

## Women's Movements and Gender Perspectives on the Millennium Development Goals

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### Women's rights, women's movements and the Millennium Development Goals

Women's movements that have been engaged with the United Nations at all levels around the UN Conferences of the 1990s working on both gender equality and social and economic justice, approach the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) with mixed feelings. On the one hand, these goals recognize the centrality of gender equality in the development agenda, and set measurable, time-bound goals on "commitments" with the support of the international community. On the other hand, there is great concern that they sideline key gains made in Beijing, Cairo and other UN conferences<sup>1</sup>; set a minimalist agenda; and fail to integrate gender perspectives into all eight goals.

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<sup>1</sup> These include the 1993 World Conference on Human Rights (Vienna), the 1994 International Conference on Population and Development (Cairo), the 1995 World Summit on Social Development (Copenhagen), the 1995 Fourth World Conference on Women (Beijing), the 2001 World Conference Against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance (Durban), as well as the broader commitments from the 1992 Earth Summit (Rio de Janeiro), the 1995 Conference on Small Island Developing States (Barbados), and the 1997 Habitat-II conference (Istanbul).

Much more, there is growing dismay at efforts to eradicate poverty or attain gender equality without addressing the fundamental causes of these problems, including issues of power, distribution of resources, militarism, fundamentalisms and current economic orthodoxy.

Thus, in the year of the review of implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action (Beijing+10) and the Millennium Declaration (Millennium Summit), feminists are seeking to reshape the MDGs to advance their agendas for transformative gender justice and economic justice. This paper presents: 1) an exploration of gender economic analysis; 2) feminist concerns regarding the MDGs; 3) a feminist gender analysis of the MDGs; 4) a brief assessment of proposals made by Task Force 3 of the Millennium Project in terms of expanding the scope of MDG 3 on gender equality, as well as the Sachs report; 5) women's civil society organizations' engagement with the MDGs; and 6) Recommendations for the UN system regarding women's organizations' needs for advancing the MDGs.

### I. Gender economic analysis

Ten years after the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing, which

affirmed the commitment to “mainstream gender” in all programmes and policies, the concept of *gender mainstreaming* is in crisis. This is because the concept has been instrumentalized by many UN agencies, donors and NGOs to merely integrate women into current social and economic policies, instead of transforming relations between men and women, between dominant and subordinate racial and ethnic groups, and among rich and poor within and between nations.

*Gender* refers to the socially constructed relations between men and women, as opposed to their biological differences. These gender roles are not static, but change over time.

While a mainstream *gender analysis* seeks to explore differential impacts of policies on men and women and to quantify the gendered outcomes of projects or policies within current systems, an integrated *feminist gender analysis* addresses power relations first and foremost, seeking to transform social inequities for all, not just for some groups of women. Frequently in development discourse, gender equality or women’s rights are seen as a means to an end (more growth, more successful development projects) instead of fundamental rights, as affirmed by the Beijing Platform and the Convention Against all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). (Elson 2004, Williams 2004b, Francisco 2004)

*Feminist economic analysis* seeks to understand how all of the institutions of society, from family and community to workplace, government and private sector embody patriarchal assumptions

that obscure women’s contributions and marginalize women from power and decision-making. It seeks to unmask the apparently “gender neutral” workings of the economy. (Riley) Central to this analysis is an understanding that race, class, ethnicity, caste, sexual orientation, national origin and other factors intersect in determining women’s experiences and in limiting the achievement of their rights. Policies that advance equality or meet the needs of women in the dominant group in a society may continue to marginalize other groups of women. Thus, policy responses must address this full range of societal exclusion in an integrated way for effective outcomes.

Neo-classical economic theory, and its application in economic policy, measures the paid work in the productive sphere of the economy. However this is only a portion of the overall labour needed to enable capitalist production. What is invisible in national accounts, and thus official policy, is the sphere of *social reproduction* or the care economy. The ability for workers to provide their labour each day presupposes a huge amount of labour in terms of cleaning, cooking, childrearing, healthcare and numerous other services provided in the home. In a patriarchal society, this role tends to be relegated to women and girls, and tends to be uncounted and undervalued. According to the 1995 *Human Development Report* (UNDP 1995), the non-monetized, invisible contribution of women is an estimated \$11 trillion a year, compared to the monetized output of \$23 trillion. (UNDP 1995)

When women enter the paid workforce they are often concentrated in jobs that are an extension of their social roles in

the household—services and garment industry for example. In many cases, this work is in the informal sector where entry may be easier and where women can balance demands at home with paid work, but this “off the books” work does not get formally counted in national accounts either.

Without consistent efforts to recognize the contributions of the reproductive economy (including home based, street based, part time and casual work), women will be marginalized. When women’s time appears as a free good, certain policies appear to be “efficient” when in fact, they merely shift costs from the public sphere to women’s unpaid labour. (Elson 1999, 2004) This has been well documented in the case of structural adjustment, now extended to IMF and World Bank economic reform programmes including PRSPs (Sparr 1994, Kalima 2002).

There is a consistent tendency to dichotomize the public and private sphere and to give less priority to the private sphere. This involves not only the failure to count women’s unpaid work in the home, but also the right to bodily integrity including issues of violence and sexual and reproductive rights as well as ownership of or access to resources, decision-making power and mobility, which tend to be relegated to the private sphere.

