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INTERACTIVE EXPERT PANEL

**Challenges and achievements in the implementation of the
Millennium Development Goals for women and girls**

**Focus: Challenges and achievements
in the implementation of the MDGs for women and girls**

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**Report of the expert group meeting on structural and policy
constraints in achieving the MDGs for women and girls***

by

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

In order to contribute to a deeper understanding of progress and limitations in the achievement of the MDGs, to take stock of current research, and to assist the Commission in its deliberations, UN Women, in collaboration with the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), convened an expert group meeting (EGM) on ‘Structural and policy constraints in achieving the MDGs for women and girls’ from 21 to 24 October, 2013 in Mexico City, Mexico. Experts elected Radhika Balakrishnan and Valeria Esquivel to serve as co-chairs of the meeting.

The Millennium Declaration and human rights

The Millennium Declaration emphasized the need for global solidarity for the realization of human rights. It outlined the opportunities and challenges that globalization presents for achieving broadly shared well-being. The fundamental values of the Millennium Declaration are freedom, equality, solidarity, tolerance, respect for nature, and shared responsibility.¹ It sets out the need for all countries to be involved in creating “...a more peaceful, prosperous, and just world,” as “we have a collective responsibility to uphold the principles of human dignity, equality and equity at global levels.”²

Human rights represent the framework for social justice embedded in the Millennium Declaration. In the spirit of the declaration, this presentation uses a human rights framework as its basis for analysis. Progress on women’s rights and substantive gender equality in the development agenda requires the centrality of a human rights framework. Women’s rights and gender equality require critical attention to women’s interconnected and indivisible sexual, reproductive, civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights. Moreover, there is a need to focus on substantive equality rather than formal equality alone. Formal equality through legal or policy measures is necessary, but may not be sufficient, to ensure that women enjoy the same rights as men in practice.

It is essential for women to have not only equal opportunities with men, but also equal access to opportunities and resources for substantively equal outcomes. In practice, substantive equality requires the transformation of unequal power relations that perpetuate gender inequality.

Recommendations: overarching approach

Experts identified recommendations arising from emerging issues and challenges related to the structural and policy constraints of achieving the MDGs for women and girls. These recommendations are meant as guiding principles rather than as directives. They are necessary not only for accelerating achievement of the MDGs in the remaining time until the 2015 target date, but also for consideration of the post-2015 development framework.

Experts emphasized that the recommendations reflect the crucial interconnections of the MDG targets and goals. There is a need to harness the synergies between goals and recognize the interconnections between the MDGs in order to reach their full potential. The recommendations give particular attention to inequality and discrimination in all its

¹ United Nations. 2000. *Millennium Declaration*. <http://www.un.org/millennium/declaration/ares552e.htm>

² Ibid.

forms, bearing in mind that gender inequality and discrimination remain key obstacles to inclusive and sustainable development.

The post-2015 framework, in particular, must be designed in a way that prioritizes the reduction of disparities and structural inequalities, using key human rights principles. Experts agreed that the respect, protection and fulfillment of human rights are fundamental to sustainable development.

The Enabling Environment for Achieving the MDGs

The global macroeconomic and financial environment, and relations of trade and aid play a pivotal role in realizing social goals and objectives. A coherent development strategy in the future must consider the enabling environment for the achievement of development goals, with all stakeholders held responsible for development and human rights. Human rights principles must be mechanisms that can hold donors and global governance structures to account. Thus:

- Progressive macroeconomic policies should be designed according to human rights principles and increased transparency, ensuring that all States, irrespective of income status or perceived human rights advancements, invest in effective, appropriate and consistent actions for gender equality, women's human rights, and women's empowerment.
- International financial and trade institutions and markets should be effectively regulated to prevent economic crises, and financial regulation must also occur at the national level.
- Fiscal policies should mobilize maximum available resources through progressive forms of taxation (e.g. corporate, wealth, and income taxes) in order to finance the provision of universal social protection measures.
- Policies that lead to retrogression, such as policies of fiscal austerity, must not be adopted and policies should support the ongoing realization of economic and social rights.
- Extra-territorial obligations of national and global governance relating to acts and omissions that have effects on the enjoyment of human rights outside of a state's territory should be reinforced and extended (expanding the *Maastricht Principles*, 1986).
- Enhanced bargaining and regulatory power in low-capacity states should be supported and funded, to ensure that they are able to hold corporations, donor agencies and global governance entities (such as WTO & TRIPS), whether within or outside their borders, accountable for upholding national laws, national policies, substantive equality, and women's rights.
- The definition of duty-bearer should be expanded beyond the state to include regimes of global governance, finance, trade etc. and to move beyond the idea of human rights as tools that are strategically or opportunistically used as part of donor conditionality.

