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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

**Implementation of the MDGs
and participation of women and girls***

by

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1. Introduction

The Report of the Secretary-General (E/CN.6/2014/3) on the “Challenges and achievements in the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals for women and girls,” provides a global picture of the extent of progress in promoting gender equality and women’s empowerment. It recommends measures to accelerate the realization of desired outcomes anchored on a more decisive and inclusive approaches to deal with old and emerging forms of gender biases.

The eight Millennium Development goals, 21 targets and 60 indicators have been inspired by the 2000 Millennium Declaration, followed by the outcomes of summits and conferences held since the 1990s. Governments have committed to eliminate gender-based discrimination in all spheres of economic, social, political and cultural life, combat all forms of violence against women and implement the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW).

The achievement of the MD targets for women and girls has been **slow and uneven**, with relatively good progress in “some areas such as primary education, but stark gaps remain in many areas.”¹ “Several targets such as those relating to maternal mortality, women’s access to decent work and access to improved sanitation facilities are at risk of not being met by the 2015 deadline. Moreover, gender mainstreaming across the framework has been limited, particularly for Goal 7 and Goal 8.”² Other implementation concerns include the inadequacy of the goals and targets to capture equally important aspects of gender equality and women’s human rights in education, poverty, political participation and maternal health

One of the key principles in achieving the MDGs by 2015 and beyond has to do with the application of human rights-based accountability principles and approaches. Actions to clearly delineate the responsibilities and accountability of various stakeholders especially Member States and all its agencies/machineries, from the national to the community/village levels, non-State actors and the private sector will facilitate the processes of achieving substantive equality between women and men. Taking a human rights approach to achieve the MDG goals allows the framing of targets and outcomes in accordance with international laws; it defines obligations by State parties and other stakeholders as legally binding.³ The norms to measure MDG outcomes for women and girls, in accordance with the CEDAW Convention, must go beyond formal equality; they must also include equality of access to opportunity and equality of results.

2. Accounting for the participation of women and girls in the implementation and monitoring of the MDG goals

Positive outcomes for women and girls of the MDGs may be assessed on the basis of the progress in female representation in decision making bodies across the different branches of

¹ Economic and Social Council. Commission on the Status of Women. “Discussion guide for the high-level round table on the challenges and achievements in the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals for women and girls,” E/CN.6/2014/5, page 3.

² Economic and Social Council, Commission on the Status of Women. Ibid, page 3.

³ Dairiam, Shanthi, “The Relevance of the Links Between Human Rights, the Beijing Platform for Action and the Millennium Development Goals,” EGM/BPFA-MD-MDG/2005/EP.8, 3 February 2005. United Nations Division for the Advancement of Women (DAW), Expert Group Meeting, Achievements, gaps and challenges in linking the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action and the Millennium Declaration and Millennium Development Goals, Baku, Azerbaijan, 7-11 February 2005, page 1 and 2.

government (i.e. executive, judicial and legal bodies), and from the global, regional, national and down to the village levels. Global data show that as of October 2013, women represented 21.8 percent of parliamentarians in single or lower houses and 19.4 percent of Senate or upper houses, up from 12 percent and 10.1 percent in January 1997, respectively. As of December 2012, only 17 percent of government ministers were women and only 8 women served as Head of State; 13 served as Head of government as at June 2013.”⁴ Only 28 countries, mostly coming developed regions, have reached 30 percent female participation in ministerial positions, a critical mass that can better ensure the passage of laws and policies enabling for women.⁵ Of this number, 23 have used quotas.

There is ample evidence now to show that an increase in female representation in decision making facilitates the passage of laws, policies and programs that protect and promote the human rights of women and children. A good example is the “significant legal reforms on women’s rights that coincided with the increase in women’s representation in some poor countries, including those emerging from conflict, like Costa Rica, Yugoslavia and Rwanda.”⁶

A serious gap in assessing the MDG results for women and girls is the lack of data on female decision making roles at lower levels of governance and planning. While an increase in number of female national parliamentarians and executive leaders should be pursued beyond MDG 15 it is equally important to monitor the extent of female participation in other areas of decision making to include the judicial and legal branches of government and special courts as well as fact-finding bodies and planning bodies at local levels of governance.

The active participation, over the years, of various international, regional and country-based women’s movements, feminist activists and civil society organizations has helped ensure the compliance of State parties and the private sector to their commitments.⁷ Their critical engagements in intergovernmental processes have, in fact, formed part the reports on the implementation of the commitments to the Beijing Platform of Action, the CEDAW and the MDGs for women and girls. This practice should be sustained and strengthened to include CSOs engaged in work around emerging gender issues.

There has been some decline, in recent years, however, of funding support for women’s organizations. Their lack of financial resilience and access to resources threaten their sustainability and capacity to perform their mandates and commitments.⁸ Besides engaging development organizations to sustain their technical and financial assistance for gender programs there is a need to mobilize the private sector to support especially CSOs that deal with gender issues related to disasters, ICT-based sex and labor trafficking and others.

