



Millennium Development Goals

NATIONAL REPORTS
A LOOK THROUGH A GENDER LENS



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CONTENTS

Background	1
1.1 The Millennium Development Goals	1
1.2 Gender and the MDGs	2
1.3 The Present Review	3

Review Highlights	5
2.1 Gender as A Cross-cutting Issue	5
2.2 Gender and Poverty	7
2.3 Gender and Education	9
2.4 Gender and Infant Mortality	11
2.5 Gender and Maternal Mortality/Reproductive Health	13
2.6 Gender and Health	15
2.7 Gender and Goal 3	17

Conclusions and Recommendations	22
3.1 Conclusions	22
3.2 Recommendations	24

BACKGROUND

1.1 The Millennium Development Goals

In September 2000, Heads of State and representatives of the Governments of 191 countries met at the United Nations and adopted the Millennium Declaration. The Declaration outlines the central concerns of the global community - peace, security, development, environmental sustainability, human rights and democracy - and articulates a set of inter-connected and mutually reinforcing goals for sustainable development. These, the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), are based on the major goals and targets agreed upon at the UN Conferences of the 1990s, which have been synthesised into a global agenda for development.

The Millennium Declaration commits the international community and member states of the UN to the achievement of eight major goals.

1. Eradication of extreme poverty and hunger
2. Achievement of universal primary education
3. Promotion of gender equality and empowerment of women
4. Reduction of child mortality
5. Improvement in maternal health
6. Combating HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases
7. Ensuring environmental sustainability
8. Developing a global partnership for development.

Quantitative targets have been defined for each goal, most of which are to be achieved by 2015. Indicators have been selected to monitor progress on each of the targets. A list of 18 targets and 48 indicators has been agreed upon to ensure comparability across countries and facilitate tracking of progress at global, regional and national levels.

The Secretary-General is mandated to report annually on the progress towards the MDGs to the UN General Assembly. Additionally, most signatories to the Millennium Declaration are preparing country-level MDG Reports (MDGRs), which are potentially a mechanism for regular tracking of progress towards attainment of the targets.

In preparing national MDGRs, each country has the flexibility to set its own targets. Nearly 40 country reports have been released as of 3 June 2003. Most of these documents include an analysis of the development context, assessment of the situation with regard to each goal, identification of major challenges in achieving each target, highlights of actions taken to create a supportive environment, and enumeration of the priorities for development assistance.

1.2 Gender and the MDGs

Goal 3 – “Promote gender equality and empowerment of women” - is the culmination of years of determined advocacy and action by the international women’s movement. The high priority accorded to Goal 3 represents a global affirmation of women’s rights and gender equality as core values of development.

This hard-won recognition that “development, if not engendered, is endangered” was also an outcome of debates and discussions at the UN Conferences of the 1990s, including the World Conference on Human Rights (Vienna 1993), the International Conference on Population and Development (Cairo 1994), the World Summit on Social Development (Copenhagen 1995) and the Fourth World Conference on Women (Beijing, 1995). Growing recognition of the gender dimensions of development paradigms and policies during the 1990s created the momentum for a consensus on gender mainstreaming – the incorporation of gender perspectives into all aspects of development theory and practice - as a key strategy to achieve gender equality.

There is a clear correspondence between the MDGs and other global instruments related to gender equality, such as the Beijing Platform for Action and CEDAW. However, unlike the other goals, Goal 3 is not specific to any particular sector or issue, since gender equality and women’s rights underpin all the other goals. It has been pointed out that attempting to achieve the MDGs without promoting gender equality will both raise the costs and decrease the likelihood of achieving the other goals.¹ The reverse is equally true – achievement of Goal 3 depends on progress made on each of the other goals. The implication is clear - while accurate reporting against Goal 3 is critical, tracking gender gaps and inequalities against each of the other MDG targets and indicators is no less important.

At the national level, MDGRs and the process of MDG reporting represent a new opportunity for gender advocates to enlarge the space for dialogue and build a broad national commitment to women’s rights and gender equality. Apart from their role in monitoring and tracking key indicators of women’s empowerment, national MDGRs are also aimed at facilitating systematic policy dialogue on critical development challenges and building a supportive environment for translating commitments into actual results on the ground. Ideally, MDGRs are expected to reach out to a range of national actors including communities, civil society groups and the media, initiating wider debate and dialogue around key development choices and enabling citizens to demand accountability from their governments.