A Multidimensional Approach to Sustainable Development

There must be a universalism in policies, not just in name, that recognizes structural inequalities and allows for an intersectional and interconnected approach. National strategies must consider difference, even within clearly identified groups, when

identifying and addressing peoples' needs, interests and aspirations. Life cycle patterns and the specific requirements of different age groups, as well as marginalized groups in society must be at the heart of the post-2015 agenda. The voices of local communities should be fundamental to poverty definition and reduction strategies. Therefore:

- Multi-dimensional measurement of poverty has to be promoted, and work to alleviate such poverty, at the individual, household, and community levels, is a key step towards substantive gender equality.
- Essential services should be delivered through sustainable processes, at a level that ensures social protection and dignity on a universal, unconditional and individual basis. (see the *ILO Social Protection Floor* for guidance).
- An inclusive approach to development should highlight leadership and autonomy at the local level, and not only at the national level. At the same time, the role of the state in protecting the human rights of all individuals is essential.
- Because the implementation of justice is often inadequate, even when laws are gender-sensitive, processes that facilitate gender equality and women's human rights should be monitored and measured.
- Long-term integrated actions should be promoted to transform stereotypes, norms and institutions, based on gender and other axes of social exclusion that are discriminatory in perception and action.

Fiscal Policy and Financing for Gender Equality

Targeted financing for gender equality and women's rights is a prerequisite to realize sustainable development and should follow the principle of maximum available resources. There is a need to counter the narrative that public money – both from donor countries as well as domestic efforts in developing countries – is not available for gender-equitable sustainable development and that therefore private sector money needs to fill the gap. The Experts recommend that:

- Adequate financing and support for women's organizations should be prioritized and reserved for gender equality and women's empowerment efforts, particularly sustained and unconditional support for women's rights organizing and movements.
- Gender-responsive budgeting should become the norm to ensure that countries' expenditure for sustainable development contribute to gender equality.
- Even in times of austerity and fiscal constraints, adequate public international and domestic resources to fund gender-sensitive sustainable development can and should be generated for example by:
 - Instituting progressive tax reform that increases domestic resource mobilization by raising taxes on capital gains, wealth, land and high incomes while lowering those on wages and necessary consumption items
 - Reducing illicit money flows and corporate tax evasion
 - Abolishing harmful subsidies, including for fossil fuel-based production and trade-distorting developed country agricultural exports
 - Shrinking military budgets
 - Introducing innovative financing instruments such as a regional or global Financial Transaction Tax (FTT), which would also benefit sustainable development by stabilizing the global financial system, or carbon taxes and levies on maritime and air transport.
- Donors should put in place accountability mechanisms for resources allocated,

disbursed and implemented, and provide data on the results of their financial support in terms of the types of social, economic, cultural and political transformations generated.

Women's Collective Action

There is a need to support women's collective action, voice and participation at all levels. Women must be recognized as key development actors in their own right. Women's voices are essential in setting priorities and policies that align with respecting and fulfilling human rights commitments, including women's rights. In some cases this may require the creation of relevant spaces and institutional mechanisms. As such:

- Women should be central to influencing and transforming collective action, such as in trade unions, land movements, or human rights organizations.
- The participation of women's organizations (including feminist organizations and movements) in policy dialogues at local, national and international levels should be ensured, at all stages of the development process (planning, implementing, monitoring and evaluating).

The Accountability of Non-State Actors

Corporations, foundations and civil society organizations must be held accountable to their obligation to promote substantive gender equality. While these actors bring new resources and political commitment, their diversity and varying perspectives on development makes this a highly complex field. Their increased engagement raises a pressing need for accountability and regulation—beyond just notions of corporate social responsibility. Therefore:

- Coherence in the implementation of the philanthropic work and in the priorities of diverse actors from the private sector, including their compliance with labor rights, other human rights provisions, fair competition and environmental regulations should be a key dimension of private sector engagement in the post-2015 agenda.
- Civil society organizations, including religious organizations and private sector actors, should be held to the principles of non-discrimination and equality, and non-retrogression, relating to acts and omissions that have effects on the enjoyment of human rights.
- All development actors, working at all levels (from national to regional to global), should all be held accountable, building on existing accountability mechanisms within the UN HR system, such as the Universal Periodic Review process.

Women's Paid Employment

There is a need to respect, recognize and fulfill the right for women to engage in paid employment, while operationalizing and enabling "decent work". Decent work for men and women and gender-balanced work and family commitments are the motor for social and economic development and gender equality. Therefore:

- Women should be able to fully engage in collective bargaining and social dialogue at all levels between governments, employers and trade unions, for the implementation of equality policies, for balanced work-family commitments and to reduce the gender pay gap.

- Legal rights and policies should be implemented that enable decent work, particularly through shifting tax structures, incentives for employers, social benefits, and parental leave, and having access to affordable and quality services (health, education, care) and infrastructure, being free from violence and sexual harassment at the work place, and having the right to organize and negotiate.