## II. Feminist concerns on the MDGs

The following are some highlights of the many critiques by women’s organizations about the MDGs:

- . The MDGs drastically limit the scope of their attention, and set a **minimalist agenda**;
- . The MDGs were developed within the UN system without the broad participatory processes of UN conferences. As a result, **civil society does not have a sense of ownership** in this agenda (Kindervatter 2004);
- . They are a **technocratic effort to solve systemic political issues**, which have to do with global distribution of power and wealth between and within nations;
- . In their initial formulation, they **have left out too much of the Beijing and Cairo agendas** (as well as the outcomes of other key UN conferences), and restrict their understanding of gender equality, including it in only one of the eight goals. Absent is the overall Cairo goal of universal access to sexual and reproductive health for all by 2015. This vastly reduces government accountability on the broad range of women’s human rights and obscures key issues such as violence, labour, reproductive rights, and women’s unpaid labour. A gender-based review of national MDG reports produced by the United Nations in 2003 found that discussions on gender were limited to Goal 3 (gender equality), Goal 5 (maternal mortality) and Goal 6 (HIV/AIDS), illustrating a ‘ghettoization’ of gender issues within women-specific sectors (Kalyani Menon-Sen, UNDP 2003). “The faces of women in the MDGs are predominantly those of a ‘girl child’, a

‘pregnant woman’, and a ‘mother’ (Painter 2004).

The MDGs **do not use the human rights framework** of the Millennium Declaration, which gives primacy to international law, including affirmation of CEDAW. The human rights framework sees people as ‘rights-holders’ who can mobilise to demand the realization of their rights, rather than “stakeholders.” While economic development goals are often seen as targets to be achieved when possible, a rights framework sees health or education as inherent rights to be claimed by all. If the MDGs are not considered as integral to existing human rights commitments, they could actually undermine international human rights law by setting lower standards than human rights treaty obligations. (Painter 2004, Symington 2004)

They seek to eradicate poverty with a **top-down approach** that virtually excludes poor people, particularly women, from decision-making.

The MDGs ignore an **intersectional analysis of multiple oppressions** due to gender, race/ethnicity/caste, class, sexual orientation, age and national origin. The outcome document of the Durban World Conference Against Racism (WCAR) linked racism to gender, poverty and denial of women’s human rights. If women’s poverty is exacerbated by biases due to race, ethnicity or caste, then efforts to end poverty that ignore this reality will fail, and efforts to increase access to education must specifically target the needs of diverse groups of girl. In women’s lived experience, oppressions due to

gender, race and class are inseparable and policies to address them must address all of these factors simultaneously. (Nazombe/Barton 2004)

The MDGs assume that growth, via **macro-economic policies that conform to the Washington Consensus**, is the means to eradicate poverty, even when per capita income fell in 54 countries in the 1990s during the years of this same ‘economic reform’ (Bendana 2004).

The MDGs **emphasize implementation in the global South**, without mechanisms of accountability for nations of the North. For peoples in the South, this is significant in relation to Goal 8 on ‘global partnership’, which calls on the North to increase aid, support debt reduction and open markets to Southern goods. For peoples in the North, this is problematic because it apparently absolves their governments of responsibility to address issues of poverty, gender equality and environmental sustainability within their own borders.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> “While there is an important push for global sharing of resources to support the development of poor nations, this emphasis should not ignore the mal-distribution of resources within developed countries and the reality of poverty in the global North...In New York City, home to the UN, 21per cent of children live in poverty and 9.6per cent of children die at birth. As Northern nations also signed the Millennium Declaration and World Conference Commitments, they should be held accountable for race, class and gender disparities within their borders.” (Ortega, 2004) Regarding Goal 8, see Vandemoortele, Malhotra and Lim (2003).

There is concern that, similar to the Monterrey Consensus (International Conference on Financing for Development, 2002), **a broad agenda on aid, debt, trade and global financial architecture is being boiled down to a request for increased donor assistance.** Yet eradication of poverty and efforts to address education, healthcare and sustainable development cannot be achieved without addressing unsustainable debt, trade subsidies, terms of trade, net reverse flows of resources from South to North, and unequal power in global economic governance, which aid flows alone do not alter (Adaba 2004). It is worth recalling that NGOs in Monterrey soundly rejected the Monterrey Consensus, because it failed to challenge the fundamental tenets of neo-liberal globalization.<sup>3</sup>

It is unclear how MDGs will mesh with **Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers** (PRSPs), developed through the HIPC initiative in conjunction with the IMF and World Bank. Economic reforms inherent to the PRSP process are in direct contradiction to development goals of poverty eradication, healthcare, education

and environmental sustainability. Poor countries are being called on to increase expenditures on poverty reduction, health and education while also servicing debt and cutting public expenditures.<sup>4</sup>

**Achievement of numerical goals may mask continued inequalities,** particularly in terms of labour rights and gender justice. The target of reducing by half the proportion of people living on less than a dollar a day is likely to be reached in the two most populous countries, China and India, due to sustained economic growth (UNDP 2003). This masks the extreme gaps between rich and poor, urban and rural, men and women, and among different ethnic groups or castes within those countries. Economic growth does not necessarily lead to gender equality, but can in fact exacerbate inequalities (Kabeer 2003).<sup>5</sup>

<sup>3</sup> The list of issues NGOs in Monterrey considered essential for financing development to achieve the MDGs included debt cancellation, a currency transaction tax, the subordination of global economic governance to human rights instruments, no conditionality on ODA, debt and national development plans, the protection of internal markets and the conservation of biological and genetic resources, the right to establish regulatory regimes for foreign direct investment, and the equal voice and vote for developing countries in global economic decision-making processes (NGO Statement, 2002).

