

United Nations Commission on the Status of Women
Fifty-eighth session
10 – 21 March 2014
New York

INTERACTIVE EXPERT PANEL

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

**Focus: Accountability and participation of women and girls
in the implementation of the MDGs**

Wednesday, March 12, 2014, 3:00 - 6:00 pm

**Human rights and accountability
in accelerating progress on 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.

Madame Chairperson, Excellencies, Distinguished delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Thank you for the opportunity offered to OHCHR to be part of this important discussion today.

There appears to be a general consensus emerging that while a dedicated goal on gender equality has been important for focusing attention on continued discrimination against women and girls, the narrowly defined targets and indicators have undermined a more holistic understanding of how gender inequality and sexism manifests perpetuated in our societies. Even in the areas where progress is being reported, a human rights analysis of the progress claimed often uncovers important dimensions of continued deprivation and discrimination. For instance, many of the MDG indicators are measured based on household surveys, which fail to uncover intra-household inequalities in access to and control over resources. The target on access to improved water sources is on track, but given women's lesser financial resources and care burdens, access to water only improves their situation if it is affordable and safe to drink, dimensions not measured by the MDGs. This begs the question whether our development approach is not fundamentally flawed?

Against these realities, the post 2015 framework must address gaps and deficiencies in the MDGs framework, as well as deliver on the commitments that States have already undertaken on women's human rights and gender equality. A future development framework does not necessarily have to have a separate goal on human rights, but rather it must build on human rights both in process and in substance. Any new framework must be aligned with international human rights standards and principles, and respond to the realities of women and girls across their life cycles.

On substance, the following four human rights issues and corresponding human rights standards should guide the elaboration of the post 2015 agenda:

1. Freedom from want – Ensuring women's economic and social rights is key to addressing women's poverty, and to broader efforts to empower women to realize their full potential. The future development framework must therefore reflect commitments to ensure women's human rights to health, education, housing, property, food, water, sanitation and work, which requires explicit attention to historic discrimination against women, deeply-rooted harmful gender stereotypes, and women's physiological differences. For instance, steps must be taken to address persistent discrimination against women in the area of land and property, which hinders their ability to claim a multitude of rights. The future framework should also resist gender stereotypes that portray women primarily as mothers, as happened with MDG 5 on maternal mortality and morbidity. Rather, the post 2015 agenda should recognize the centrality of ensuring all individual's sexual and reproductive rights. The right to water and sanitation for women necessitates explicit attention to menstrual hygiene – a reality which adds up to about 10 years of a woman's life, yet is still shrouded in silence.
2. Freedom from fear – In the Post-2015 framework, the international community must include goals related to personal security, access to justice, and public participation. The omission of gender-based violence was a major failing for women, particularly given the

extraordinarily high incidence of such violence. Access to justice was also excluded and remains a distant dream for many women whose rights have been violated for a variety of reasons including non-recognition of the violations they suffer, inability to access accountability mechanisms for economic, social and cultural reasons, and discriminatory actions by police, prosecutors, judges, health service providers and others.

3. Equality and non-discrimination – The new development agenda should include goals, targets and indicators that aim to remove discriminatory legal provisions that are still embedded in the legislation of most countries. Discrimination in practice within the family and community threatens women’s autonomy, limits opportunities to obtain an education or access information, excludes women from decision-making processes, and unfairly burdens women and girls with domestic tasks. Efforts to track progress towards equality must include improving the availability of data disaggregated by sex, as well as by other prohibited grounds of discrimination.
4. Healthy environment – Efforts to promote sustainable development and protect the environment must place special emphasis on gender dimensions – recognizing that, in many places, women are more dependent on subsistence agriculture and common resources, such as water and forests – resources which are highly vulnerable to environmental shocks. Women’s poverty also plays a role in making women more vulnerable when natural disasters occur, especially where women’s socio-economic position is low. Women are also exposed to specific environmental risks due to gender specific division of labour such as indoor pollution caused by hours cooking over stoves using biomass fuels, causing respiratory illnesses. Women must be involved in decision-making and new technologies should open up new opportunities that allow them to realise their rights to education and work rather than burdening them with additional domestic tasks.

On process, the integration of human rights principles which promote full respect for the human rights of women and girls requires specific measures to:

- Promote the effective participation of women and girls in the design of the new agenda, with specific attention to women’s diversity, as well as in the implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes related to achieving the Post-2015 development goals.
- Ensure that the maximum available resources are dedicated towards the realization of human rights, especially women’s human rights. This requires the integration of a gender perspective in budgetary decisions on policies and programmes, as well as the adequate financing of specific programmes for gender equality.
- Establish a strong accountability mechanism to hold Governments accountable to reaching the post-2015 goals, which identify clear responsibilities to ensure that all actors, including private actors, are held to account.

On the last point, how can accountability for achieving post-2015 goals be strengthened at global, regional, national and sub-national levels, including with respect to the private sector?

We all know from our own countries that accountability strengthens political commitment, promotes a culture of justification of policy choices and resource allocation, and improves incentives for fair delivery of services. The MDGs, unfortunately, did not put in place mechanisms that were strong enough to ensure accountability for reaching the goals and targets set at national or international level. This is now seen as one of the main reasons why the MDGs did not achieve as much as they could have.

We should not make that mistake again. The post-2015 agenda must include a strong accountability framework.

But first you might ask: what is accountability from a human rights perspective? Accountability has three dimensions: responsibility, answerability and enforceability.

- Responsibility requires that those in positions of authority have clearly defined duties and performance standards, enabling their behaviour to be assessed transparently and objectively.
- Answerability requires public officials and institutions to provide reasoned justifications to those affected by their decisions, to oversight bodies, and to the electorate and the public at large.
- Enforceability requires putting mechanisms in place that monitor the degree to which public officials and institutions comply with established standards, and ensure that appropriate corrective and remedial action is taken when this is not the case.

So how we can strengthen the accountability framework for the post-2015 agenda?

Accountability starts right now: by making sure that we have transparent criteria to decide what goes into the agenda and what does not. We have suggested criteria, including on universality, legitimacy, action-orientation, consistency with international law, instrumental value, and equality focus, among several others, building on the Rio+20 agreement.

It will require clear and measurable benchmarks and indicators, and reporting, in different intervals. Voluntary MDGs monitoring and reporting is not enough and is not a good model. We need mandatory reporting and independent review at the global level, with full transparency and participation of civil society.

We also need effective mechanisms at the national and local levels to ensure that relevant institutions monitor progress. Many of these exist already and can be utilized (e.g. parliaments and their oversight bodies, national human rights institutions, the judiciary, social audits, etc.).

We can also make use of the experience and work of existing human rights mechanisms, like the UN treaty bodies, special procedures, and Universal Periodic Review. The post-2015 monitoring and reporting framework should make these linkages clear and take account of recommendations of international human rights mechanisms.

Finally, non-State actors have responsibilities too. Business and private sector entities have a responsibility to respect human rights, and governments have an obligation to protect people from human rights harms caused by business, and affected people have a right to a meaningful remedy. As such, due diligence, adequate regulation, human rights impact assessments, and the full application of the UN's Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights should be part of the implementation framework of the new agenda.

Thank you.