

**Women's Empowerment**

**Gender Equality**

AND THE  
**Millennium Development Goals**

*A WEDO  
Information and  
Action Guide*



WOMEN'S ENVIRONMENT & DEVELOPMENT ORGANIZATION

## WHAT IS THE UNITED NATIONS MILLENNIUM DECLARATION?

The UN Millennium Declaration was agreed by 191 governments at the September 2000 UN Millennium Summit, where 147 heads of government turned out for the largest-ever gathering of world leaders. The Declaration is packed with positive language about peoples needs for the new millennium and about women's centrality in development processes. In it governments commit "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 Declaration also addresses "the equal rights and opportunities of women and men" and pledges "to combat all forms of violence against women and to implement the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women" (CEDAW). [www.un.org/millennium/declaration/ares552e.htm](http://www.un.org/millennium/declaration/ares552e.htm)

## WHAT ARE THE UNITED NATIONS MILLENNIUM DEVELOPMENT GOALS?

The UN Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), issued by the UN Secretary General in 2001, are a "road map" for implementing the Millennium Declaration. The MDGs comprise eight goals supplemented by 18 numerical and time-bound targets and 48 indicators intended to improve living conditions and remedy key global imbalances by 2015. Goal 3 calls for gender equality and women's empowerment. In addition the MDGs address several of the 12 Critical Areas of Concern in the Platform for Action adopted at the 1995 Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing, namely poverty (1), education (2), health (5) and environmental sustainability (7). [www.un.org/millenniumgoals](http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals)

# The MDGs at a Glance

- 1 | Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger
- 2 | Achieve universal primary education
- 3 | Promote gender equality and women's empowerment
- 4 | Reduce child mortality
- 5 | Improve maternal health
- 6 | Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases
- 7 | Ensure environmental sustainability
- 8 | Develop a global partnership for development

## How Have Women Responded to the MDGs?

The United Nations has been a key forum for women's advocacy. From the 1975 UN International Year on Women through the Decade on Women (1976-1985) and the global conferences and summits of the 1990s<sup>1</sup> women participated actively to shape economic, social, and political development. In these settings advocates established strategic mechanisms, influenced resolutions and won crucial commitments to set a far-reaching global policy agenda that recognizes gender equality and women's empowerment as essential components of poverty eradication, human development and human rights.

The Millennium Declaration reflects widespread international acknowledgement that empowerment of women and the achievement of gender equality are matters of human rights and social justice. It is another indication of the successful efforts of women to put gender on the global policy agenda.

However, the Millennium Development Goals do not represent the full vision of gender equity, equality and women's empowerment or poverty eradication and structural transformation envisioned in key human rights instruments<sup>2</sup> or in significant inter-governmental agreements like the 1995 Beijing Platform for Action. Chief among the gaps is the failure to include the issue of reproductive rights. Nor do the MDGs mention two critical issues in the Declaration, peace and human rights.

In the MDG drafting process WEDO and other women's rights advocates argued that gender equality and women's empowerment are essential cross-cutting components for achievement of all the goals. If the approach to implementation was gender blind, if adequate resources were not identified and if global economic policies remained discordant with social and environmental needs the

MDGs could not succeed. Unfortunately the MDGs include women's empowerment and gender equality only as a single goal and the consequences are already apparent: country reports tend to confine these concerns to Goal 3 and the goals on health (4, 5, 6) and to exclude them from the goals on poverty eradication (1), environmental sustainability (7) and global partnerships (8).

Nonetheless, the MDGs do contain time-bound targets for holding governments and international institutions accountable; and they are mutually reinforcing—progress towards one goal affects progress towards the others. In addition the MDGs have broad support; the 191 UN member states, UN agencies, and international trade and financial institutions have committed to the 2015 timeline. Additionally, the review and follow-up processes to UN conferences and summits of the past decade will focus extensively on achieving the goals, providing a critical opportunity to implement the policy gains of the international women's movement.

For these reasons, the MDGs can be seen as another avenue of engagement for monitoring the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action and other key international policy agreements. In this regard the MDG process offers three main challenges to advocates:

- To ensure a gender-sensitive approach to implementation at the national level, integrating gender across all the goals;
- To demand adequate resources and equitable global economic policies that are consistent with social and environmental needs;
- To link the MDGs to other ongoing global and national policy processes, particularly the 10 year review of the Beijing Platform for Action (or Beijing +10) in 2005.

