



# THE GENDER DIVIDEND

A BUSINESS CASE FOR GENDER EQUALITY

  
United Nations Entity for Gender Equality  
and the Empowerment of Women



## Foreword

by Michelle Bachelet

### In July 2010, United Nations Member States adopted a resolution to consolidate four separate entities into a new UN Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women).

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In creating UN Women, the international community sent the message that gender equality and women's rights are on par with other global imperatives, such as ending poverty and hunger and combatting climate change. As its first leader, I am determined that UN Women will be a catalyst for change, offering new energy, drawing on core ideas and values, and bringing together countries and communities in a shared endeavor.

The challenges we face today are considerable. The increasing gaps in wealth and income that have accompanied global growth have deepened with the economic crisis and pushed millions of workers, especially women, into permanent informal employment. Political conflict and natural disasters are driving up fuel and food prices, threatening livelihoods and straining household coping strategies in both developed and developing countries.

Yet we are seeing progress. Over 125 countries have outlawed domestic violence; at least 117 have equal pay laws; 187 have ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women; and 115

guarantee equal property rights. The constitutions of 139 countries and territories now guarantee gender equality. As we see in countries throughout the Arab region, especially in Northern Africa, women who once stayed out of the public arena are now standing alongside men to demand freedom, dignity and the right to participate in revitalizing their societies.

Change can happen. But UN Women can't make it happen alone. Partnerships are essential. Working with key partners, including UN agencies, civil society, the private sector, and governments from the south and north, we are not only more comprehensive, bringing together knowledge and expertise from different sectors to tackle challenges holistically; but we are also more powerful—working to create the momentum for the results and progress we all want to see.

Now is the time for all of us to join together to create a tomorrow of peace, justice and equality for all the world's people—women and girls, men and boys alike.





# INTRODUCTION

Countries cannot move forward when one in every two people lacks the opportunities and skills needed to live a productive, freely chosen life. Investment and action on an unprecedented scale are required to broaden the range of real opportunities open to the world's 3.5 billion women and girls.

**A**dvocates for equality between women and men have long made the case that women's empowerment benefits everyone—not just women. In recent years, other actors have added their voices to this chorus, bringing with them strong economic arguments and evidence. The World Economic Forum reports that across 134 countries, greater gender equality correlates positively with per capita Gross National Product. The Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific estimates that the Asia-Pacific region alone loses more than US \$40 billion per year because of women's limited access to employment, and \$16-\$30 billion because of gender gaps in education. And McKinsey & Company recently found that private sector firms with the largest share of women in top management perform best; they argued that moving from raising awareness about the gender gaps in management to implementing strategies to close those gaps is critical to private sector growth worldwide.

The Millennium Development Goals and the vision set forth in the Millennium Declaration represent the most ambitious blueprint for global development that the world's countries have ever agreed to. Meeting the Goals and realizing the Declaration's vision of "...a more peaceful, prosperous and just world" characterized by freedom

and equality requires a host of actions and resources. Of these, none is more critical, far-reaching or strategic than advancing women's empowerment and bringing about equality between women and men.

Of course, **empowerment and equality are valuable ends in themselves**. Nobel Laureate Amartya Sen famously describes development as a process of expanding the real freedoms that people enjoy. Women are human beings; as such, they are, in the words of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, "born free and equal in dignity and rights" and thus entitled as surely as men to the full complement of rights—life, liberty, and the security of person; equal rights during marriage; freedom of opinion and expression; and the rights to work, to education, and to take part in the government of their country, to name but a few. Countries are obligated to respect, protect and fulfill the human rights of every person, and all United Nations entities are charged with furthering the realization of these rights. To date, 186 countries have ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). Promoting gender equality is thus the **core business** of the international community and the United Nations family—not an add-on, not a special charity project.

But keeping our promises to women is not just a moral and institutional imperative; it is also the smart thing to do. **Equality and empowerment are critical means to a broad end**—development that is environmentally and socially sustainable—as well as vital linchpins for the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals. Societies fall behind when half their citizens cannot live to their full potential. Economies lag when half a country's productive adults have inadequate capabilities, are excluded from the formal labor market, cannot gain access to credit, or are subjected to violence. Innovation stagnates when the thoughts and ideas of half the people are unheard or discounted. Corruption flourishes when those in power are not accountable to half the population. Families struggle when half the adults do not have access to good jobs with decent working conditions, and children are less likely to thrive when their mothers lack control over household resources.

The evidence is overwhelming and unambiguous: women's empowerment and gender equality drive development progress. The ways in which equality and empowerment advance development objectives can be seen by analyzing a few key drivers for the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (see Box 1).

## Box 1

## Women's empowerment is key to the Millennium Development Goals

Evidence overwhelmingly supports the view that women's empowerment drives development and is key to achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Yet investment in the gender dimensions of the goals continues to be inadequate. How would investing in women change the trajectory for countries currently off-track for meeting the 2015 targets?