Women's Unpaid Care Work

Women's enjoyment of the right to decent work is strongly affected by heavy and unequal unpaid workloads. The unequal distribution of unpaid care work is simultaneously reflective and determinative of power relations between women and men. Discriminatory gender stereotypes cause and perpetuate this unequal distribution of total work, rendering women's equal enjoyment of a wide range of interlinked rights (not only to decent work, but also to education, health, leisure, and participation) impossible. Therefore:

- The impact of action on the level and distribution of unpaid care work should be used as a key criterion for the evaluation of macro-economic policy.
- The value of unpaid care work should be recognized and redistribution of paid and unpaid care work should be achieved within the household and between the household and the public sphere, through public provision of care services, government incentives, labor laws and regulations, and equality legislation, etc.
- Policies should be promoted that reduce unpaid care work through investments in public infrastructure (e.g. access to drinking water to reduce fetching effort).³
- The transformation of patriarchal social norms and stereotypes that construe men as 'breadwinners' and women as 'carers' should be targeted and addressed through progressive social and economic policies.

Education for Women and Girls

Experts agreed that children are the future and they are the opportunity for change in society. Education is a public good and a human right, and universal and comprehensive access to education is essential to the achievement of the MDGs overall. As such:

- An ambitious education agenda should encompass access to quality education, completion, quality of curriculum, capacity of teachers, and infrastructure.
- The post-2015 framework should encourage policies that provide enough financial and in kind support to allow girls to enroll, attend regularly, and progress through school to complete primary school successfully. This entails putting money into public services (schools, roads, health provision) ensuring the poorest girls have resources to stay at school, and that all teachers are well supported to provide high quality learning.
- There is also a need to ensure resources (financial, in kind, information and critical engagement with cultures of exclusion) to enable girls to enroll and complete cycles of secondary and tertiary education, so that the gender parity target is met in all regions of all countries and for all social groups.

³ Sepulveda Carmona 2013.

Violence Against Women

Any efforts to address the development agenda must include attention to violence against women and girls. Violence against women and girls is a concern in its own right, but is also relevant for its impact and repercussions on other aspects of women's equality, including education, health and work. The elimination of violence against women must be seen as inseparable from achieving gender equality and national development. Therefore:

- Laws and policies that protect women and girls from violence should be implemented.
- States should report on a regular basis their programs in place to eliminate VAW.
- Experts recognized that violence against women's human rights defenders (WHRD) is a crucial problem to be addressed. Recognizing that many of the obstacles and risks that WHRDs face are due to structural inequities, upholding the human rights principles of universality and nondiscrimination in all aspects of this work must be central to addressing cases of WHRDs. Particular attention should be paid to the gender dimension of cases relating to WHRDs.
- This requires examining the gender-specificity of individual violations; gendered structures and ideologies permeating a given context; the range of State and non-State perpetrators who may pose specific threats to WHRDs; and the resulting gendered consequences of violations.
- Effective and gender-sensitive responses should be developed, that recognize that different WHRDs may have different needs, mediated by their identities, social positioning, personal situations and the contexts in which they live and work.

Women's Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights

Sexual rights and reproductive rights are essential to ensuring the bodily autonomy and bodily integrity of women and girls and are fundamental to enabling equal citizenship. Sexual and reproductive rights are embedded in human rights and their exercise is essential for the enjoyment of other fundamental rights and for achieving the international development targets and poverty eradication. It is essential to recognize the life-cycle approach with regards to sexual and reproductive health as defined in the ICPD PoA and provide universal access to rights based SRHR services; while giving equal emphasis to the right to contraception as well as a right to conception for all. It is essential to recognize inequalities between groups of women and that poor, rural and indigenous women are sometimes marginalized in relation to access to SRHR services, even if they constitute the majority of the population. Therefore:

- States should provide comprehensive sexuality education as a core subject in the national curriculum and put resources toward this in the education system.
- Access to SRHR information and services should be made available for young people in and out of schools, and young people should have an equal right to prevent pregnancy as well as ensure a right to education for girls who are pregnant and have children.
- Member States should guarantee universal access to good-quality sexual health and reproductive health services, bearing in mind the specific needs of men and women, adolescents and young people, persons of diverse sexuality and gender identity, and persons with disabilities, with special attention to vulnerable persons, persons living in rural and remote areas and to the

promotion of citizen participation in the follow-up to commitments.

