

**A TRANSFORMATIVE STAND-ALONE GOAL ON  
ACHIEVING GENDER EQUALITY, WOMEN'S  
RIGHTS AND WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT:  
IMPERATIVES AND KEY COMPONENTS**

*In the context of the Post-2015 Development Framework and  
Sustainable Development Goals*



United Nations Entity for Gender Equality  
and the Empowerment of Women

**TOWARDS A TRANSFORMATIVE GOAL ON GENDER EQUALITY, WOMEN'S RIGHTS  
AND WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT**

As a set of time-bound targets, the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) have played a critical role in mobilizing integrated international action on global poverty issues. Inequality and discrimination based on gender is an impediment to the achievement of women's rights and was recognized in the Millennium Declaration as a significant factor undermining progress in many contexts. This recognition led to the inclusion of a stand-alone goal on gender equality and women's empowerment (MDG3) and the integration of gender perspectives in other goals through some targets and indicators. Although significant progress has been made in some of these MDG targets, there is a great deal further to go.

Moreover, MDG3, on gender equality and women's empowerment, did not explicitly address the need for transformation in gender relations. Progress on MDG3 was tracked through the target on gender parity in education, which was important yet insufficient to capture other important areas of progress on gender equality. These include overcoming gender-specific injustices such as violence against women and girls, gender-based wage discrimination, women's disproportionate share of unpaid care work, women's limited asset and property ownership, and unequal participation in public and private decision-making.

Furthermore, a significant body of research indicates that gender equality, women's rights and women's empowerment can have a catalytic effect on the achievement of sustained peace, development, human rights and sound relationships between the environment and human populations. Progress on other MDGs has been contingent on achieving gender equality and empowering women and girls: gender inequalities have held back progress on the other MDGs on reducing poverty and hunger, increasing enrolment in education, reducing child mortality, improving maternal health, combating HIV/AIDS and promoting environmental sustainability. Efforts to achieve broader development goals will not succeed in promoting gender equality and women's rights without dedicated commitment and resources. Therefore, achieving gender equality and women's empowerment is an unfinished agenda and requires a comprehensive and transformative approach and recognition as a stand-alone goal in the new development framework.

The need for a transformative goal on gender equality, women's rights and women's empowerment is grounded in the commitment by UN Member States to gender equality and advancing women's rights. These commitments are enshrined in global treaties such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), in policy commitments such as the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the outcome of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20), in relevant outcomes of the General Assembly, including the Millennium Declaration, in ECOSOC and Security Council resolutions, and in agreed conclusions of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW), including most recently in the agreed conclusions of CSW 57 on the elimination and prevention of all forms of violence against women and girls.

The outcome document of the Rio+20 Conference, which reaffirmed the commitment to CEDAW and the Beijing Platform for Action, and called for a new set of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), provides a strong basis for including a comprehensive and transformative approach to gender equality, women's rights and women's empowerment. The document recognized that gender equality and women's empowerment are important for sustainable development in all three dimensions – economic, environmental and social – and for our common future. Underscoring women's vital role in achieving sustainable development, Member States reaffirmed their commitments to ensure women's equal rights, access and opportunities for participation and leadership in the economy, society and political decision-making.<sup>1</sup> Member States also recognized the leadership role of women and resolved to “ensure [women's] full and effective participation in sustainable development policies, programmes and decision-making at all levels.”<sup>2</sup> The Rio+20 outcome document's framework for action and follow-up included a dedicated section on gender equality and women's empowerment as priority areas and cross-cutting issues and included explicit references to women's empowerment and gender equality in twelve other thematic areas for action and follow-up.<sup>3</sup> It also recognized that goals, targets and indicators, including gender-sensitive indicators are valuable in measuring and accelerating progress on sustainable development.