<sup>4</sup> In the Tanzanian PRSP “there are no specific targeted actions on behalf of the poor. In fact, seven of the 11 action strategies listed to reduce poverty directly support the large-scale private sector, including a private sector development programme. There are no gender-specific dimensions with respect to actions which focus on poverty reduction” (Mbilinyi 2004).

<sup>5</sup> “If MDGs appear feasible at the global level it does not necessarily imply that they will be feasible in all nations or at all locations. {While averages} give a good sense of the overall progress, (they) can be misleading... (An example is) the failure to disaggregate for gender...Average household income is very much an abstraction for women who have little or no control over how it is spent; it may exist in the mind of economists, but it does not necessarily correspond with the reality faced by millions of poor women.” (Vandemoortele 2002b). Therefore, “the simple extrapolation of global trends to 2015 is invalid; global poverty projections will only be meaningful if they are

Many women's NGOs feel that it is impossible to view a "development agenda" outside of **current geopolitics**. This means addressing the inter-linked dynamics of militarism and military intervention; the rise of religious fundamentalisms and communalism as political projects; and neo-liberal economic globalization. To address only one aspect is to ignore the multifaceted ways that women's rights agenda is undermined. Thus, while the MDGs seek to address social and economic development issues, much of civil society is focused on the interlinkage of multiple forces, within a broader social change agenda.<sup>6</sup>

### III. Gender perspectives on the MDGs

The fact that Goal 3 focuses on gender equality affirms that gender equality is a value in its own right, and not only a means to other ends. At the same time, achievement of the MDGs is dependent on the integration of gender equality targets within each of the MDGs, not merely Goal 3 and other women-specific goals including 5 (maternal health) and 6 (HIV/AIDS and other diseases). There is disappointment that gender was not established as an explicit cross-cutting theme in all of the goals. This has left it up to gender advocates at the national and international level to create gendered targets and indicators and make the case for gender once more.

From a *feminist gender analysis perspective*, the goals must be looked at

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based on country-specific solutions" (Vandemoortele 2002a).

<sup>6</sup> See, for example, Feminist Dialogues 2005, WICEJ 2003.

holistically, as they are inextricably linked. This directly translates into sound policy. Goals related to women's health, control over their bodies, freedom from violence, and ability to have access to sexual and reproductive rights are inextricably linked to Goals related to macro-economic policy, poverty and resource distribution. For example, the lack of access to jobs and extreme poverty has led thousands of women to turn to prostitution for income, exacerbating the AIDS pandemic. The collapse of public health systems under structural adjustment policies and the inability of poor nations to access low cost essential medicines due to intellectual property rights (both linked to Goal 8) have meant the inability of AIDS patients to get adequate care, as well as loss of public reproductive health services for women.

### Goal 1: Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger

According to the UN Department of Public Information, the number of people living in extreme poverty worldwide, on less than one dollar a day exceeds 1.3 billion, and women are the majority (UNDPI 2003). Moreover, the focus on the quantitative measurement of a dollar a day ignores the fact that for poor women, access to affordable housing and transportation, water and sanitation, primary health care for their families and education are essential to well-being for their families and communities (Antrobus 2005). There are multiple factors that lead to this reality, which may differ by region or locality.

In general, women's unpaid labour is discounted and women are relegated to a secondary status, with less access to

property, little power to make decisions over resources and production, and little control over personal life choices. Paid jobs are still segregated by gender, with women concentrated in the lowest paying jobs with fewer benefits. Women head single headed households in disproportionate numbers. Violence affects women's ability to access certain jobs and income, as does the ability to choose when and whether to have children. The lack of ability to limit family size, and women's role as primary caregivers, mean that women often cannot seek remunerative work outside the home.

At the local level, approaches to poverty eradication must empower women to make decisions about priority services and how they are delivered. This points to the need to increase women's participation in decision-making at local levels (Antrobus 2005). A human rights approach to eradicating poverty "is fundamentally about empowering vulnerable groups so that they can demand economic and social rights" (Robinson 2004).

Rural women are the primary producers of food for their families and the domestic market. Thus, strategies for increasing food production must ensure that women have access to and control of land, credit, training and the technologies required to increase production. This links Goal 1 (poverty), Goal 3 (gender equality) and Goal 7 (environment) (Antrobus 2005).

There is a need to address the gender implications of national macro-economic policy (from expenditures on social services to privatization to labour and

industrial policy, to taxation to trade and investment policy). How do these policies play out differently for men and women? In addition, efforts to address poverty must link Goal 1 with Goal 3 and Goal 8 (global economic policy). Debt, trade, aid and global economic decision-making are key factors in both poverty eradication and gender equality.