**Goal 1: Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger**

According to FAO, women produce half the world's food. In sub-Saharan Africa and the Caribbean, they produce up to 80 percent of basic foodstuffs, and in Asia, they account for between 50 percent and 90 percent of the rice cultivation workforce. With the rights to own and inherit land and more equitable distribution of assets (credit, improved seeds and fertilizer, and information and technology), women would achieve higher agricultural productivity, boosting incomes and lessening hunger.

**Goal 2: Achieve universal primary education**

Though the gender gap is narrowing, and the world as a whole is currently on track to achieve universal primary education, more girls than boys are out of primary school. Two-thirds of the world's illiterate adults are women. A one-year increase in the schooling of all adult females in a country is associated with an increase in GDP per capita of around \$700.<sup>3</sup> Girls' education has a greater return on investment than nearly any other development sector, thanks to multiplier effects that range from delayed marriage and lowered fertility to increased labor force participation and higher wages.

**Goal 3: Promote gender equality and women's empowerment**

Goal 3 calls for the elimination of gender disparities in education at all levels by 2015. Gender gaps in access to education have narrowed significantly, but access to university education, especially in Southern Asia and sub-Saharan Africa, remains highly unequal. Women account for only 19 percent of parliamentarians worldwide, according to the International Parliamentary Union, and are under-

represented in leadership roles the world over. Women's participation in governance has been shown to lead to greater investment in human capital, critical in our increasingly knowledge-based global economy. Firms with higher shares of women on their leadership teams show better financial results.<sup>4</sup>

**Goal 4: Reduce child mortality**

Women's agency, autonomy and ability to negotiate within the family directly affect the well-being of children. Research shows that when decision-making within the household is more egalitarian, children's needs are more adequately met, and that women invest a greater share of their incomes on their children's health than men do. Even when a household's total income is taken into account, when women have greater control over income, child mortality rates decrease.<sup>5</sup>

**Goal 5: Improve maternal health**

Harmful traditional practices, such as child marriage and female genital mutilation/cutting, as well as other forms of violence against women, contribute to maternal mortality. A woman dies in childbirth every minute,<sup>6</sup> and girls in their teens are twice as likely to die in childbirth as women in their twenties.<sup>7</sup> Investing in the education and empowerment of adolescent girls and young women makes early marriage and its corollary, early motherhood, less likely, speeding progress toward the maternal health goal.

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

Violence against women and unequal power relations with men place women at risk of HIV infection. High proportions of women—78 percent in Mali, 64 percent in Nigeria, 26 percent in Haiti, and 9 percent in Cambodia, for example—report being unable to ask their husband or partner to use a condom.<sup>8</sup> Three in four young Africans living with HIV are female,<sup>9</sup> young women aged 15-24 are at least three times more likely to be infected than men of the same age, and girls with little education are significantly more likely to contract HIV than girls with more education. Empowering women

and girls and tackling key gender-based risk factors for the transmission of HIV, such as rape, trafficking, the sexual exploitation of girls, power imbalances that make it difficult for women to negotiate safe sex, and the economic insecurity that drives transactional sex between impoverished adolescent girls and older men, are the foundations of successful HIV and AIDS programs and policies.

**Goal 7: Improve environmental sustainability**

A key target of the MDG 7 is to cut in half the proportion of people without access to a hygienic toilet or latrine; open defecation, the reality for those without access to sanitation, is a potent driver of infectious disease, child mortality, violence against women, and social exclusion. Research shows that when women have control over household resources, they are more likely to prioritize the construction of a sanitary latrine at home than men are. In addition, decades of evidence from community sanitation projects attests to the myriad ways that projects designed and run with the full participation of women are more sustainable and effective than those that ignore women or relegate them to menial roles.<sup>10</sup>

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

In an increasingly interdependent world, global governance, trade regimes, the international financial system, technology transfer and more all have a powerful influence on the opportunities open to women and men at the national level. Fairness in these international systems and deliberate efforts to ensure that they meet the needs of women as well as men is critical to development progress. Evidence shows that women in positions of political leadership tend to give greater priority than men to investing in people's capabilities by supporting, for instance, health care systems, social safety nets, and programs that benefit children.<sup>11</sup> Only by making the development dialogue more diverse can we hope for new, innovative solutions.

Delivering on the gender equality commitments countries made under the CEDAW, the Beijing Platform for Action, the Millennium Declaration, and a host of human rights conventions will bring tangible benefits to women—and to society as a whole, men included (see Box 2). We know why it needs to be done; we know how to do it: now is the time for the world to keep its promises to women and in so doing liberate the world's greatest untapped development resource.

**Box 2**
**What about men?**

Gender is not just short-hand for women. Gender refers to the social roles of men and women, boys and girls, as well as the relationships among them, in a given society at a specific time and place. In societies the world over, gender is a key determinant of who does what, who has what, who decides and who has power. It patterns the range of choices and opportunities available to a person and defines what he or she is expected to do and be.