The imperative for a transformative approach to gender equality, women's rights and women's empowerment was strongly validated in the outcomes of the participatory national, regional and global consultations organised under the aegis of the UN Development Group and UN Regional Commissions. Global consultations, including those on inequality conducted in 2012-13 and co-hosted by UN Women and UNICEF, revealed that gender-based inequality remains one of the most pervasive forms of inequality, found in all societies, and affecting a larger proportion of the world's population than any other form of discrimination.<sup>4</sup> The global inequality consultation concluded by stating that “a new Post-2015 Development Agenda should therefore include not only a universal goal for gender equality and the empowerment and advancement of women and girls, but also ensure that gender and other dominant inequalities are mainstreamed in all relevant areas through disaggregated targets and indicators”.<sup>5</sup>

The UN Task Team Report to the Secretary-General, “Realizing the Future We Want for All,” emphasizes the critical importance of gender equality as both a human right and a core development goal and stresses that discrimination against women and girls impedes progress in all other areas of development. The report states: “the empowerment of women and girls and the protection of their rights should be centre-pieces of the post-2015 development agenda.”<sup>6</sup>

Looking ahead to the post-2015 development framework and the SDGs, a comprehensive approach is needed. To be transformative, this approach should be universal, should address the structural foundations

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<sup>1</sup> United Nations, 2012. ‘The Future We Want’, Rio, Article 31. See: <http://www.uncsd2012.org/content/documents/727The%20Future%20We%20Want%2019%20June%201230pm.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> United Nations, 2012. ‘The Future We Want’, Rio, Article 45.

<sup>3</sup> These areas were: poverty eradication; food security and nutrition and sustainable agriculture; energy; water and sanitation; sustainable cities and human settlements; health and population; promoting full and productive employment, decent work for all and social protection; oceans and seas; small island developing States; disaster-risk reduction; desertification, land degradation and drought; and education.

<sup>4</sup> See <http://www.worldwewant2015.org/node/299198>

<sup>5</sup> See Chairperson's Summary Statement, Leadership Meeting on Addressing Inequalities in the Post-2015 Development Agenda, 19 February 2013, Copenhagen, Denmark. <http://www.worldwewant2015.org/inequalities>

<sup>6</sup> United Nations System Task Team, 2012. ‘Realizing the future we want for all: Report to the Secretary-General’, New York, Paragraph 61. See [http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/pdf/Post\\_2015\\_UNTTreport.pdf](http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/pdf/Post_2015_UNTTreport.pdf)

of gender-based inequality, including in the three dimensions of sustainable development – social, economic and environmental – and should ensure accountability. Through a stand-alone goal, the post-2015 development framework and the SDGs should capture and have targets on the core catalytic factors for achieving gender equality, women’s rights and women’s empowerment. In addition, gender-specific targets should be integrated across other goals in order to ensure meaningful achievement of those goals by addressing the specific areas of gender-based discrimination. These are critical concerns that limit prospects for eliminating poverty, creating sustainable consumption and production patterns, promoting transparent and accountable governance, ensuring access to high quality education and health care, and ensuring sustainable water and energy access while protecting the environment.

## **KEY COMPONENTS OF A TRANSFORMATIVE STAND-ALONE GOAL ON GENDER EQUALITY, WOMEN’S RIGHTS AND WOMEN’S EMPOWERMENT**

UN Women’s proposed stand-alone goal to **achieve gender equality, women’s rights and women’s empowerment** is structured around three target areas. These address core elements of gender equality and women’s empowerment, namely: freedom from violence, gender equality in capabilities and resources, and gender equality in decision-making power and voice in public and private institutions.