<sup>1</sup> These conferences included: the Conference on Environment and Development (Rio de Janeiro, 1992) where women's vital role in environmental management and development and the need for their full participation to achieve sustainable development was recognized; the International Conference on Human Rights (Vienna, 1993) where women's human rights were spelled out for the first time; the International Conference on Population and Development (Cairo, 1994) where formal recognition of women's reproductive rights prevailed despite bitter opposition; the World Summit on Social Development (Copenhagen, 1995) where the link between gender equality and poverty was explicitly recognized; and the Fourth World Conference on Women (Beijing, 1995) where advocates won a broad-based agenda for promoting and protecting women's human rights worldwide, while establishing the principle of shared power and responsibility between women and men in all arenas.

<sup>2</sup> For women, the most significant of these is the 1981 UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) [www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/](http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/)

# Making the Case for Women

## IN DEFENSE OF A GENDER PERSPECTIVE: GOALS 1-7

**G**ender equality is not only a goal in its own right, but an essential ingredient for achieving all the MDGs, be it poverty eradication, protecting the environment, or access to health-care. Attempting to meet the MDGs without incorporating gender equality will both increase the costs and minimize success. Because the MDGs are mutually reinforcing, success in meeting the goals will have positive impacts on gender equality, just as progress toward gender equality in any one area will help to further each of the other goals.

### **GOAL 1: Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger.**

It is now generally recognized that the majority of the world's poor are women. Goal 1 reflects this by broadening the definition of poverty to encompass not only income poverty but other dimensions such as lack of empowerment, opportunity, capacity and security. Because many aspects of gender inequality influence the different dimensions of poverty, promoting gender equality in the design of strategies and actions to meet this goal is critical. Gender equality has a direct impact on economic growth and the reduction of income poverty by raising productivity improving efficiency, increasing economic opportunities and empowering women.

### **GOAL 2: Achieve universal primary education.**

Of the 150 million children aged 6-11 who don't attend school, over 90 million are girls. Meeting the education goal therefore requires that the distinctive conditions preventing girls or boys from attending or completing primary school be addressed. Reducing education costs, improving quality, tackling parental concerns about female modesty or safety and increasing the returns to families that invest in female schooling are factors that can overcome social and economic barriers to girls' education. Goal 2 is key to achieving Goal 1; eliminating gender disparities in education is one of the most effective poverty reduction strategies.

### **GOAL 3: Promote gender equality and women's empowerment.**

Of the world's 876 million illiterate people over 15 years two-thirds are women; working women have less social protection and employment rights; a third of all women has been violently abused; over 500,000 women die each year in pregnancy and childbirth; and rates of HIV/AIDS infection among women are rapidly increasing. The proportion of seats held by women in national parliaments is also included making this goal important in its own right and to all the other MDG goals.

### **GOALS 4, 5, AND 6: Reduce child mortality; Improve maternal health; Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases.**

Evidence from countries around the world demonstrates that gender equality is key to improving maternal and child health and stemming the spread of HIV/AIDS and other diseases. Some 500,000 women—the majority in poor countries—die each year due to pregnancy-related causes. Reducing maternal mortality depends on the extent of health care availability for expectant mothers, particularly when dealing with complications. Greater control of income by women tends to lower child mortality even when the household's total income is taken into account. Child mortality rates are also linked to gender-related norms and customs. Globally, 48 percent of adults living with HIV/AIDS are women and in many regions women make up the majority of infected adults. Meeting the health goals requires an awareness of the biological aspects of disease transmission and treatment as well as the social and cultural factors that promote or reduce good health. Women cannot achieve empowerment and equality unless their reproductive rights are fully and legally realized.

**GOAL 7: Ensure environmental sustainability** Men's and women's different roles and responsibilities are strongly linked to environmental sustainability. Women's survival, and that of their households and communities, depends on access to and control of

natural resources—land, water, forests and plants. Every day women and girls walk long distances to bring water and fuel to their families. Women perform the majority of the world’s agricultural work, producing food for their families, as well as other goods that are sold in national and international markets. Over generations, women have developed in-depth knowledge of the uses and care of medicinal plants. Women have learned to manage these resources in order to preserve them for future generations. Yet these vital contributions are generally ignored or exploited.

