



BACKGROUND NOTE

PATHWAYS TO PARTNERSHIPS

Gender inequality deprives countries of a critical resource in the struggle to end poverty and attain stability. Women and girls continuously lack the same access as men to education, health care, food, jobs, property and decision-making powers in the political, social, and business sectors. Economists confirm that women's empowerment is a central engine for development – if they cannot participate, the targets that governments and the United Nations set will continue to go unmet. The Nobel Prize winning economist, Professor Amartya Sen, speaks of more than 100 million “missing women” in developing countries who die of cumulative neglect because they are continually treated differently than men, especially in health care, medical attention and access to food and social services. Other studies speak of 60 – 101 million missing women on the basis of ratios of women to men. Every year, at least another 2 million girls die worldwide because of inequality and neglect. Moreover, women and girls become victims of gender-based violence, which entails severe physical and mental health implications and, consequently, enormous social and economic costs. The current economic and financial crises deepen gender inequality, as economic recession affects women and men, girls and boys differently.

There are mechanisms in place to support women's economic and social empowerment and innovative programmes are producing remarkable results. The last 20 years have also seen unprecedented progress in the political attention paid to violence against women and girls, as well as in the number and scope of laws and policies to prevent and respond to gender-based violence. First results are encouraging but still apply only to a small number of places. The effort is woefully under-resourced, much more needs to be done to implement laws and commitments, and all actors have to work closely together.

PARTNERSHIPS

As the complexity of economic and social issues affecting local and global communities continues to escalate, it has become increasingly clear that no single actor in the philanthropic realm can hope to match the impact of funders and humanitarian organizations working together. Each change agent has unique skills and resources to bring to bear on today's most difficult challenges. Non-profit organizations and other independent players have the on-the-ground knowledge, theories of change and the local manpower to ensure that the right services are delivered with integrity. Private foundations bring subject matter expertise and funding. Community members add a nuanced understanding of the cultural strengths that can be harnessed to turn challenges into opportunities. In addition to funding, corporations bring expertise in marketing, logistics, research and development and project management. The United Nations provides unparalleled access to leaders and policy makers and, most importantly, the ability to unite and coordinate those seeking to make a difference. By fitting these pieces together, the result is much more than the sum of the individual parts.

Over the past decade, public-private sector partnerships have become a creative and sophisticated mechanism for addressing priority challenges and to leverage the skills and resources of the private sector and civil society toward the goals of the United Nations. Through the work of the United Nations Office for Partnerships (UNOP) that provides strategic advice on partnerships between the private sector and the United Nations system, the Organization has increasingly engaged the private sector and civil society as a partner in helping to achieve its goals, in particular, the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Specialized agencies, funds and programmes of the United Nations system,

such as the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), have established partnerships to integrate the private sector's perspective, its networks and expertise in their work, in order to effectively implement the international development policies and make change happen, where it is most needed.

SPECIAL EVENT

For the third time, the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations (ECOSOC) is convening a special event in New York to strengthen partnerships of the United Nations and its agencies, funds and programmes with the business and philanthropic communities. This event is co-organized by the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA), UNOP and UNIFEM, in collaboration with the Committee Encouraging Corporate Philanthropy (CECP). Experts, public figures and corporate and non-corporate foundations are being invited to discuss possible partnerships in support of the international development agenda. The main focus of this year's event will be on ending violence against women and girls and promoting women's economic empowerment. These two issue areas have been chosen in consultation with the United Nations experts, as well as cooperating partner organizations. Events, such as this special event, activate and actualize the potential of all possible actors. Those seeking to engage in the process of making a difference are strongly encouraged to lend this unique ability by engaging in this collaborative conversation.

EXPECTED OUTCOME

The key outcome of the special event will be to provide increased focus of the philanthropic as well as international communities on issues central to the achievement of gender equality and women's empowerment. To succeed, it is essential to broaden the range of stakeholders involved in the work of the United Nations in this field. Awareness among the philanthropic community should be increased on the progress that has already been made and outline the challenges that countries face in achieving, in particular MDG 3. It is hoped that concrete initiatives by the philanthropic community and the creation of new partnerships between United Nations entities, Member States and the philanthropic organizations would accelerate progress in reaching the targets. One initial step could be to expand multi-stakeholder engagement in the Secretary-General's Campaign UNiTE to End Violence Against Women.

THE ORGANIZERS

DESA serves as the secretariat of ECOSOC and supports its deliberations and consensus-building of Member States. This demands high-level engagement on many global development issues and consultations with international financial institutions, the private sector and civil society. DESA operates within a framework of internationally agreed upon goals known as the United Nations Development Agenda: a shared vision of human progress rooted in the values of freedom, equality, solidarity, tolerance, respect for nature and mutual responsibility. DESA plays a central role in monitoring and implementing global commitments to economic and social progress, including the MDGs. It oversees the global statistical system and produces authoritative population estimates and projections that



are used worldwide. DESA also manages the Development Account, a fund established by the General Assembly to help countries meet their development challenges.

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UNOP serves as a gateway for public-private partnerships with the United Nations system. It aims to help the underprivileged by harnessing the interest, competencies and resources across sectors. Working with leaders in business and civil society, UNOP provides a platform for strategic policy dialogue and engages financial, technical, and management expertise to achieve the MDGs. It provides partnership advisory services and outreach to a variety of entities, including academic institutions, companies, foundations, government agencies and civil society organizations. It oversees the United Nations Fund for International Partnerships (UNFIP) and manages the United Nations Democracy Fund (UNDEF), which promotes democratization throughout the world, supporting democratic institutions, promoting human rights, and ensuring the participation of all groups in democratic processes.

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UNIFEM is the women's fund at the United Nations dedicated to advancing women's rights and achieving gender equality. It provides financial and technical assistance to innovative programmes and strategies that foster women's empowerment. UNIFEM works on the premise that it is the fundamental right of every woman to live a life free from discrimination and violence, and that gender equality is essential to achieving development and to building just societies. Established in 1976, UNIFEM has touched the lives of women and girls around the world. It maintains strong ties to both women's organizations and governments, linking them with the United Nations system to join national and international political action, and to create momentum for change.

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CECP is the only international forum of business CEOs and chairpersons focused exclusively on corporate philanthropy. CECP's mission is to lead the business community in raising the level and quality of corporate philanthropy. It offers members essential resources, including a proprietary online benchmarking tool, networking programmes, research, and opportunities for best-practice sharing. Through innovative programmes like those aimed at eradicating diseases or raising childhood literacy rates, companies can also improve employee retention and heighten brand recognition. CECP is intently focused on three guiding principles: representing the CEO voice incorporate philanthropy, encouraging business discipline in the field, and setting the standards for effective philanthropy practice and measurement.

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