



2010 UNDP/UNDESA E-discussion on Women and Poverty

Launch Message: Part II

[Facilitator's note: Please find below the launching message for the second phase of the E-discussion on Women and Poverty for the 15-Year Review of the Implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action and ECOSOC 2010 Annual Ministerial Review on Gender Equality and Advancement of Women. This E-discussion is cross posted on gender-net, mdg-net and pr-net. The discussion will be held till February 12, 2010.]

Hello Everyone!

This is your moderator, Mark Blackden. If I had spent a little less time breaking bones (mine), and more on the e-discussion, you would have heard from me already last week.

I have now read all your postings with great interest. Though I may not yet have counted everyone, we've had around 70 responses (excluding repeat postings) from around 30 countries.

Summary of First Phase

We've had an interesting first phase of the e-discussion. Though it's impossible to summarize or do justice to all your contributions, let me suggest a few key points that have emerged, and that we need to take further. First, I'm struck by how many topics have been covered. Even loosely grouped, we're tackling more than 20 issues, ranging from patriarchy, neo-liberalism and male bias, through legal rights, culture, corruption, and care issues, to specific issues relating to health, education, HIV, jobs, gender-based violence, and land rights, not to mention poverty diagnostics, data limitations, and the need for a "new methodology" to capture gender and poverty. In many respects, this is a strength, and reflects the multi-dimensional nature of poverty, and the important ways in which gender concerns need to inform the poverty debate. In other respects, however, this is a limitation, in that we're often trying to cover many of these topics at the same time, sometimes in the same posting. This means that it can be difficult for us to focus on a particular problem, and deal with it in a meaningful way. I recognize that in moderating the discussion, I may have contributed to this by asking too many questions at once.

Second, in seeking to understand gender dimensions of poverty, we have had important reminders not to neglect women with disabilities, to recognize that women's work, for the most part, remains "under-counted or uncounted," and that we must avoid the pitfalls of poverty analysis based on household headship. We've been reminded that, while lack of sex-disaggregated data can be a serious problem for poverty analysis, we should not let the unavailability of data impede action. We've been told to focus on women's control over resources, and transforming gender relations, indeed that women's property ownership is transformative, with one participant suggesting that when women own property, they would "grow wings" and thereby escape from the control of their husbands. We need to come back to the idea of transforming gender relations later in the discussion.

Third, we're getting some good case studies of what people are doing--micro-finance in Jordan, conditional cash transfers in Latin America and in Egypt, where we have begun a useful set of exchanges

on this, work on land rights in Nepal, empowerment through micro-finance linked with HIV/AIDS prevention in South Africa. We've begun to collect some interesting ideas for what to do, including focusing more on training and enabling people to generate and use relevant sex-disaggregated data. We need to keep these ideas coming, but we'll focus on the action agenda in the last segment of our e-discussion, where we will get to what we can do about the poverty problems we have identified.

Launch of Second Phase

So what's next? We're going to move to the second phase of our e-discussion, in which we want to address specific institutional responses to poverty. We want to build on the conversation we have started on conditional cash transfers, by looking at social security and social assistance programs, as one important mechanism for tackling poverty, as several of your postings have already suggested in the first phase.

We know from ILO and other data that very few people benefit from adequate social security, while half of the world's population lives without any social security protection. Social protection is provided through various instruments such as cash transfers, pensions, child care, social services, and various subsidies.

Here are the set of question for this week:

What kind of social assistance/benefits and protection programs (such as cash transfers or other social benefits) are provided by your government?

In answering this question, please provide concrete information on the objectives of these programs and, where possible, the extent to which these target or reach poor women.

How have the recent economic crisis affected the provision of these programmes and what changes have occurred that might affect their sustainability.

To what extent have these programmes helped to transform gender relations.

This is a big topic. In the interest of not asking too many questions, let's start and address the first question for the next 2 or 3 days, and then explore other aspects of the social security issue outlined in question two and three. We would ask you keep your answers focused.

Keep the messages and good ideas coming.

Best,

Mark Blackden