These three areas address inter-related dimensions of gender inequality. First, the new framework must address the debilitating fear or experience of violence. Because of the great physical and psychological harm to women and girls, this violence is a violation of their human rights, constrains their ability to fulfil their true potential and carries great economic costs for them and for society. Therefore, a resolve to eliminate violence must be a prerequisite for any future development agenda. Second, the often skewed distribution of capabilities,<sup>7</sup> such as knowledge, good health, and sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights; as well as gender inequality in access to resources and opportunities, such as productive assets, including land, decent work and equal pay constrain women’s empowerment and need to be addressed with renewed urgency. These are the basic foundations for sustainable development and realizing human rights. And third, the low numbers of women in public decision-making from national parliaments to local councils needs to be remedied to ensure that women’s voices feature prominently in democratic institutions and public and private deliberations. The lack of voice in decision-making is found in the key institutions influencing public opinion and promoting accountability, such as the media and civil society. It is also found in private-sector institutions such as in the management and governance of firms, and it has its roots in unequal power relations in the family and community. These three dimensions taken together affect women’s and girls’ safety, economic and social security and choices, and voices in shaping public policy priorities.

Table 1 identifies the three areas of the stand-alone gender goal, and their respective dimensions.

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<sup>7</sup> The capability approach, as developed by Amartya Sen, puts emphasis on people’s substantive freedoms and sees development as a process of enlarging those freedoms. These substantive freedoms include capacities ‘to be and to do’, such as the freedom to be nourished, educated, and healthy, and to live a life that one has reason to value.

**Table 1: Goal: Achieve Gender Equality, Women’s Rights and Women’s Empowerment**

**Target areas**

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**Freedom from violence**

- *Prevent and respond to violence against women and girls*
- *Change perceptions, attitudes and behaviours that condone and justify violence against women*
- *Ensure security, support services and justice for women*

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**Capabilities and resources**

- *Eradicate women’s poverty*
- *Promote decent work for women*
- *Build women’s access to, and control over, productive assets*
- *Reduce women’s time burdens*
- *Promote education and skills for women and girls*
- *Improve women’s and girls’ health*
- *Reduce maternal mortality and ensure women’s sexual and reproductive health, and reproductive rights*
- *Ensure women’s sustainable access to energy*
- *Ensure women’s sustainable access to water and sanitation*

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**Voice, Participation and Leadership**

- *Promote equal decision making in households*
- *Promote participation in public institutions*
- *Promote women’s leadership in the private sector*
- *Strengthen women’s collective action*

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**Illustrative Indicators**

This proposal for a stand-alone goal draws from a list of indicators that have been agreed internationally and therefore enjoy a strong normative and technical basis. The proposed indicators for the three target areas are based on internationally agreed standards, including the minimum set of gender indicators<sup>8</sup> which was developed by the Interagency and Expert Group on Gender Statistics (IAEG-GS) and agreed

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<sup>8</sup> The Minimum set of gender indicators was developed by the IAEG-GS at the request of the UN Statistical Commission. This list of 52 indicators, which was formally endorsed by the UN Statistical Commission in February 2013, covers economic structures, participation in productive activities and access to resources; education; health and related services; public life and decision-making; human rights of women and the girl child. Methodological work is under way to refine this list and a public and readily accessible database will be developed and maintained by the UN Statistics Division, in collaboration with UN Women and other members of the Interagency and Expert Group on Gender Statistics.

by the UN Statistical Commission at its 2013 session (decision 44/109),<sup>9</sup> and the core list of nine violence against women indicators which was developed by the Friends of the Chair of the UN Statistical Commission at the original request of the UN General Assembly and was agreed by the Statistical Commission at the same session.<sup>10</sup> In line with the criteria recommended by the UN Task Team on Lessons Learned from MDGs Monitoring, these indicators were chosen on the basis of their (1) relevance, (2) methodological soundness, (3) measurability and (4) understandability.<sup>11</sup>

In order to establish a strong monitoring framework that is relevant and useful for public policy and accountability the development of targets and indicators should not hinge exclusively on data availability. Rather, a strong framework needs to identify what is important to measure and encourage data collection in those areas, as happened with the MDGs.

