provide more access to information, etc.) aspects.

Once again, goals could be framed in terms of process indicators as targets for each of these areas. E.g. reduction of unpaid work in the form of water collection through piped water access, and so on.

Social policies and social protection

It has been reiterated that expansion of social policies and social protection, as well as universalism in provision of public services, are essential ingredients to improvement of quality of life and greater equity and equality of various kinds. The concept of the social protection floor provides a useful way of assessing this. It has been defined as follows:

- Basic income security, in the form of various social transfers (in cash or in kind), such as pensions for the elderly and persons with disabilities, child benefits, income support benefits and/or employment guarantees and services for the unemployed and working poor; and
- Universal access to essential affordable social services in the areas of health, water and sanitation, education, food security, housing, and others defined according to national priorities.

Goals could be framed with respect to each of these, with countries each making their own pledges with reference to the exact target. However the notion of aiming for universalism in good quality service provision is absolutely essential, and this in turn requires either public provision or highly regulated private provision, sufficiently affordable as to be available to every citizen and/or resident.

Employment and labour markets

One critical issue that has emerged is that of sustaining employment and livelihoods in agriculture, manufacturing and services, with a recognition of the various forms of stratification and special attention to the prevalence and even increase of informal, low-paid work among women assessment of gender wage and employment gaps and changing conditions of work. For agriculture, it is crucial to identify the current constraints particularly of women farmers and agricultural workers, such as women's access to land, their recognition as productive workers in agriculture and issues of their viability as small cultivators.

Policies directed towards labour markets are also important. In the period of globalisation, calls for "flexibilisation" of labour created much greater insecurities and worse working conditions for all workers, particularly women, without generating significant benefits in the form of increased employment. This needs to be reversed. Institutional changes, such as an increase in minimum wages, can be very important in reducing wage inequalities. Increase in minimum wages and more effective enforcement of such floors are also particularly important for women workers, who tend to be clustered in the lower end of the wage distribution, at and around the minimum wage. Further, labour market institutions that (such as labour unions, employment protection, unemployment benefits and regulation with respect to firing) are important in moderating or reducing wage inequalities. However, proactive efforts need to be made to ensure the greater involvement of women workers in such institutions.

Access to justice

Legal and justice systems across the world – in both developed and developing countries – are known to be inimical to the rights of women. In some countries, even the most basic rights and freedoms are not recognised in the legal system; or inheritance laws are unfairly skewed; or women are denied mobility without the stated permission of the (male) head of the household. In extreme cases even the law of the land is not seen to apply to the physical security of women in their own families, as in the case of khap panchayats (informal clan courts) in North India that sanction so-called “honour killings” of daughters/sisters who disobey rules about marriage or other interaction across sexes, and the legal/judicial system effectively turns a blind eye to this. Important process indicators that could be identified include the legal sanction of respect of women’s agency and choice in important decisions affecting their own lives; ensuring equal inheritance and marital property laws, and so on. In addition, even when the law is properly formulated, the implementation of justice often leaves much to be desired, since the process is tardy, full of agents with extremely patriarchal attitudes that expose women to constant insult, humiliation and open sexism even in the exercise of the recognised rights. So process indicators also need to be developed with respect to timing and nature of implementation of the law.

Health, education and care services

It has been noted at several points in this paper that effective, affordable and universal provision of good quality public services in health, education, sanitation, nutrition and a range of other services is absolutely essential not just to strive towards women’s empowerment but for reducing inequalities and advancing development goals generally. In addition to improving quality of life and reducing the costs to society of morbidity and unhealthy citizens, they also play an important role in reducing unpaid labour in the care economy and reducing inequalities of opportunity. They therefore make for more liveable and pleasant societies in general. Process indicators in this regard should include not just quantity but some indicators of quality and should focus on reducing inequalities in access and prevention of multi-tier or segmented systems.

Sexual and reproductive rights

Issues of women’s bodily autonomy, integrity and security have been a bit of a hot potato in the international discussion. As noted by Sen and Mukherjee (2013) the political and media power of

conservative lobbies and patriarchal-fundamentalist religious groups has made it harder to ensure either sufficient voice to such demands or even minimal enabling of women's organisations and other groups who could seek to mobilise and fight to make this a major issue of debate and discussion at national and international levels. In this context the setting of some minimum process indicators, such as access of women to independent family planning

Access to property rights and control over assets

The negative implications of the lack of recognition of women's rights to land and control over productive assets were noted with reference to agriculture and the significance of women farmers. But in fact it is widespread in all productive activities and also affects relational inequalities. Therefore some process indicators that point to increasing recognition of women's rights to assets, and inheritance and other laws that ensure this, could be developed.

Monitoring and accountability

One of the key problems in monitoring the MDGs has been the sheer paucity of information with respect to actual trends, and the absence of disaggregated data that would allow for a systematic assessment of conditions on the ground in a timely manner. In addition, it is necessary to identify some missing indicators (such as violence against women, for example) that have been identified in this paper and collect information on these as well. However, it is unfair and even ridiculous to expect developing countries, particularly with government that are already resource constrained, to spend more on such data collection. Rather, this needs to become an international priority, with international assistance to governments to enable them to collect sufficiently disaggregated data and to set up tracking institutions that would make such data available not only to the governments but to the public at large. When monitoring becomes a more public process with greater involvement of civil society, it is likely to be much more effective.

This brings up a related issue on which there needs to be more discussion at national and international levels. What are the current monitoring frameworks and their limitations? What are the respective roles of governments, elected representatives, private sector, civil society and women's groups, as well as international agencies in this regard? With respect to accountability: who can be held responsible? What can be done about it? These questions also need to be thought over and discussed thoroughly before a new set of global goals is sought to be put in place.

In conclusion, it has been argued in this paper that the MDGs have largely been disappointing in terms of real achievement, even though they were relatively modest in scope. This has been related to the fact that the focus on relatively specific individual outcome targets tended to miss the important point that these outcomes can only occur within larger processes that are determined by macroeconomic, developmental and social policies. While the empowerment of women was declared to be an MDG, the way the targets were formulated tended to trivialise the discussion and the concerns, and in turn ignoring the broader processes meant that even these limited targets were generally not met. Therefore it is argued that the emphasis needs to shift away from specific outcome indicators towards policies and processes; and that goals need to be formulated in terms of economic and social policies that will generate processes that can deliver

positive outcomes. Given the overwhelming presence of gender inequalities and their cross-cutting nature, a gender perspective needs to underlie the approach towards all the goals and targets, even when the indicators appear to be about something else.

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