**Gender Equality and the MDGs (World Bank)**  
[www.worldbank.org/gender/gendermdg.pdf](http://www.worldbank.org/gender/gendermdg.pdf);  
**Background Paper (ICRW)** [www.unmillenniumproject.org](http://www.unmillenniumproject.org)

## **IN DEFENSE OF ADEQUATE RESOURCES AND EQUITABLE GLOBAL ECONOMIC POLICIES: GOAL 8**

**A**chieving Goals 1-7 will depend on the extent to which the UN system, national governments and international trade and financial institutions are able to develop Goal 8, a global partnership for development that currently includes targets or indicators on the global trade and financial system, good governance, official development assistance (ODA), market access, and debt.

Yet the current targets and indicators do not adequately address the systemic inequities and power imbalances within the global economic system that undermine the goals. The focus has been more on what the poorest countries need to do to achieve the MDGs and less on accountability of the most powerful global actors—the richest countries and the international financial and trade institutions. Moreover, there are no time frames, quantifiable benchmarks, or instruments that can hold industrialized countries, economic institutions, and corporations accountable. Establishing such accountability mechanisms becomes vital therefore, particularly when countries fail to meet the goals due in part to lack of financial resources.

Over the past decade, the neo-liberal economic model and market-driven policies—particularly trade

and finance rules and the deregulation and privatization of public goods and services—have exacerbated poverty, food insecurity and economic exclusion of the majority, while increasing the wealth and over-consumption of the privileged few.

Gender-blind macroeconomic and national policies keep women concentrated in the informal sector without job or safety protections and in the lowest-paying, most hazardous jobs in the formal wage economy, while rendering their household labor invisible. Women still earn less than men for the same work and remain drastically under-represented in decision-making.

The impact of the HIV/AIDS pandemic has further increased women’s income-earning, domestic, and care-taking responsibilities. The lack of land tenure or inheritance rights and economic trends such as water privatization undermine the ability of women to own, manage, use, and conserve natural resources and to provide for themselves and their families. In working towards implementation, women’s rights advocates can use Goal 8 to push for accountability in the global arenas, holding the international financial institutions—World Bank and International Monetary Fund—the World Trade Organization, the UN and national governments accountable for creating the necessary enabling conditions for implementation to be achieved. At the UN, the ongoing Financing for Development (FfD) process provides the necessary arena to engage in issues of global governance and macroeconomic policy, and strategies for the mobilization of resources needed for implementation of international development commitments. The World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) outcomes and follow-up, monitored through the Commission on Sustainable Development, focuses on partnerships and a variety of strategies needed to ensure progress towards the MDGs and larger development agenda of peace, equality, and sustainability. Women’s rights advocates can use both processes to push for global accountability.

**"It is essential to design, implement and monitor...efficient and mutually reinforcing gender-sensitive policies and programmes...at all levels (to) foster the empowerment and advancement of women."**

**—Beijing Declaration**

## Bring Back Beijing

### ENGENDERING TARGETS AND INDICATORS

**A**ny discussion on attaining the MDGs must start with an understanding of the different positions of women and men, girls and boys in society.

#### ACTIONS YOU CAN TAKE

##### **Lobby your government to apply a broader gender lens to measure progress:**

Promote the use of sex-disaggregated data to measure and monitor the impact of fiscal and social policies on women compared with men, including those data that have been marginalized or are missing from the MDGs. This data is essential, and should be applied in analyses of policies at all levels—national, provincial, and local.

**Expand the MDG indicators:** Many gender-sensitive indicators already exist and have been used to measure progress of other UN agreements from United Nations world conferences such as the Beijing Platform for Action. Use them.