Accordingly, UN Women has developed a highly select set of indicators that are disaggregated by sex wherever possible and can potentially be used to monitor each of these target areas. Consistent with a twin-track approach, these indicators are designed to measure progress towards transformative change in gender relations and are useful to monitor a stand-alone goal, and can also be used to monitor the gender considerations in other goals. Table 2 presents a list of illustrative indicators for monitoring purposes:

**Table 2: Illustrative indicators to monitor the stand-alone goal**

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#### **Freedom from violence**

- *Total and age-specific rate of ever-partnered women subjected to sexual and/or physical violence by a current or former intimate partner in the last 12 months, by frequency*
- *Rates of female genital mutilation and other harmful practices*
- *Percentage of people who think it is never justifiable for a man to beat his wife, by sex*
- *Proportion of women over 15 years-old subjected to physical or sexual violence in the past 12 months who reported it to the justice system*
- *Proportion of law enforcement professionals who are women (including judges and police)*

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#### **Capabilities and Resources**

- *Percentage of people earning their own income, by sex*
- *Ownership of dwelling, by sex*
- *Percentage of population undernourished, by sex*
- *Gender gap in wages*
- *Proportion of adult population owning land, by sex*

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<sup>9</sup> United Nations. 2013. Report on the forty-fourth session. Statistical Commission Forty-Fourth session 26 February-1 March 2013.

<sup>10</sup> United Nations. 2011. Report of the Friends of the Chair of the United Nations Statistical Commission on Indicators on Violence against Women: Note by the Secretary-General. Statistical Commission Forty-second session 22-25 February 2011; United Nations. 2013. Report on the forty-fourth session. Statistical Commission Forty-Fourth session 26 February-1 March 2013.

<sup>11</sup> United Nations. 2013. Lessons Learned From MDGs Monitoring From a Statistical Perspective. Report of the Task Team on Lessons Learned From MDGs Monitoring of the IAEG-MDGs.

- *Average weekly number of hours spent on unpaid domestic work, by sex<sup>12</sup>*
- *Transition rate to secondary education, by sex*
- *Share of population aged 15-49 living with HIV/AIDS, by sex*
- *Maternal Mortality Ratio*
- *Available emergency obstetric care facilities per 100,000 population*
- *Age of mother at birth of first child ever born*
- *Unmet need for family planning*
- *Percentage of households using solid cooking fuels, by urban/rural location*
- *Percentage of households with access to electricity, by urban/rural location*
- *Average weekly time spent on firewood collection, by sex*
- *Average weekly time spent in water collection (including waiting time at public supply points), by sex*

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### **Voice, Leadership and Participation**

- *Percentage of women who have a say in household decisions regarding large purchases*
  - *Percentage of people who think important decisions in the household should be made by both men and women, by sex*
  - *Proportion of seats held by women in national parliaments*
  - *Proportion of seats held by women in local governments*
  - *Percentage of the population with basic national identity documentation, by sex*
  - *Birth registration coverage, by sex*
  - *Proportion of women in decision-making roles in relevant organizations involved in preventing conflict*
  - *Percentage of women in managerial positions in firms*
  - *Proportion of media professionals who are women*
  - *Proportion of managers of civil society institutions who are women*
  - *Proportion of women who are members of civil society organizations*
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## **ENABLING FRAMEWORKS AND POLICY PATHWAYS**

The stand-alone goal will draw attention to transformation that is based on meaningful changes in critical areas (such as changes in attitudes to violence against women, increases in men’s contributions to unpaid care work or increases in women’s intra-household bargaining power). For this aspiration to become reality, it should be underpinned by policies that have proven to be the most effective pathways to achieve these outcomes (enabling macro-economic and regulatory environments, removal of discriminatory laws

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<sup>12</sup> According to the International Trial Classification of Time Use Activities (ICATUS) unpaid working time for the household or in household related activities refers to time spent on productive activities that are outside the boundaries of the system of national accounts (not destined for the market). It includes for instance household maintenance activities (such as cooking, ironing etc.) as well as caring for household members, including children, the elderly, the sick and household members with disabilities. The IAEG-GS also recommends that where possible housework and person-to-person care activities should be separated in order to better track the drudgery of women’s unpaid work.

and policies, gender-sensitive social protection, etc.). Many of these policies have been outlined in the international human rights framework and in policy commitments such as the Beijing Platform for Action, as well as in General Assembly, ECOSOC and CSW resolutions and agreed conclusions.