- States should formulate and promote policies that enable persons to exercise their sexual rights, which embrace the right to a safe and full sex life, as well as the right to take free, informed, voluntary and responsible decisions on their sexuality, sexual orientation and gender identity, without coercion, discrimination or violence, and that guarantee the right to information and the means necessary for their sexual health and reproductive health.
- States should formulate laws, policies and programs which specifically emphasize non-discrimination with regards to access to sexual and reproductive health services as well as sexual orientation and gender identity in the exercise of sexual rights and the manifestations thereof.
- States should promote the prevention and timely detection of and guarantee universal access to comprehensive treatment for HIV/AIDS and sexually transmitted infections and eliminate the stigma and discrimination to which persons living with the virus are often subjected as well as strengthen measures for detection of HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted infections in pregnant women and for prevention of the vertical transmission of the virus; ensuring that both women and their children have access to anti-retroviral medicines.
- It is also necessary to invest sufficient financial, human and technological resources in order to provide universal sexual health care and reproductive health care for people of all genders, without any form of discrimination.

Environmental Sustainability and Access to Resources

Human-made climate change is not gender-neutral. “It is common knowledge,” says the Rio +20 and Gender Brochure of the United Nations, “that vulnerability to biodiversity loss, desertification and climate change impacts are deeply connected to gender, and that, conversely, sustainability interventions, responses and solutions need to consider gender issues if they are to fully meet the objectives for which they were established.” Persistent gender inequalities, (often overt) discrimination, and the dependence of many women on the environmental resource base, mean that women are disproportionately affected by climate change. Climate change can exacerbate women’s poverty, such as time poverty, by increasing women’s drudgery and care work for the basic provision of food, water, and fuel. It undercuts current and future development gains, and undermines the realization of women’s fundamental human rights, including the rights to life, health, food, water and self-determination. Therefore:

- Women, especially those living in developing economies, should be key stakeholders and deserve comprehensive and meaningful participation in determining national priorities for low-carbon, climate-resilient development.
- Women’s voice and agency in their role as community leaders, farmers, entrepreneurs, producers and household managers should be supported in order to mitigate and adapt to climate change. This includes giving recognition and compensation to the mitigation and adaptation activities that women are already engaging in -- such as switching to drought-resistant seeds, employing low-impact or organic soil management, or community-based reforestation efforts. Such recognition also reduces women’s (frequently) unpaid care work on behalf of environmental sustainability.
- Predictable and adequate public financing for climate mitigation and adaptation action should be gender-responsive.
- The specificity of women’s needs, in terms of water, sanitation and hygiene,

deserves the highest priority for infrastructure investments. In particular, every woman and girl should have safe access to a hygienic toilet through infrastructure planning, slum improvement and rural-development programmes. Access to and affordability of these basic resources, whether through private-public partnerships or through community-based efforts, are fundamental to health, dignity, and the realization of women's human rights.

Women, Peace and Security

Armed conflict undermines development, human rights and gender equality, and development efforts must seek to prevent conflict by addressing its structural causes. A gender perspective must be mainstreamed throughout efforts to prevent, resolve and recover from conflict, including ensuring women's full and equal participation in these efforts and addressing militarized masculinities as obstacles to peace.

- The post-2015 framework should address the most common underlying drivers of conflict and insecurity, including lack of fair access to basic services such as justice and security and lack of inclusive and accountable governance, as well as global factors that lead to conflict such as environmental degradation and illicit financial flows.
- A holistic approach to women's participation in peace and security policy and practice should be adopted through implementing comprehensive strategies aimed at enhancing women's capacities and potential, as well as the structures and relations that constrain them from a full and equal role.
- States should be held accountable for the prosecution and punishment of perpetrators of sexual and gender-based violence in conflict and post-conflict situations and specific funds must be committed for in country monitoring of the implementation of UNSCRs 1325, 1820, 1888, 1889, 1960, 2106 and 2122.⁴

Data Usage and Gathering

It is essential to measure the impact of policies and development strategies. Data must be transparent in its assumptions, collection, and analysis, nationally and internationally, and made accessible to all in a timely manner. There is clearly a need to encourage more systematic use of existing data, particularly routinely collected data and time use surveys, because – while available – these are not regularly used and policies are not shaped by existing information.

- A focus on equality and non-discrimination should trigger the generation of more precise data that is disaggregated according to gender, as well as age, disability, and other factors. Collecting data that allows situations of discrimination and marginalization to come to light should inform policy-making and action to make progress towards development goals.
- In order to assess progress in reducing inequalities, monitoring should go beyond income and capture other causes of lack of access to basic rights and services.
- Process indicators are needed in addition to outcome indicators in the post-2015 development framework.
- Time use data should be collected more systematically and in a policy-oriented

⁴ See Security Council Report, 'UN Documents for Women, Peace and Security' <http://www.securitycouncilreport.org/un-documents/women-peace-and-security/> for a full list of Security Council Resolutions on this thematic priority.

way, so that the data can be used for the design of both economic and social policies aimed at eradicating poverty, including time poverty, and enhancing equality.

- This should be 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.