Look for local indicators in National Plans drawn up after the Beijing Conference. More than 70 percent of the 187 governments that agreed the Beijing Platform of Action drafted National Plans by March 1998. Women's monitoring reports in Mapping Progress, a 1998 WEDO publication, cover progress in 90 of these countries [www.wedo.org/monitor/MP.htm](http://www.wedo.org/monitor/MP.htm)

Look for other gender sensitive indicators developed by international agencies:

United Nations Development Programme Human Development Indicators, including key Gender Indicators: <http://hdr.undp.org/reports/global/2002/en/indicator/indicator.cfm?File=index.html>

UN Gender Mainstreaming Mandate on Statistics: [www.un.org/womenwatch/osagi/gmsstatistics.htm](http://www.un.org/womenwatch/osagi/gmsstatistics.htm)

UN Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) ECLAC Economic and Social Statistical Yearbooks, including sex disaggregated data: [www.eclac.cl/estadisticas/default.asp?idioma=IN](http://www.eclac.cl/estadisticas/default.asp?idioma=IN)

World Bank Gender Sensitive HIV/AIDS Indicators [www.worldbank.org/gender/genaids/factsheet.pdf](http://www.worldbank.org/gender/genaids/factsheet.pdf)

### MONITORING GOVERNMENT PROGRESS

**F**ollowing the 1995 conference in Beijing, women began monitoring their governments' efforts—or lack thereof—to turn policy promises into action. In preparation for UN reviews in which governments present progress reports, women's organizations have responded with their own critical shadow reports. Seeing the world through the eyes of women, still the majority of the poor and powerless, provides the only truly realistic context for official words and deeds. Progress reports by government authorities, still overwhelmingly male, must be read alongside the realism of women's day-to-day lives.

#### ACTIONS YOU CAN TAKE

##### **Track implementation of measures necessary to meet the MDG targets:**

This provides advocates with a further opportunity to pressure governments and inter-governmental bodies to mainstream gender.

Millennium Development Goals: National Reports—A Look Through a Gender Lens. [www.undp.org/gender/docs/mdgs-genderlens.pdf](http://www.undp.org/gender/docs/mdgs-genderlens.pdf)

United Nations Millennium Development Group—Reporting on the Millennium Development Goals at the Country Level. [www.undp.org/mainundp/propoor/docs/UNDGMG-Guidance-NoteENG.doc](http://www.undp.org/mainundp/propoor/docs/UNDGMG-Guidance-NoteENG.doc)

**Push for country reports to be put through a gender review process:** to assess whether gender is adequately addressed as a cross cutting if they are sim-

ply following the global matrix that limits gender equality to girls' education as in the Goal 3 target.

**Develop a local version of the MDGs:** Get input from all the stakeholders including women's organizations and other civil society sectors as well as government representatives and UN agencies.

**Bring all of the stakeholders together:** to review the UNDP common country assessment [www.undp.org/dpa/coweblinks/index.html](http://www.undp.org/dpa/coweblinks/index.html), Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers [www.undp.org/dpa/publications/poverty.html](http://www.undp.org/dpa/publications/poverty.html), or equivalent national poverty reduction plan, in the context of the Millennium Development Goals.

**Keep up-to-date with global progress:** Country progress towards the goals from the UNDP Human Development Report 2002 [http://hdr.undp.org/reports/global/2002/en/pdf/hdr\\_2002\\_a\\_1\\_3.pdf](http://hdr.undp.org/reports/global/2002/en/pdf/hdr_2002_a_1_3.pdf)

How many countries are on track? (Data from the Human Development Report 2002) [http://hdr.undp.org/reports/global/2002/en/pdf/hdr\\_2002\\_feature\\_1\\_1.pdf](http://hdr.undp.org/reports/global/2002/en/pdf/hdr_2002_feature_1_1.pdf)

## **About Beijing+10**

Protect Global Policy Promises to Women  
[www.wedo.org/protect.htm](http://www.wedo.org/protect.htm)

## **About CEDAW**

UN CEDAW Committee  
[www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw](http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw)

## **About FfD**

Women Challenging Globalization (English, French, Spanish) [www.wedo.org/publicat/publicat.htm](http://www.wedo.org/publicat/publicat.htm)

## **About WSSD**

WEDO's gender analysis of the World Summit on Sustainable Development and updates  
[www.wedo.org/programs/sustainable.htm](http://www.wedo.org/programs/sustainable.htm)

## **Get Updates**

Beijing+10 and CEDAW--WEDO Governance listserv: [global5050ingovernment@yahoo.com](mailto:global5050ingovernment@yahoo.com)

FfD Women's Caucus listserv: [ffd\\_wc-subscribe@yahoo.com](mailto:ffd_wc-subscribe@yahoo.com)