Policy choices have important implications for success in promoting gender equality in all areas of the stand-alone gender goal. It is essential to strengthen and capitalize on well-known enabling conditions and policies to prevent violence against women and girls, expand women's capabilities and build their access to and control of resources, and build women's influence in public and private decision-making. These include:

- Legal and policy frameworks that are aligned with international standards on human rights and provide for women's access to justice and their legal empowerment;
- Human development policies that include universally accessible and affordable education and health care, provision for women's specific sexual and reproductive health needs, and provision of infrastructure for sustainable water and energy supply;
- Economic regulation and employment policies that prevent discrimination against women, reduce the burden of unpaid domestic and care work and enable men to take more of those responsibilities, promote equal pay, prohibit sexual harassment, and promote decent work opportunities for all;
- Macroeconomic policies that promote inclusive, equitable growth and enable the generation of decent work, resource mobilization to fund public investments in infrastructure and services, and reduce exposure to volatilities in global markets;
- Security and justice sector reforms that prevent, respond to and end impunity for violence against women, protect and support victims/survivors, prosecute and punish perpetrators, and provide gender-sensitive remedies;
- Temporary special measures to enable women to compete more effectively for leadership positions in the private sector, public administration, or in representative politics;
- Comprehensive social protection measures that give women (particularly vulnerable or marginalized women such as the elderly, indigenous and minority women, etc.) protection against risks and vulnerabilities; and
- Gender mainstreaming as a strategy for ensuring that gender perspectives are integrated into the design, implementation, and monitoring and evaluation of all policies and programmes, so that women and men benefit equally from the outcomes and that inequalities are not perpetuated.

Effective implementation of measures to achieve this goal requires gender-responsive accountability systems that enable women to hold public authorities answerable for their commitments. Gender-responsive accountability reforms are crucial to ensuring that women and civil society organizations can hold governments to account and that women can shape public policy, prevent abuses of their rights, or demand redress where abuses occur. Key to making accountability systems work for women is the strength of women's collective action, either within women's rights groups or within broader associations such as trade unions. For this, an environment of civic and political freedom is necessary.

Without a clear impetus to allocate adequate resources, the achievement of these outcomes will remain a hollow promise. Therefore resource allocation, including practices such as gender-responsive budgeting, freedom of information arrangements that are made accessible to women to review public decisions and

spending patterns, and judicial reviews equipped to handle public interest cases will also be valuable for effective accountability to women and girls.

Any future development framework, including the SDGs, must be underpinned by clearly laid out means of implementation which are gender-responsive, including financing for development, trade, technology development and transfer, enhanced knowledge sharing, capacity-building, and data collection. Gender perspectives must be central in each of these areas, and women's participation and voice are key in their design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation. This will help ensure that women and men contribute and benefit equally from development outcomes, and that inequalities are addressed.

To summarize, a stand-alone goal on gender equality would target transformation in women's and men's lives in three areas: freedom from violence, gender equality in capabilities and resources, and gender equality in decision-making power and voice in public and private institutions. Measuring some of the less visible aspects of gender-based discrimination and inequality remains challenging, but with investment and commitment, it is not only possible, but necessary. It is necessary to meet our collective responsibility for advancing women's rights. And, in order to meet our commitments to sustainable development, human rights, and peace and security, achieving gender equality is critical.

This note is based on a longer paper prepared by UN Women that provides the evidence base for a transformative goal and a fuller list of indicators, which is available at [www.unwomen.org/focus-areas/post-2015](http://www.unwomen.org/focus-areas/post-2015).

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