### **Goal 2: Achieve universal primary education**

This goal is linked to Goal 3, which includes a goal of gender equity in education, as well as literacy rates. It explicitly mentions the inclusion of girls in primary education. A gender and intersectional analysis would explore what keeps girls from accessing schools. This might include the fear of violence from teachers or male students; the lack of separate sanitary facilities; the lack of transportation (and fear of walking long distances); the expectation that girls' work at home take precedence over school; the idea that girls do not need to be educated; the creation of user fees as budgets are cut under economic reform programmes; the lack of money for shoes, uniforms and school supplies (and the assumption that whatever resources there are should go to boys first), and many other factors. Beyond this, we must address the impact of privatization and economic reforms on public education.

A recent case study on AIDS in Uganda noted that young girls in secondary school were taking on "sponsors" in exchange for sex, in order to pay school fees, even when they knew this increased their risk of AIDS (*The New York Times*, 2003). In these conditions the statistics do not tell the full story –

access to school has a deadly price. Further, the content of curricula, be it gender, race, ethnic or religious biases, must be considered as factors that undermine girls' potential. Thus, a feminist gender analysis would explore the specific factors in each country (and how these may differ by race, caste and class), to create policies that actually enable girls to take advantage of primary education in a safe way. Strategies to achieve the goal must not be limited to literacy rates, but also look at factors that hamper girls from attending school, and would explore the content of education, as well as participation.

**Goal 3: Promote gender equality and empower women**

As currently formulated, this goal is extremely limited in terms of targets, although the enormous contribution of feminists on Task Force 3 (gender equality and education) and Task Force 4 (maternal mortality) offer a broader understanding of the goal (see below). The goal itself addresses gender disparity in education, the share of women in wage employment, and the proportion of seats held by women in national parliament. Here, figures can be misleading. As noted in the *Progress of the World's Women 2000*, the share of women in wage employment has increased dramatically (UNIFEM 2000). However, this can lead to greater inequality and exploitation, as in free trade zone factories and sweatshops, rather than enhanced rights for women. Measuring women's role in parliament is an important factor, which should also contemplate women's real leadership and decision-making roles within parties and parliament.

Task Force 3 has proposed seven interdependent strategic priorities for implementation of the goal at the national level. These include access to secondary education, sexual and reproductive health and rights, lightening women's unpaid workload, property and inheritance rights, equality in employment, representation in government, and combating violence. Policymakers must embrace these women's human rights, reflected in the Beijing Platform, the 1994 Cairo Programme of Action and CEDAW in implementing Goal 3. Policy efforts towards gender equality must be addressed in each goal, must link macro and micro policy, and recognize women's contributions in paid work and in the care economy.

The shrinking role of the state as a provider of public services has undermined women's ability to provide for their families and intensified their labour and must also be addressed. In addition, economists, finance, development, industry and trade ministries as well as bi-lateral and multi-lateral agencies will need to make linkages between the public and private spheres to achieve women's human rights and all development goals. Without addressing issues of violence, women's sexual and reproductive rights and decision-making power, the macro goals are also undermined.

**Goal 4: Reduce child mortality**

Child mortality is intimately related to women's sexual and reproductive health, adequate basic public health care, adequate water and sanitation, immunization programmes, women's and children's poverty and access to

adequate nutrition, incorporated in many of the other goals. A feminist gender analysis would explore how women's roles as primary caregiver, linked to women's disproportionate likelihood of being poor, may contribute to child mortality. Clearly, the ability to choose when and how many children to have is critical in terms of survival in very poor families. There is also a question of which children get more food and health care, where boys may be favoured over girls. In Asia, girls under five die at a greater rate than boys (WHO 2003).

Policymakers should explore how macro-economic policies may be prioritizing certain investments (debt repayments, military expenditures, incentives for FDI) over health and social protection programmes that could reduce child mortality, and how these might affect girls. New WTO trade rules, particularly the General Agreement on Trade and Services (GATS) could undermine the ability of nations to provide public healthcare with subsidies for the poor (UN Millennium Project Task Force on Child Health and Maternal Health, 2005).

#### **Goal 5: Improve maternal health**

A WHO gender analysis notes that poor nutrition of women due to gender discrimination can increase the chances of life-threatening complications at the time of pregnancy. Societal norms that limit women's mobility may delay life-saving care in an obstetrical emergency, and there is a correlation between illiteracy and maternal mortality (WHO 2003). Improving maternal health is inextricably linked to sexual and reproductive health (UN Millennium Project Task Force on Child Health and Maternal Health, 2005). While

complications in childbirth may be relatively random, who dies from these complications is not random at all. Almost 99 per cent maternal mortality deaths occur in poor countries" (Freedman 2004). Both a feminist gender analysis and a human rights approach would "unmask the seeming naturalness of such deaths." The shocking imbalance is due to failing and inequitable health care systems that are unable to provide the interventions necessary to save women's lives.

One key demand is equitable access to emergency obstetric care, but this requires functioning health care systems which have been undermined by budget cuts and privatization under economic reforms tied to aid, as well as new trade rules – bringing in linkages with Goal 8 (global economic governance, trade and development financing). Rich countries are "complicit in what has happened to health systems in poor countries" (Freedman 2004). This points to the need to address "economic reform" policies as well as the massive flows of capital from South to North for debt repayment, unequal terms of trade, and profit remittances.

