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High-level Symposium

Impact of Development Cooperation in advancing gender equality and women's empowerment in the MDGs

It is widely recognized that gender equality and women's empowerment are goals in their own right and central to the achievement of all of the MDGs. However, and despite nearly 10 years of experience with gender-responsive budgeting and even longer experience with gender equality markers for development assistance, the level of investment in gender equality and women's empowerment remains difficult to track, especially at country level. Where tracking has been done, the results are not encouraging. Analysis of post-conflict needs assessments (PCNAs) shows that while there has been an improvement in the analysis related to gender inequality, the budget allocations rarely match up. For example, out of a total of US\$77 billion analysed for PCNA processes, only about 16 per cent of funds were associated with targets and indicators specifically addressing women's needs and fewer than 8 per cent of actual budgets were tagged for women's empowerment.

There is growing agreement that tracking financing for gender equality and women's empowerment initiatives is essential, particularly so that it is possible to link results and how they are achieved to the investments that are made. This is virtually impossible when gender equality is relegated to a cross-cutting issue that is mainstreamed across all other sectors and rendered – for all intents and purposes – invisible.

The recognition that development results are the ultimate measure of aid effectiveness was one of the principal outcomes of the 3rd High Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness at Accra. The Accra Agenda for Action (AAA) states that gender equality, human rights and environmental sustainability are the cornerstones of development effectiveness, which also depends on strengthening national ownership and open and inclusive dialogue. It pledges that developing countries and donors will ensure that development policies and programmes are designed and implemented in ways consistent with agreed international commitments on these goals, which means that commitments to the Beijing Platform for Action, the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, and many others need to be accounted for. And it commits donors to support capacity building of all stakeholders, enabling civil society, parliaments, central and local governments and the private sector to engage effectively in development policy dialogue.

Drawing on these commitments, gender equality and women's rights advocates have worked closely with governments to broaden consultations on national development strategies, pressing

for the inclusion of gender equality priorities throughout the planning, programming and budgeting process as well as in tracking and monitoring results. They have criticized an approach to measuring effectiveness of aid exclusively in terms of its efficient management, while failing to address ongoing issues of predictability and conditionalities. They have also effectively linked the assessment of aid effectiveness into the Financing for Development agenda, including in the High-level Conference on the Financial and Economic Crisis in 2009.

Against this background, and as we approach the 2010 MDG Summit, the 2010 Development Cooperation Forum offers an opportunity to affirm the importance of financing gender equality, taking place as it does in tandem with the ECOSOC Annual Ministerial Review focused on gender equality.

Increasing coherence between policy and budget commitments Progress against commitments to gender equality over the past 15 years has been uneven and, in many cases, disappointing. There has been good, albeit inadequate, progress in improving the normative environment for gender equality, with new national constitutions, laws, policies and strategies identifying national priorities for moving international commitments forward. Yet, the mechanisms, capacities and budgets needed to implement global or national commitments have yet to be put in place. For instance, there are at least 100 countries that have national action plans for gender equality or women's advancement and only a handful of these have costing or budgets attached to them. Failure to provide the resources required to implement these national commitments are an indication of inadequate accountability.

In the run up to the MDG Summit, with only five years to go until 2015, there have been numerous initiatives to identify what works to advance progress on the MDGs. While many factors – from political will to local capacity and governance – influence MDG achievement, there is sufficient evidence of what works to support a much higher degree of investment in strategies that can be scaled up to accelerate progress. This is true for investments in MDG 3 as well as for the gender dimensions of other MDGs.

Recently, 13 UN organizations collaborated on a background assessment of MDG3 for the UN Development Group (UNDG) and identified key actions that donors and governments can support to accelerate progress on gender equality over the next five years. The recommendations recognize that the gender equality targets and indicators included in the MDGs are far too limited and do not take into account the gender-differentiated impacts of the food, fuel, climate and financial crises and the need to re-examine macroeconomic models to generate employment led growth and ensure universal social protection. Notwithstanding these gaps, however, and in recognition that removing gender discrimination in all areas and sectors is a pre-requisite for making progress on the MDGs, the UNDG paper highlights the following actions based on evidence that shows how these strategies have produced positive results in other countries.

1. Remove barriers to girls' education, providing scholarships and cash transfers and eliminating user fees; tackling violence against girls in school; and scaling up investments in girls' enrolment in secondary school.
2. Introduce positive action to improve the numbers and influence of women in decision-making, investing in women's leadership in local decision-making bodies and creating an even playing field for men and women within political parties.

3. Prioritize the creation of full, productive and decent work, extending labour rights and legal protection to informal workers and adopting a universal social protection floor.
4. Invest in sexual and reproductive health by supporting community health approaches to reduce maternal mortality and measures to enable HIV positive women to participate fully in shaping policy to address the pandemic.
5. Strengthen accountability for advancing women's rights in access to land and property and implementing laws to end violence against women.

