

## **Presentation to Informal Session of United Nations General Assembly in preparation for 2010 MDG Summit**

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**April 13, 2010**

Thank you for the invitation to contribute to your thinking about how we can accelerate progress toward the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals.

I have been asked to focus my remarks on MDG 1 – Eradicating extreme poverty and hunger.

In doing so, it is important that we recognize that the face of global poverty is that of a rural woman and her family. It is an obscene irony that rural women, those who produce 70 per cent of the world's food, are those most likely to be poor; most likely to go hungry. And yet that is the cruel reality that confronts us.

The good news is that as intractable as the barriers are to achieving the MDGs, we have lots of evidence of what works because we've seen it in most of the countries represented here today.

The first lesson learned is that there is no magic bullet or single solution that will provide sustainable results. Rather there is a series of inter-related and mutually reinforcing actions that are necessary to change the underlying power dynamics that create and perpetuate poverty. Substantive progress on any one MDG will be assisted or retarded by progress on the others.

This reality was well understood by the drafters of the MDGs and we are very pleased to see the Secretary-General reaffirm the "imperative of a holistic approach" to the MDGs in his draft report "Keeping the Promise".

Significant resources and great political will are required in the coming five years to close the gap and meet our goals. But as we have seen in the past two years, the rich economies of the world can generate huge resources when needed to protect the stability and prosperity of their own economies.

As we look to the G8 and G20 Summits to take place in Canada in June and as we look to the MDG Summit set for September, we expect no less level of ambition in addressing the growing poverty and hunger of the majority world.

The confluence of the global financial, food, fuel, climate and care crises has eroded progress toward the MDGs, plunging tens of millions more into deep poverty and hunger. In the face of these reversals, it is essential that we not panic and take shortcuts that will leave poor rural women and their families out of the solution.

So what's working?

Experience shows us we need effective states and active citizens. I am reminded to the observation of Amartya Sen that there has never been famine in a country in which democracy thrives.

We need to build on assets and local capacities.

We need full, active participation of women as leaders and agents for change.

We need large scale investment in the basic building blocks of prosperity and equality: health, education, water and sanitation.

We need long-term, predictable funding in support of strong public institutions.

To assure this, we need to mobilize domestic resources – ensuring fair taxes and royalties are being paid and quality services are being delivered – as well as increased, accountable aid flows. In this respect, the findings of the OECD on aid flows from donor countries, released today, are sobering and speak to the scale of the challenge in meeting our promise to the world's poorest.

We need to significantly increase investment in agricultural production, with the emphasis on small scale production for local consumption, recognizing that in most countries this is women's work.

**In Malawi** in 2002, years of neglect of the agricultural sector led to millions coming close to starvation, dependent on expensive imported food.

- In recent years the Malawian Government has intervened to invest in farmers' livelihoods and to put food within the reach of the poorest again.
- They have distributed 3 million coupons enabling farmers to buy cheap fertilizer – at a quarter the market value.
- Experts calculate that harvests have been 20 per cent greater than they would have been without this subsidy.
- Poor households reporting a major shock from high food prices fell from 79 per cent in 2004 to 20 per cent in 2007.

**In Vietnam** the government has reduced levels of poverty and hunger through equitable land redistribution to smallholders and support for their farming, increasing incomes and improving access to food to around three-quarters of the population.

**In Cuba**, support for organic, labour-intensive agriculture has resulted in a significant increase in healthy, accessible and sustainably produced food in rural communities, creating important opportunities for decent work for women and men.

**Ghana** is the only sub-Saharan country to have met the MDG of halving hunger by 2015. The number of hungry people has decreased from 5.4 million in 1990 to 1.9 million in 2005 and we hope it has continued to fall.

- The government has achieved this by placing food security at the centre of development policy, giving incentives to smallholders. As well as making progress on hunger, these interventions have increased the contribution of agriculture to overall GDP to 34 per cent.
- In addition, Ghana's school feeding program has helped reduce malnutrition among children, aiming for 100 per cent coverage this year.
- This investment helped protect Ghana from the worst impacts of the 2008 food price increases, but the government has pledged to further decrease dependency on rice imports, announcing a new package of support to farmers to achieve a boost in rice and maize production by 23 and 46 per cent respectively.

These are the kinds of interventions governments must make to scale up food production, increase resilience and improve incomes in rural areas. But they must combine investments in rural women and small-scale farmers with social protection packages – addressing the needs of the most poor but also recognizing the value and importance of reproductive work and the reality that not everyone will be able to support themselves and those for whom they care through paid labour or their own production.

- **Brazil's** 'Fome Zero' (Zero Hunger) program launched an impressive package of policies to address hunger – including cash transfers, food banks, community kitchens, school meals prepared with locally produced food and village markets.
- 'Fome Zero' has reached over 44 million hungry Brazilians, helping to reduce child malnutrition by 73 per cent.
- **In Mexico** cash transfers to poor rural families through the PROGRESA program are tied to participation in health and nutritional programs and the attendance at school. The program has lifted millions of families from extreme poverty and provided an essential safety net to the poorest.