#### **Goal 6: Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases**

Fortunately, there has been considerable gender analysis of HIV/AIDS, which now disproportionately impacts women. HIV/AIDS is a global pandemic, affecting women in both North and South, while disproportionately affecting poor women, and women of color. In Africa, for example, central to the spread of AIDS is the loss of jobs, increased migration (particularly of partners who may travel, have other sexual partners, and then

return), the increase in prostitution due to poverty, the trading of sex for education fees, the diminishing role of the State (lack of prevention, education, healthcare, jobs) and other factors. In all regions, AIDS is increasing among women due to realities of violence and lack of control over sexual and reproductive rights (linking Goal 6 to Goal 3). In many situations women cannot demand that sexual partners use condoms or say no to spouses, even if that puts them in danger. Women face rape and sexual violence, or may be sold into prostitution.

As primary caregivers, women and girls also bear the brunt of care giving for those sick with AIDS, and those orphaned by AIDS. This is more intense when public hospitals cannot meet basic healthcare needs, and women step in to fill the gaps.

Further, new bilateral, regional and global trade rules make it difficult for poor nations to get waivers on patent rules in order to produce generic drugs or import low cost essential medicines. This limits patients' access to these essential medicines. Given that women in particular will lack such access, it is critical that strategies are rooted in a gender analysis and linked to Goal 8, which addresses trade.

### **Goal 7: Ensure environmental sustainability**

The survival of women and communities depends on access to and control over natural resources. Access to water, energy, land and bio-diversity are central for women's equality. Women often must walk many miles for both water and fuel, adding to the many hours of unpaid

work they do each day. This underscores the call by Task Force 3 to invest in infrastructure (water, fuel, etc.) to lessen women's "time burden." In the case of water, women's work is exacerbated by limited water supplies, poor service delivery, pollution, growing population pressure and privatization. (WEDO 2003) Women's access to land, while not mentioned in MDG7, is critical to both gender equality and to food sustainability given that rural women are primary food producers for local markets in much of the world. Task Force 3 has called for guaranteeing women access to land and inheritance rights.

In general, women are key managers of environmental and ecological resources and must be involved in decision-making at local and national levels to protect those resources. New trade rules limit that decision-making not only for women, but also for national policy-makers. Procurement rules on competitive bidding with transnational firms, as well as the potential for environmental regulations to be seen as "barriers to trade," undermine the ability of the public and policy-makers to set environmental standards. Trade Related Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS) may allow firms to establish patents on local knowledge, shifting control of seeds or medicines from local communities. For indigenous women, issues regarding local control over indigenous knowledge are of great significance, as they are often the experts on local medicinal plants, and because the commodification of this knowledge threatens to destroy their culture and community (Morales 2004). Efforts to implement Goal 7 require attention to Goal 8 and Goal 3.

Beyond responses at the local and community level, feminist gender analysis would challenge the thrust towards the commodification of the environment through trade liberalization rules, privatization, and foreign direct investment, exploring particular implications for diverse groups of women, given their role in production and in the household. Policymakers need to then formulate macro policies with this consideration.

**Goal 8: Develop a global partnership for development**

Goal 8 addresses macro-economic policy, including trade, debt, official development aid, financing for development, “good governance,” a “global partnership for development”, as well as such concerns as youth employment, small island states and land-locked countries, access to affordable essential drugs, and access to information and communications technology.

At least since the Nairobi women’s conference in 1985, women have been engaged in engendering macro-economic policy at the national and global level. This has included efforts to address structural adjustment policies, debt and trade in such forums as the World Summit on Social Development, the Beijing women’s conference, and Beijing+5, in such diverse arenas as local rural communities, development organizations, and academia. Women’s organizations actively engaged in the Financing for Development Process leading up to Monterrey (International Conference on Financing for Development, 2002), to shape analysis

and policy recommendations regarding of global governance, domestic financing, debt, trade, official development assistance and Foreign Direct Investment.<sup>7</sup>

Since 1999, women have been increasingly active in addressing trade from a gender perspective, as trade rules encroach on other areas such as services, agriculture, intellectual property rights and investment.<sup>8</sup> This includes mobilization and advocacy to impact WTO negotiations and regional trade deals. For example, the International Gender and Trade Network is one of the few NGOs with an office in Geneva specifically following WTO negotiations. Most recently, some feminist groups have embraced the Global Call Against Poverty which is mobilizing groups around the world to take action for fair trade, debt cancellation, increased quality and quantity of aid, and accountable and transparent policy processes.

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<sup>7</sup> A women’s symposium was sponsored by WEDO and UNIFEM. See WEDO and UNIFEM 2001, 2002a, 2002b. See also Floro 2001.

<sup>8</sup> The International Gender and Trade Network, which emerged in 2000, has sub networks in all regions, and is involved in research, education and advocacy on trade. Among the IGTN members working closely on the trade agenda are Women in Development Europe (WIDE), KULU Women in Development, the Caribbean Association for Feminist Research and Action (CAFRA), Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era (DAWN), the Thai Labour Campaign and the Centre of Concern (see [www.igtn.org](http://www.igtn.org)). Other feminist groups working on trade include Gender and Economic Reforms in Africa, African Women’s Economic Policy Network (AWEPON), Shirkat Gah in Pakistan and Fiji Women’s Rights Network.

Gender analysis of trade explores the roles women and men play in the economy as producers, traders and consumers, and how trade accords affect them in those roles. For example, dumping of cheap food imports, which devastate local markets mainly affects women, who are primary food growers. The massive migration of males from rural agriculture to the cities in search of work (sometimes within a country, sometimes across borders) has divided families and may increase risk of sexual diseases. Women, too, are migrating in increasing numbers to provide income for themselves and families at home, as jobs and livelihoods disappear at home. Remittances become a major source of development financing, but at a major cost for women migrants. Gender bias in access to credit and export facilitation may hurt women entrepreneurs who seek to export, as does lack of access to long-distance transport.