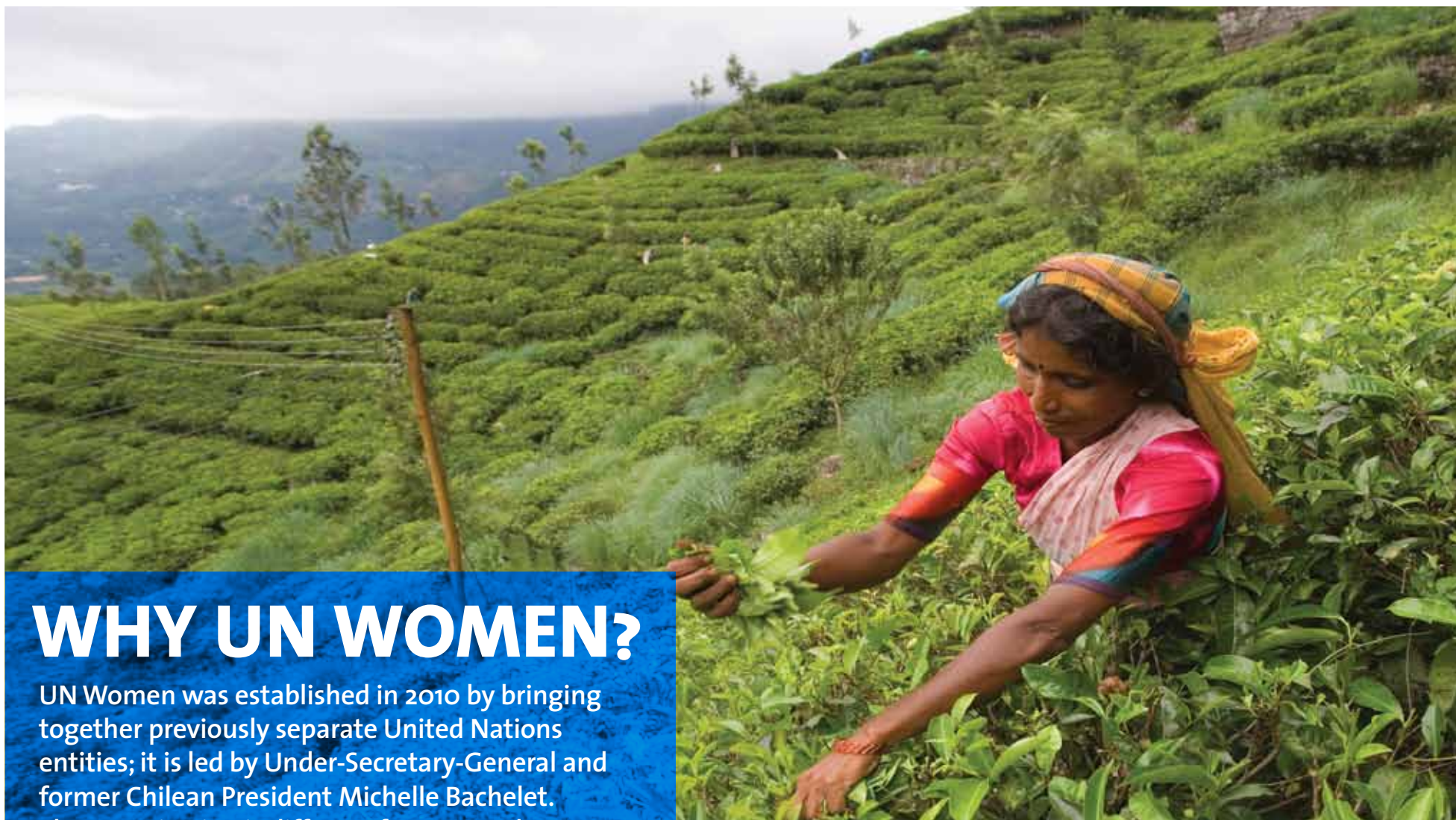
**UN Women believes that because gender is about women and men, engaging men is critical to transformative social change; it is a “positive-sum” game.** Engaging men is vital first and foremost because in most societies, men are more economically, socially and politically powerful than women; recruiting them as allies able to bring to bear their

disproportionate power on issues of social justice helps to remove impediments and hasten progress. Engaging men is also critical because gender is about the relationship between women and men; transforming the nature of that relationship requires change on the part of both parties—not just half of them. And engaging men is important to human progress because some definitions of what it means to be a man harm men as well as women.

Successfully engaging men requires appeals to enlightened self-interest, work with male role models and authority figures, and the creation of non-threatening environments in which change can occur. Working with boys and young men holds great promise for a more equitable future for everyone.







## WHY UN WOMEN?

UN Women was established in 2010 by bringing together previously separate United Nations entities; it is led by Under-Secretary-General and former Chilean President Michelle Bachelet.

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