The paper also listed three cross-cutting actions that are essential to progress on all of the MDGs:

1. Reduce women's work burden through investments in infrastructure, labour saving technologies and gender-responsive economic recovery measures.
2. Generate, analyse and use sex-disaggregated data and statistics, including on agricultural work, women's time use, and their investment in unpaid care work;
3. Scale up and account for investments in gender equality, including by institutionalizing gender-responsive budgeting as a part of public financial management reforms to ensure that budgets are commensurate with policy commitments to gender equality.ⁱ

Filling the data gaps needed for inclusive development

In terms of the data needed to improve gender equality programming, the Millennium Task Force on MDG3 identified a minimum list that all countries should have. Endorsed by the Interagency and Expert Group on MDG Statistics, they are currently recommended and drawn upon by countries doing national MDG reporting. These include the ratio of female to male completion rates in primary, secondary and tertiary education; proportion of demand for contraception satisfied; adolescent fertility rate; hours per day (or year) women and men spend fetching water and collecting fuel; land ownership by sex; housing title, disaggregated by male, female or jointly held; share of informal employment, both waged and self-employed, by sex in non-agricultural employment; gender gaps in earnings in paid and self-employment; percentage of women elected to local government bodies; proportion of women, 15-49 years old, who have ever experienced physical violence by an intimate partner.

Lack of sex disaggregated data is an ongoing problem, making it difficult to develop and implement equitable development strategies. It has been hard to get precise data on all gender-related issues, from education and literacy to violence against women and girls. Following the recommendations of the Inter-agency Group on Gender Statistics, a global survey of national statistical offices conducted by the UN Statistical Division (UNSD) found that out of the 120 countries that provided information, 82 of these reported activities related to producing and compiling gender statistics, incorporating gender issues into data collection and reporting, and engaging with policymakers to better define and use the necessary information.

New standards have been endorsed at the international level to better measure women's work and contribution to the economy, through the inclusion of unpaid work for own consumption in what is to be considered "economic", treating all goods produced by households the same way as goods produced for the market and forming part of total national production. Implementation of this framework requires stepped up investment in gender statistics programmes in all countries.

Although major initiatives are underway to accelerate progress towards the MDGs, including strengthening national statistical systems, none fully address the need to include a gender perspective. In spite of all the evidence that links women's empowerment and gender equality to poverty eradication and the achievement of the MDGs, gender remains a marginal component of strategies and plans; more than 30 years after the 1st World Conference on Women, which called for improved data on women and men, neither national nor global data available make it possible to monitor the basic aspects of development related to gender and to inform policies with statistics and indicators that fully reflect gender differences in economic and social life.ⁱⁱ

A capacity building agenda for equitable and inclusive national development

Another major challenge is to strengthen capacity among all stakeholders to engage in nationally owned and inclusive development planning and implementation. Although national development plans occasionally make reference to national gender equality plans, the linkages tend to be weak. This reflects a lack of capacity of gender equality advocates to effectively engage in aid delivery modalities on the one hand, and a lack of capacity of finance and planning officials to effectively integrate gender equality priorities into policy formulation on the other.

Capacity building to advance these goals goes beyond training on how to mainstream gender equality into finance and planning ministries. It implies a comprehensive process through which abilities to formulate objectives, perform functions, and achieve goals are obtained, strengthened, adapted, and maintained. It should also be seen as part of a governance practice that enables the promotion of gender equality. Even when capacities are developed, governance structures should provide the incentives to ensure that capacity translates into performance, which in turn should advance gender equality and greater development effectiveness. Thus the ability to apply gender analysis needs to be made a core competence in policymaking bodies in order to move gender equality to the forefront of development interventions.

Capacity for ***gender-responsive budgeting***, mandated in the Doha Declaration on Financing for Development, can be undertaken at various levels of government, ranging from ministries of finance to local authorities. Budgeting essentially links government goals and policy commitments with budget decisions needed to allocate resources to achieve them. Thus gender responsive budgeting entails developing public sector and civil society competencies and organizational capacity to bring about the needed gender responsive changes in government policies, plans, programmes, budgets and monitoring systems. There are a range of skills and organizational capacities that are required inside and outside government to ensure that gender gaps are adequately addressed throughout government development actions. More than 70 countries have had some experience with gender-responsive budgeting at national or local levels, but only a handful have institutionalized the practice within finance and sectoral ministries.