Other necessary measures to reduce rural poverty include:

- removing legal barriers to women's ownership of land and supporting fair and equal access to credit and other assets;
- recognizing that subsidies and given preference to local production are not barriers to economic development but rather may be requisites;
- providing real options for rural families, recognizing the importance to the planet that we make rural life sustainable and stem the tide of migration to ever fewer cities.

When we look at poverty, we recognize that poverty relates directly to power and the ability to fully exercise our human rights. And when we look at poverty among rural women, there are many different facets of that poverty. Not only are rural women most likely to earn little and eat last and last, they are also likely to suffer from a poverty of opportunities, a poverty of access to services, a poverty of time, a poverty of power.

For that reason, investments in clean water and sanitation are fundamental to the economic prospects of women and girls, having a direct impact on how many hours they work, how many years of schooling they attain, how likely they are to be victims of violence.

For many rural women in Africa, their greatest poverty is a poverty of time and the hours spent walking an ever greater distance to find and fetch water in a climate-changing world is a great drain on their economic and social prospects.

We have seen the tremendous benefit of investments in health care for women as mothers, patients, health care workers and as those with whom the responsibility for care rests in the absence of robust health care systems. Making health care free saves lives.

- In 2006, in **Zambia**, health care was made free to all in rural areas. Today 200,000 people in Zambia living with HIV are receiving lifesaving antiretroviral treatment (ART) – more than 60 times the number being treated in 2003.
- In 2006, when the government of **Burundi** announced free health care for maternal deliveries and children under five, births in hospitals rose by 61 per cent.
- **Nepal** has abolished user fees to ensure universal, free health services. In just five years the under-five mortality rate has been reduced by around a third and since 1996 maternal mortality rate has fallen by 50 per cent. In the past year an extra 60,000 women were able to give birth in health facilities
- We need governments North and South to ensure financing and political support for free public services that save and change lives, as well as sufficient political will to ensure that policy change means change for the poorest people in towns and villages. This includes ensuring that the maternal health initiative promised for this year's G8 puts reproductive rights and health at its centre.

Similarly we see the benefits of investment in education, especially for women and girls.

- Combining direct budget support with domestic resources, the government of **Mali** has been able to increase its spending on education in relation to GNP by more than a third since 1999 and recruit more than 20,000 new teachers.
- As a result the number of children going to primary school has risen 34 per cent since 2001; more than half of children of primary age now attend school and more children are staying until the final year of primary school and completing their education.
- Mali could meet the international target of getting all children (girls and boys equally) into primary school if the government and donors continue their commitment and increase their funding.
- **In Mozambique**, the government more than doubled its public expenditure on education, increasing it by 56 per cent (as a percentage of GDP) between 1999 and 2004.

In advancing all of these initiatives, it is critical that governments be held to account for achieving gender parity and gender justice. This is essential if we are to address the poverty of opportunity faced by most women and girls.

- In two-thirds of 187 countries with data, gender parity has been achieved at the primary level and the number of children out-of-school fell from 105 million to 72 million in 2007.
- In **Burkina Faso**, increased budget support has contributed to increased expenditure on education, and monitoring the gender impact of this finance is essential to ensuring it is realizing its full potential. The Centre for Budget Information, Training and Research (CIFOEB) has been working with the Coordinating Group for Basic Education (CCEB) and Special Alert (ASAB) to monitor education budgets, evaluate the impact of education spending, and train communities in gender sensitive budget-tracking. Donors and national civil society need to work together to ensure these domestic accountability mechanisms are supported.

Involving women in setting development priorities is critical to success. Women and women's interests are often under-represented politically, even though they make up half or more of the population and most of the world's poor. Women are also most likely to make the best decisions for the welfare of households—especially decisions regarding nutrition, health, and schooling.

For ownership to advance development, governments must be accountable to their citizens. Yet in many countries, there is little or no government accountability to women. This is an important issue from a donor perspective, since the goal of development is to reach those living in poverty. Unless a government is accountable to both its female and male citizens, it will reinforce the disenfranchisement of large segments of the population.

As we look to the future, a new context and a new decade demands a new style of leadership. We are in challenging and difficult times, but one of great opportunity.

We continue to see advances where countries commit to pursue comprehensive, coherent, holistic approaches that seek progress on all of the indicators.

Where it is recognized that citizens have the right to attain the MDGs and governments have the obligation to create the conditions in which citizens can fully exercise these rights.

Where we see the active participation of citizens and civil society, including women and women's movements, in identifying priorities, confirming strategies and implementing and adjusting programs as we move forward.

Progress has been made and the UN Summit must see governments – rich and poor – championing examples of what works, and detailing how they will scale up such interventions and accelerate progress towards success by 2015.

Peoples' confidence in the governments of the world will be built by solid progress, learning lessons from the past.

The evidence is clear. We can do it. And I encourage you to work together to ensure we do.