WEDO Sustainable Development listserv: [WEDOSustDev2002-subscribe@yahoo.com](mailto:WEDOSustDev2002-subscribe@yahoo.com)

## **Link Up**

Beijing+10 and CEDAW

UN Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM)  
[www.unifem.undp.org](http://www.unifem.undp.org)

UN Division for the Advancement of Women (UNDAW)  
[www.un.org/womenwatch/daw](http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw)

## **FfD**

African Women's Economic Policy Network (AWEPON)  
[www.awepon.org](http://www.awepon.org)

Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era (DAWN) [www.dawn.org.fj](http://www.dawn.org.fj)

International Gender and Trade Network [www.igtn.org](http://www.igtn.org)

KULU: Women and Development [www.kulu.dk](http://www.kulu.dk)

Women's International Coalition for Economic Justice (WICEJ) [www.wicej.org](http://www.wicej.org)

## **WSSD**

Network for Human Development (REDEH)  
[www.redeh.org.br](http://www.redeh.org.br)

Women in Europe for a Common Future [www.wecf.org](http://www.wecf.org)

World Water Council [www.worldwatercouncil.org](http://www.worldwatercouncil.org)

Gender and Water Alliance  
[www.genderandwateralliance.org](http://www.genderandwateralliance.org)

# Publications, Reports & Papers

## Non-Governmental Organizations

International Campaign on the Millennium Development Goals (CIDSE)

[www.cidse.org/docs/200312081215006352.pdf](http://www.cidse.org/docs/200312081215006352.pdf)

Background Papers of the Millennium Project Task Forces

[www.unmillenniumproject.org/html/doc\\_lib.shtml](http://www.unmillenniumproject.org/html/doc_lib.shtml)

MDG Gender Net—Links to publications on gender and MDGs [www.mdgender.net](http://www.mdgender.net)

MDG Gender Net—Discussion Archives

<http://groups.undp.org/read/?forum=mdgender-net>

We the People: 2003. A Call to Action for the UN Millennium Declaration (WFUNA)

[www.wfuna.org/wfuna-archive/site/WFUNA%20-%20english%20-%20ofinal.pdf](http://www.wfuna.org/wfuna-archive/site/WFUNA%20-%20english%20-%20ofinal.pdf)

Women and the Millennium Development Goals (WHRNet) [www.whrnet.org/docs/issue-mdg.html](http://www.whrnet.org/docs/issue-mdg.html)

## United Nations

From Promise to Performance: How Rich Countries Can Help Poor Countries Help Themselves

[www.undp.org/mdg/CGD%20BRIEF\\_April\\_2003\\_CRA.pdf](http://www.undp.org/mdg/CGD%20BRIEF_April_2003_CRA.pdf)

Millennium Development Goals Indicators [http://millenniumindicators.un.org/unsd/mi/mi\\_goals.asp](http://millenniumindicators.un.org/unsd/mi/mi_goals.asp)

Progress of the World's Women: Gender Equality and the Millennium Development Goals (UNIFEM)

[www.undp.org/unifem/resources/progressv2/index.html](http://www.undp.org/unifem/resources/progressv2/index.html)

United Nations Human Development Report 2003

[www.undp.org/hdr2003/](http://www.undp.org/hdr2003/)

## International Financial Institutions

Gender Equality and the Millennium Development Goals [www.worldbank.org/gender/gendermdg.pdf](http://www.worldbank.org/gender/gendermdg.pdf)

Health, Nutrition and Population and the Millennium Development Goals

[www1.worldbank.org/hnp/MDG/MDG%20-%20HNPbooklet.pdf](http://www1.worldbank.org/hnp/MDG/MDG%20-%20HNPbooklet.pdf)

World Bank Workshop on Gender Equality and the Millennium Development Goals—Report and Program

[www.worldbank.org/gender/mdgworkshop/](http://www.worldbank.org/gender/mdgworkshop/)

## WEDO

Common Ground: Women's Access to Natural Resources and the United Nations Millennium Development Goals:

[www.wedo.org/sus\\_dev/common1.htm](http://www.wedo.org/sus_dev/common1.htm)

Diverting the Flow: A Resource Guide to Gender, Rights and Water Privatization [www.wedo.org/sus\\_dev/diverting1.htm](http://www.wedo.org/sus_dev/diverting1.htm)



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