Capacity building ***for monitoring and evaluation*** includes monitoring implementation, measuring desired results, and capturing lessons to feed back into policymaking. Without such monitoring, planners and policymakers will not receive the feedback needed to ensure that programmes are achieving desired results. To monitor and evaluate progress on gender equality, indicators are needed against which to measure progress towards objectives identified in national development strategies. As part of the Accra process, women's rights advocates, supported by EC-UN partnership for gender equality developed a set of indicators against which to monitor implementation of development plans and assess the impact of programme based approaches on

gender equality goals. These have assisted women's organizations in monitoring and shadow reporting on the implementation of the Paris Declaration at the country level, enabling them to provide evidence on the impact of these principles on gender equality during the final review of the Paris Declaration in 2011.ⁱⁱⁱ

The integration of gender into national planning, budgeting, and monitoring and evaluation systems and instruments can enhance the effectiveness of aid that goes to general budget support (GBS) and sector budget support (SBS). Clearly, the more responsive national planning, budgeting, and monitoring and evaluation instruments are to gender equality and women's rights, the more aid can contribute to the implementation of gender equality objectives.

Tracking and evaluating aid to gender equality outcomes

The issue of aid quality goes to the heart of the problems regarding data— gaps in its collection, disaggregation and analysis, and more fundamentally, gaps in indicators against which to collect it and criteria against which to select the best indicators to measure impact.

A review of the OECD DAC gender marker illustrates some of these problems. Although reporting has improved-- a higher percentage of total ODA is being screened against the marker - and more money (in absolute terms) is being allocated to gender equality and women's empowerment, as a percentage of total ODA, the share that is marked for gender equality, either as a principal or significant objective has not changed since 2005 (33%).^{iv} Analysis shows that far less is allocated to economic and infrastructure sectors than to health and education.

Under the new aid modalities, new funding mechanisms are also likely to be created and existing mechanisms, such as multi-donor funds may be used more frequently. A gender analysis of the 2008 round of proposals awarded by the Global Fund for HIV/AIDS indicates some of the problems in targeting gender inequalities as well as tracking gender impact. For example, while about 20 percent of the proposals were designed to change or redress gender inequalities, about 80 percent were targeted to objectives that 'did not reinforce existing gender inequalities'. That is, fully 100 percent took gender into account. Yet according to the report, only 28 percent of the proposals stated that data disaggregated by sex would be collected.

Learning from promising examples is important for strengthening accountability for gender equality in efforts to track and evaluate aid. In Kyrgyzstan, women's rights advocates succeeded in integrating the National Action Plan for Achievement of Gender Equality in the key development results of the Country Development Strategy, with corresponding cost estimates and indicators for measuring progress. In Kenya, Cameroon, Suriname, Zimbabwe and Indonesia, donors have joined together to create a multi-donor "basket fund" to support different aspects of gender equality^v.

As the aid effectiveness agenda moves forward, it is important to note that development results, including progress on gender equality, also depend on a coherent policy environment, both nationally and globally. Development assistance, to be effective, cannot be detached from the larger context of the international financial system and global trade. Gender equality and

sustainable development require policies that address the root causes as well as the symptoms of poverty, inequality, marginalization and injustice, which requires strengthened global governance structures at all levels, including trade, financial markets, foreign direct investment and debt. It also requires that gender equality priorities are made explicit in every sector, rather than relegated to cross cutting issue or dependent on mainstreaming efforts, which can end up making gender equality invisible.

The DCF 2010 will be an important venue for a wide variety of actors to have an in depth discussion on all of these issues.

The following questions may be examined:

1. What are the most critical issues which need to be urgently addressed to achieve MDG3 and the gender specific aspects of each of the MDGs? Where has aid helped and where should it now be focused? How can the impact of development assistance on gender equality and women's empowerment be tracked more effectively?
2. What improvements in data and statistics are most urgently needed to strengthen the capacity of policy makers in ensuring that gender equality and women's empowerment policies and programmes are appropriately designed and targeted? What 'good practice' examples can be built on in the collection, compilation, analysis, dissemination and use of data disaggregated by sex and age? What are effective principles to assess performance and monitor progress in gender equality at national level? What are major challenges in this regard, and how can they be addressed?
3. What is needed to develop capacity for developing and implementing more gender-responsive aid strategies and management practices? For example, how can gender equality considerations be institutionalized when setting up new aid delivery mechanisms?

ⁱ UNDG, "Thematic paper on MDG3: Promote gender equality and empower women", March 2010; see www.undg.org.

ⁱⁱ Francesca Perucci, "Engendering development statistics: An opportunity to remedy past neglect", December 2007 (ESA/STAT/AC.140/2/1)

ⁱⁱⁱ EC/UN Partnership on Gender Equality for Development and Peace; available at www.gendermatters.eu

^{iv} In 2007-2008, the most recent period for which data are available, total bilateral ODA was USD 71.6 billion, of which USD 45.7 billion was screened against the Marker, roughly 64%. In 2006-2007, total ODA was USD 59.2 billion of which only 52% was screened against the Marker.

^v UNIFEM, Progress of the World's Women 2008/09: Who Answers to Women: Gender and Accountability.