⁴ Economic and Social Council, Commission on the Status of Women, Ibid, page 7.

⁵ UN Women, 2011. “In Pursuit of Justice: Progress of the World’s Women. New York. UN Women. Pages 108-109.

⁶ UN Women, 2011. “In Pursuit of Justice: Progress of the World’s Women,” Ibid.

⁷ Some organizations that have indeed immensely contributed to the advancement of the goals of gender equality and women’s empowerment include, among others, the Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era (DAWN), Global Alliance on Media and Gender (GAMG), the Coalition against Trafficking in Women (CATW), the Association of Women’s Rights for Development (AWID).

⁸ Arutyunova, Angelika and Julia Miller, “Beyond Investing in Women and Girls,” AWID website, February 21, 2014,

3. Accounting for the quality and extent of mainstreaming gender equality and women's empowerment principles and approaches in development plans with MDG-related targets and for generating accurate, appropriate and adequate sex-disaggregated data and gender-sensitive analytical tools and outcome indicators.

Many countries have adopted the gender mainstreaming approach to development planning and monitoring, installed oversight committees and audit mechanisms for use of gender budget to enhance the gender responsiveness of intervention outcomes. Gender committees with significant representation of women from various socio-economic and cultural groups participate in the review and reformulation of action plans. Many have also started to use the human rights norms to measure quality and quantity of MDG outcomes for women and girls.

Despite these laudable efforts of many countries, there are serious challenges in efforts to maximize the application of the gender mainstreaming approach. For instance, the poverty indicators do not capture the fulfillment of the right to adequate standard of living and other economic and social rights. They do not indicate anything about the differential impacts, of poverty on females and males given their different household, community and economic roles. The gender dimensions of hunger, malnutrition and their connection to food security are not included in implementation guidelines. The MDG 3 “fails to address critical issues like violence against, inequalities in the division of paid work, women’s limited access to assets, violations of women’s and girl’s sexual and reproductive health and rights, and their unequal participation in private and public decision-making beyond national parliaments.”⁹ Policy reforms are needed to address these serious gaps.

The Philippines has had a long and fruitful experience in the use of the gender mainstreaming approach. The various elements that perhaps account for its relative success getting all branches of government to promote gender equality and women’s empowerment include (a) passage of enabling laws and policies; (c) institutionalization of the gender committees in all branches of government and levels of governance; (c) gender plans to guide implementation of national plans; (e) regular gender training for all stakeholders (d) technical assistance provided by the Philippine Commission on Women and development agencies, and (d) audit mechanisms on the implementation of the gender plan as well as use of the gender budget. To address the problem of low female representation in male dominated fields of work, other countries have adopted the quota system to fill up elective and appointive positions and those across the cycle of development planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation.

4. Accounting for legal and judicial reforms to enhance women’s participation in development and enjoyment of the benefits of development.

The Convention on All forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) calls on governments to address the adverse impacts of the laws or lack of laws on women. The achievement of the MDGs for women and girls greatly depends on the extent to which discriminatory practices are eliminated through legal reforms and promotion of gender justice.

⁹ Economic and Social Council. Commission on the Status of Women. “Discussion guide for the high-level round table on the challenges and achievements in the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals for women and girls,” E/CN/6/2014/5, pages 5-10.

“In the past 50 years half of the world’s constitutions have been reformed or redrafted, an opportunity that has been seized upon by women to write gender equality into the legal fabric of their countries.”¹⁰ Around 139 constitutions include guarantees on gender equality, 125 countries outlaw domestic violence, at least 117 countries have equal pay laws, 173 guarantee paid maternity leave, and 117 outlaw sexual harassment in the workplace. Women have equal rights to own property in 115 countries and in 93 have equal inheritance rights.”¹¹

Many more State Parties need to undertake a thorough review and amendment of their discriminatory laws in accordance with internationally agreed human rights principles and norms. Other areas that should be pursued to enhance women’s participation in development can include the provision of specialized services to reduce attrition in the justice chain and speed up the resolution of court cases, provide adequate gender-sensitive training for service providers across the various pillars of justice, enact enabling policies to facilitate women’s access to courts and truth commissions during and after conflict and implement gender-responsive reparations programmes.

5. Concluding Comments

The implementation of the MDGs for women and girls has provided us with many lessons and positive experiences on how to move forward the achievement of gender equality and women’s empowerment. These include the need to further enhance female representation in MDG processes, the development of enabling policies and mechanisms for gender mainstreaming as well as sustained reforms of the legal and judicial systems to eliminate the structural causes of gender inequality. The human rights normative framework must inform future actions to address these challenges.

¹⁰ UN Women. In Pursuit of Women:2011-2012 Progress of the World’s Women. New York: United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, page 25.

¹¹ , page 35.