Women are highly concentrated in free trade zones and “maquila” industries that are buffeted by the flows of capital in a highly competitive and mobile environment. For example, some assembly and clothing plants in the southern US, with predominantly women workers, moved to Mexico after NAFTA. Many of these plants then moved to Central America. When China entered the WTO, some of those plants moved from Central America to China. Women are also affected in specific ways by rules limiting labour and environmental regulations, and by patenting and intellectual property rights accords (see Goal 7 above).

Of particular concern is the potential impact of GATS, which mandates that

WTO countries liberalize their service industries and gradually phase out tariff and non-tariff barriers to trade in services. These might include subsidies to education or healthcare or domestic regulations. GATS covers 160 service sectors, which range from education, housing, social protection services, healthcare, sewerage, transport and water to post offices, telephones, financial services and more. GATS will have a huge impact on all the MDGs that imply delivery of key services, as well as regulations such as environmental protections or labour and gender equality requirements.

For example, as of 2001 over 100 nations had listed health care as a service to be liberalized under their GATS schedules (IGTN 2001). Countries are now actively bidding for each other’s service markets. This pushes a trend towards privatization, which public-private partnerships hasten. In some accords, once a sector has had private participation, private companies must be allowed to bid to supply future services (USGTN 2005). Experience has shown that private delivery of services may put them out of the reach of the poor. When the state and market fail to deliver services, it is women’s unpaid labour that fills the gap. In addition, women make up the majority of service workers and stand to lose wages, benefits or jobs as sectors are privatized. GATS will also encompass regional and local governments and even NGOs that provide government services (IGTN 2001). IGTN has called for a differentiation between basic services that are “essential for social reproduction” (e.g. water, health and education) and others like financial,

telecommunications, etc. (Antrobus, 2005).

Goal 8 frames the trade debate solely in terms of market access for goods from developing countries to developed countries. This begs the larger question about the need for fair trade; for open, democratic and transparent trade negotiations; for more equal terms of trade; and for rules that do not over-ride local and national economic policy-making and democratic decision-making (in terms of labour law, environmental law, human rights law and affirmative action, among others).

Beyond trade, much of the debt of poor countries in the global South is sapping resources needed to meet the MDGs, and is paid for out of the poverty of working poor, and particularly the unpaid labour of poor women. HIPC, the framework for Goal 8, is insufficient in addressing the power imbalances that created and maintain the debt burden, and the massive flows of net resources from South to North.<sup>9</sup> NGOs are calling for debt cancellation, and resources shared equitably to meet the needs of the poor, including poor women, and to provide essential public services. Debt relief or ODA that is not targeted to specifically address the needs of women

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<sup>9</sup> The Highly Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) initiative proposes debt relief to poor nations in the context of Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs) which call for economic and political reforms. Critics of HIPC say it is not enough debt relief, but merely maintains a sustainable debt burden, and that conditionalities related to PRSPs further the drive towards liberalization and privatization that have intensified poverty (Marshall et al 2001, Kalima 2001).

may ignore the great disparities in income, health and other factors between men and women. In addition, aid conditionality may undermine progress on several key goals.

#### IV. The Millennium Project

*This section makes a brief assessment of proposals made by Task Force 3 of the Millennium Project in terms of expanding the scope of MDG 3 on gender equality, as well as the Sachs report*

##### Task Force 3 proposals

Task Force 3 of the Millennium Project has done a careful job of gathering women's concerns and critiques and incorporating many of them in their report (Grown, Gupta, Kes 2005), which expands the scope of Goal 3 on Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women. Task Force 3 affirms the human rights framework, including government commitments to CEDAW, as well as commitments made in Beijing and Cairo. They see gender equality as critical to achieving all of the MDGs and likewise, that achievement of all of the MDGs is critical to gender equality. They lay out seven interdependent strategic priorities for international and national-level action by 2015, seen as the "minimum necessary to empower women."

**Strategic Priorities Outlined by Task Force 3 (Gender Equality)**

1. Strengthen opportunities for post-primary education for girls and eliminate gender gaps at that level, while meeting commitments for universal primary education.
2. Guarantee Sexual and Reproductive Rights and Health (at a minimum, national public health systems must provide quality family planning, safe abortion, and emergency obstetric services.)
3. Invest in Infrastructure to Reduce Women’s and Girls’ Time Poverty (reallocating time from routine maintenance tasks to more productive and fulfilling activities)
4. Guarantee Women’s Property and Inheritance Rights
5. Reduce Discrimination in Labour Markets by decreasing women’s reliance on informal employment, closing gender gaps in earnings, and reducing occupational segregation.
6. Increase Women’s Representation in Political Bodies (with the suggested use of gender quotas)
7. Combat Violence against Women (via a global campaign and community-based interventions).

Notably, Task Force 3 proposals re-integrate goals on reproductive rights, violence, and women’s unpaid labour, which are central to the Beijing Platform, ICPD and CEDAW. They also bring in the issue of labour market discrimination and of property rights. The issue of women’s “time poverty” directly addresses women’s role in the care economy. They call for meeting goals through “fundamental transformation in the distribution of power, opportunities and outcomes for both men and women.”