¹ Carlsson, Helene and Cecilia Valdivieso. 2003. “Gender Equality and the MDGs.” Unpublished World Bank discussion paper.

In several countries, the MDGR process has been “localised” and extended to the sub-national level through the preparation of regional reports. Effective gender mainstreaming would therefore expand the possibilities of building links between actions for gender mainstreaming at macro and micro levels, and encompassing a wider constituency of support for these actions.

National MDGRs are also relevant to the wider donor community, particularly in targeting and optimising their support to national development efforts. Goal 8 (“Developing a global partnership for development”) is focused on making visible the linkages between national and international commitments to achieving the MDGs, with clear resource implications for action on gender equality. In addition, reporting against each of the MDGs is expected to identify priorities for action and also provides a basis for resource mobilization. Effective mainstreaming of gender issues into MDGRs can thus be expected to have significant long-term impacts in terms of enhanced resources and focused support for action on gender issues within the country.

Despite scepticism about the feasibility of achieving any of the MDGs within the projected time-frame, it is generally agreed that they represent a “strategic talking-point for assessing what the barriers to the achievement of goals are, and provide a tool with which to hold both donor agencies and governments accountable”².

Given the above, it is important for women’s organisations and gender equality advocates to use the opportunity created by the MDGRs and the MDG reporting process to ensure greater public visibility and awareness of gender inequality, and demand a stronger policy commitment for gender equality.

Several recent studies and reports highlight the importance of mainstreaming gender concerns into the MDGs. These include a gender analysis of the MDGs commissioned by the Gender Programme in the Bureau for Development Policy UNDP³, which reviews the goals and targets from a gender perspective. An analysis of targets and indicators under Goal 3 has also been commissioned by the Millennium Project Task Force on Gender Equality and Education⁴. The UNIFEM bi-annual report “Progress of the World’s Women 2002” is devoted to the MDGs and their implications for gender equality. A UNDP programme on Gender and the MDGs, initiated with support from DFID-UK, is also underway and is expected to make a substantive contribution to engendering the MDGRs.

1.3 The Present Review

The present exercise builds on and complements the recent evaluation of MDG reporting in eight countries being carried out by the Evaluation Office of UNDP. One of the parameters of the evaluation was an analysis of strategies for mainstreaming gender into the process of MDG reporting.

² Subrahmanian, Ramya. “MDGs: Is the Glass Half Full or Half Empty?” Institute of Development Studies, Sussex. 2002.

³ “Gender and the MDGRs”. UNDP-WEDO Discussion Paper. Unpublished. 2003

⁴ “Promises to Keep: Achieving Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women. A background paper for the Task force on Education and Gender Equality of the Millennium Project”. Caren Grown, Geeta Rao Gupta and Zahia Khan, ICRW. 2003

The review presented in this paper focuses on a selection of published MDG reports to assess the extent to which gender concerns and perspectives have been mainstreamed into discussions under various goals. The MDGRs of 13 countries have been scanned along three parameters.

- ❖ Incorporation of gender issues/perspectives under goals other than Goal 3.
- ❖ Mention/recognition of women's issues under goals other than Goals 3 and 5.
- ❖ Content/perspective of gender/women's issues under each goal.

The MDGRs were selected to provide a regional spread and include reports authored by the UN System, national governments and civil society/research institutes.

The results of the scan are presented as a series of tables in the next section of this report.

REVIEW HIGHLIGHTS

2.1 Gender as a Cross-cutting Issue

Table 1 presents the results of a preliminary scan of the selected MDGRs, to track the visibility of women's concerns and/or gender issues across goals. Any mention of gender or women, regardless of content, was scored as a positive and is represented as a solid cell in the table.

Table 1. Gender as a cross-cutting issue in selected MDGRs

COUNTRY	Ownership	Gender Issues Under Each Goal								Women's Issues Under Each Goal							
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Albania	Independent consultants. Published by UN System. Foreword by Government.																
Armenia	'HD Experts Club'. UN System data used.																
Bolivia	UN Country Team.																
Cameroon	UN Country Team.																
Egypt	Independent NGO. Published by UN.																
Lithuania	UN System.																
Mauritius	Government of Mauritius and																

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