

## **Background note on roundtable 6:**

### ***Dialogue on gender equality and the empowerment of women***

***Organizers: United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) and DESA/Division for the Advancement of Women***

***ECOSOC 2005 High Level Segment***

***29 June, 2005***

#### ***Background***

The Millennium Declaration<sup>1</sup>, unanimously endorsed by 191 nations, emphasized the need to “promote gender equality and the empowerment of women as effective ways to combat poverty, hunger and disease and to stimulate development that is truly sustainable”. The forthcoming five-year review of the Millennium Declaration and MDGs provide an opportunity to strengthen global commitments to achieve gender equality and the empowerment of women including fulfilling the obligations of the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), and achieving the goals of the Beijing Platform for Action and Security Council resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security.

At the preparatory meeting for the high-level segment of ECOSOC (16-17 March 2005), an inter-agency group organized a panel focused on Goal 3 of the MDGs and explored aspects of the institutional architecture for gender equality and women’s empowerment at the national level (<http://www.un.org/docs/ecosoc/meetings/16-17March2005.html>).

This roundtable will outline the efforts of institutions at local and community levels to translate the global norms on gender equality and empowerment of women into actions at local level and the opportunities and challenges for strengthening capacity at local level to forward gender equality and the empowerment of women as central to achieving the overall commitments in the Millennium Declaration will be highlighted.

The panel will involve other partners as discussants, including a representative of the UN Economic Commission for Africa and a civil society representative from the hearings on the Millennium Declaration.

#### ***Objectives of the roundtable:***

1. To highlight how gender equality and the empowerment of women are promoted at local and community levels through, for example:
  - a) attention to gender perspectives in local budgets and public policies;
  - b) participation of both men and women in local decision-making

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<sup>1</sup> United Nations General Assembly, *United Nations Millennium Declaration, Resolution 55/2*, (New York: United Nations, September 18, 2000), p. 1.

- c) partnership between local authorities, civil society and private sector for provision and production of local goods and services; and
2. To discuss how to give more prominence to actions at local level in the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of women at the Millennium Summit.

### ***Elements for Discussion***

A growing body of evidence confirms that when greater equality between men and women exists, “economies tend to grow faster, the poor move more quickly out of poverty, and the well-being of men, women, and children is enhanced.”<sup>2</sup> Support to local development provides the opportunity to address directly the inter-related dynamics of inequality and poverty. Gender-sensitive implementation of the key recommendations of the Millennium Project – including those related to women’s employment, education, health, political participation, property and inheritance rights, and ending violence against women – will have a critical impact on the lives of women and their families at the local level

The panel will offer concrete experiences and insights into the translation of global and national norms, standards, and debates to the local level. For example, the 10-year review of the Beijing Platform for Action highlighted how women's entry into local politics often challenges social stigmas regarding their ability to exercise power and brings more attention to the immediate needs of the community such as education, water and sanitation issues. This panel will offer concrete experiences that demonstrate how this type of progress is achieved.

Concretely, the panel will highlight how national machineries for women in Central America are joining together to bring a gender equality perspective to economic policies related to regional trading agreements. It will offer practical lessons in securing community commitment to gender equality initiatives in response to findings of local-level gender responsive budgeting in Africa. And it will detail achievements and challenges in using positive action to increase women’s political participation at the local level in South Asia.

### ***Guiding questions:***

How can global and regional level commitments to gender equality be translated into meaningful change at local level? How can decision-makers at national level ensure that policies and programmes maximize opportunities to promote gender equality at the local level? What kinds of institutions and partnerships have proven effective to furthering gender equality at the local level? What experiences of ‘localizing’ the MDGs have strengthened community-based initiatives in support of gender equality?

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<sup>2</sup> The World Bank, *Integrating Gender into the World Bank’s Work: a Strategy for Action* (Washington, D.C.: The World Bank, January 2002), p. 1.