In addition, the Task Force notes that women’s advocacy has been central to the gains in gender equality and women’s empowerment over the past three decades, and that “investing in women’s advocacy organizations is key to holding the international community and national governments accountable.” They affirm that true gender equality and women’s empowerment “require a different vision for the world” rather than

piecemeal responses, including not only shared roles between men and women, but a shift of resources from war and destruction to human development, democratic decision-making processes, and dignity for all. These are significant additions, and contribute to women’s advocacy agenda regarding expansion of the MDGs in the 2005 review and beyond.

Despite these contributions, there are also serious limitations in the Task Force 3 report. First and foremost, there is a major disconnect between proposals for enhancing gender equality and women’s empowerment, and the overall macro-economic framework. As they address implementation, they acknowledge that “fundamental change in the rules that specify how resources are allocated and how tasks, responsibilities and values are assigned in society,” is necessary. To achieve this, they call for political will, technical capacity, accountability (particularly through CEDAW) and

“institutional structures and processes to support transformation, including structures that enable women to successfully claim their rights.” In reference to financial resources, they call for debt cancellation to highly indebted poor countries, more and better quality ODA, trade reform that levels the playing field for developing countries, and domestic resource mobilization.

These are welcome but insufficient references to macro policy. But the Task Force could go further in making connections to the “reconstruction of the global economic environment.” One example is that of land rights, where legal access for women may be constrained not only by social norms, but also by the concentration of land in the hands of richer owners, including foreign-owned agribusiness, depriving both poor men and women of land (Elson 2004).

In addition, the Task Force works within the MDG framework of global South accountability, which projects the North primarily as donors and does not demand accountability on gender equality and the other MDGs within Northern nations.

Also missing is explicit reference to an intersectional analysis that addresses race and ethnicity, (though they specifically address poor women and young women). Despite these shortcomings, the Task Force deserves credit for the creative way they have worked within their mandate to pose some significant challenges.

### **The Sachs Report: *Investing in Development: A Practical Plan to Achieve the MDGs***

Space does not allow us to fully review the gender implications of each of the Millennium Project Task Force Reports. It is an achievement of feminists that gender is addressed in most of the reports, as well as in the overarching summary by Jeffrey Sachs (Sachs, 2005, [www.unmillenniumproject.org/reports/full\\_report.htm](http://www.unmillenniumproject.org/reports/full_report.htm)). Beyond Task Force 3, significant work was done in the Task Force on Child Health and Maternal Health and several other Task Forces of the Millennium Project to incorporate strategies, additional targets and indicators on sexual and reproductive health. The Sachs report recommends “protection of sexual and reproductive health and rights (including access to information and family planning services) as one of its ten key recommendations.<sup>10</sup> Calls for gender equality and sexual and reproductive health, particularly in relation to poverty-reduction, nonetheless do not translate into an integrated gender approach throughout all of the ten recommendations. These recommendations get a nod in terms of training, but not, for example, a call to distribute recommended increases in ODA and debt relief with an eye to gender impacts and gender balance.

Within the ten recommendations, there is a strong role of the private sector in the overall strategy for fulfilling the MDGs, including public-private partnerships, as well as an emphasis on “good governance” and the rule of law. While Sachs affirms the role of the state in creating an enabling environment for

<sup>10</sup> Sachs 2005, p. xivxvi and Overview, p. 30.

growth, as well as in providing public goods (Sachs 2005, p. 16), this could be undermined by public-private partnerships, which, under GATS, could necessarily lead to competitive bidding with the private sector. Women have less relative power vis a vis the private sector rather than the state, as workers, producers and consumers. Thus, such public-private partnerships may place women in a more vulnerable position and weaken the public role in healthcare, education, housing, water, food security and transport that support women's work.

Sachs calls for a rapid conclusion of the Doha Development Round. There has been strong questioning of the Doha Development round by many poor nations and civil society organizations, unless previous issues from the Uruguay Round are addressed, as well as democracy and transparency within the WTO, special and differentiated treatment, and issues of Northern agricultural subsidies, among other concerns.

Regarding calls for *good governance*, Bendana argues that 'the faulty notion of *good governance* is taking us away from the MDGs because it entails placing the state and society at the service of the market'. In his view, the Washington Consensus version of *good governance* is to strengthen the state in terms of its ability to administer economic policies that serve transnational capital.

In this equation, governance has been separated from popular democracy and sovereignty. Civil society gets involved as 'stakeholders', not political actors. The international financial institutions

and donors 'limit themselves to procedural definitions of democracy...imposing neo-liberal economic policies as part of liberal political values that...further transfer power towards the top...Both the public and standing governmental structures become disempowered'. The global trade and finance regime, and global political misgovernance, are unquestioned in the MDG framework. Hunger and poverty are seen not as political issues, but technical concerns. Yet, 'poverty, hunger and bad government cannot be eliminated without the democratisation of policy-making to the most local level possible' (Bendana 2004).

In this context, there is a contradiction between Sachs' call for civil society participation and increased democracy and transparency on the one hand, and the dominant notion of *good governance* on the other.

#### **V. Women's organizations' engagement with the MDGs**

"Despite several years of intense debate within women's organizations in all regions, women are beginning to engage with the MDG process. Some see this as a necessary strategic choice, given the prominence of the MDGs on the development agenda. Some see it as a real opportunity to continue to advance women's agenda in national and international arenas. Others see it as a necessary part of doing business with donors. None are willing to let go of the importance of the Beijing and Cairo processes, as well as CEDAW in terms of priority. What is beginning to emerge are efforts to use the MDGs to continue to advance women's broader social

justice agenda, without being distracted by the limitations of the MDG conceptual framework.

*As women's rights activists we are faced with the challenge of engaging in a serious attempt to transform the MDGs at the national level to fulfill at least some of our most primary aspirations in terms of women's health and education, while at the same time engaging in a critical evaluation of the overall implications of reducing the sum total of human aspirations in the twenty first century to a few "basic needs" with no consideration for the full complexity and diversity of human beings and human society" (Abeysekera 2004).*

There are several areas where women's groups are working on the MDGs:

**1) Mobilizing to link Beijing+10 with Millennium Summit, at international, country and regional levels.** This entails demands that commitments made in Beijing in 1995 be reflected in efforts to implement the MDGs and that these commitments be structured into the debates and official outcome documents of these inter-governmental meetings.<sup>11</sup> The "MDG Road Map" issued by the UN Secretariat recognizes that the MDGs do not supersede Cairo and Beijing commitments (UN Secretariat 2001).

Other priorities include efforts to integrate national plans of action for Beijing and Cairo with national MDG plans and expanding MDG indicators through advocacy at the national level to affect national plans. (WEDO 2003). There are efforts, particularly by women trade unionists, to highlight the creation of quality jobs as a necessary part of poverty eradication, the first MDG goal. This reflects recommendations of the

<sup>11</sup> Comments DAWN, "Our ability to critically engage with the MDG process is conditioned upon a strong reaffirmation of Vienna, Cairo and Beijing" (DAWN 2005).

ILO World Commission on the Social Dimension of Globalization (ILO 2004).

**2) Use of human rights instruments to frame MDG implementation.** There are strong calls to reaffirm and utilize the human rights framework of the Millennium Declaration as the basis for the MDGs. This includes initiatives to use CEDAW as a tool for national accountability on engendering the MDGs. (Neuhold, 2005; Painter, 2004; UNIFEM, 2004, Robinson 2004). One tool would be linking MDG reporting to national progress reports submitted to the CEDAW committee.<sup>12</sup>

**3) Using the MDGs to address the unfinished agenda of equitable global governance, debt, trade and aid conditionality (Goal 8).** Civil society groups, supported by the UN Millennium

<sup>12</sup> "International human rights treaties can provide some of the normative guidance, analysis and authority required to identify concrete measures that should be taken at the country level. For every area covered by the MDGs there is direction on gender equality that exists in the core human rights treaties... States are already under formal, legal human rights obligations to realize gender equality" (Waldorf 2004).

Campaign, launched the Global Campaign Against Poverty (GCAP), with the support of Brazilian President Lula da Silva at the World Social Forum in Brazil, January, 2005. The Campaign brings together groups working nationally and/or internationally against poverty, and seeks to build global momentum for the MDGs on civil society's terms. The Campaign focuses on what member organisations see as the bottom-line steps required for progress on the MDGs, including fair terms of trade, debt cancellation, an increase in quality and quantity of aid, and the creation of anti-poverty programmes that are accountable to citizens. Within this are national efforts to make PRSPs more accountable to the MDG commitments and to challenge the contradictions of promoting the Washington Consensus in the name of poverty reduction. Gender perspectives are practically absent in the PRSPs, and these omissions must not be compounded as links are made to the MDGs (Kalima 2002, Marshall 2001, Whitehead 2003).

Women have added the attainment of gender equality as a pre-requisite for poverty eradication. (AWID 2005, GCAP 2004) Feminist groups have joined the process seeking to strengthen gender perspectives in the Campaign through a Feminist Task Force of GCAP.

They organized a high profile launch of the campaign during the Beijing+10 review in New York in March 2005 and released a statement, which said: *"Achievement of the MDGs would represent only a partial improvement for women. (We) demand that governments meet and far exceed the MDGs and fulfill the other promises that they have made*

*through UN Conferences of the 1990s and in regional and international human rights treaties"* (Feminist Task Force 2005). GCAP is open to interested CSOs, and is primarily nationally based, building on anti-poverty and global economic justice work ([www.whiteband.org](http://www.whiteband.org)).

#### **VI. Recommendations for the UN system on women's organizations' needs for advancing the MDGs**

The Declaration from the March 2005 Beijing+10 review "emphasized that the full implementation of the Beijing agenda for women was essential to achieving the internationally agreed development goals, including those of the Millennium Declaration" (UN DPI 2005c). Similarly, the UN Secretary General, highlighted the seven proposals (above) made by Task Force 3 in the Millennium Project report, asking member states, "As you recommit yourselves to the full implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action, I hope you will reconsider these seven priorities as guideposts that can help shape national programmes" (UN DPI 2005b).

Building on enthusiasm from that event, and eager to continue a central role in shaping the multi-lateral agenda, many women's civil society organizations are plan to have an active presence in the Millennium Summit process. This is hampered by UN constraints regarding NGO participation in the Millennium Summit, which takes place in the General Assembly. NGOs are invited to attend mid-year hearings and to provide input on the Secretary General's report, but at this point, will not be present at the







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