

Gender Makes the Difference

The adoption of the Millennium Declaration in 2000 by all 189 member states of the UN General Assembly was a defining moment for global cooperation in the 21st century. The Declaration sets out, within a single framework, the key challenges facing humanity at the threshold of the new millennium: the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) to be reached by the year 2015.

1. To cut in half the percentage of people with per capita incomes below one dollar a day, as well as of people who suffer recurring hunger.

- Of six billion inhabitants of the planet, 1.2 billion barely survive in conditions of misery, with daily per capita incomes under \$1. Seventy percent of these are women. 6.3 million children die of hunger each year. And there are 842 million undernourished people in the world.
- 75 percent of the world's poor and hungry live in rural areas and depend directly or indirectly on agriculture for their nutrition and livelihood. Increased food production is essential to improve their lot. Reliable access to water increases agricultural yields, providing more food and higher incomes in the rural areas. In Africa, improving the access of rural women to productive resources, including education, land, and fertilizers for crops, could increase agricultural productivity by as much as one-fifth. Given equal access to resources and human capital, women farmers can achieve yields equal to or even significantly higher than those of men. The marginal effect of female income on child nutrition is four to eight times higher than that attributable to male income. The nutrition security of the household, including that of children, depends almost exclusively on women.

2. To establish the goal that children around the world shall be guaranteed the opportunity to finish a complete primary education cycle.

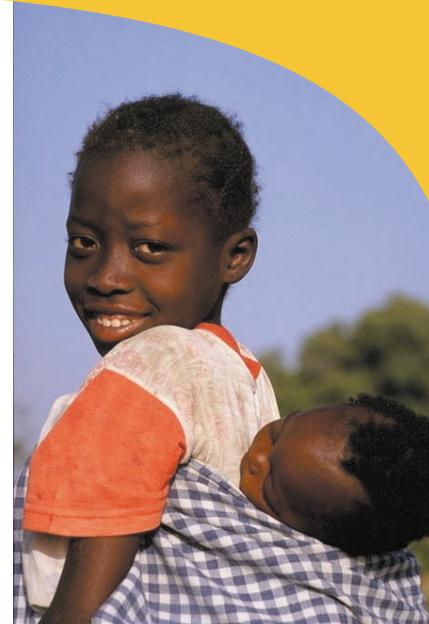
- Around 115 million children of the world do not go to school. Of these, three-fifths are girls. 876 million people in the world are illiterate, of which two-thirds are women.
- Women and children spend hours a day collecting water and fuel for cooking. This is a cause for dropping out of school, particularly in the case of girls. Renewable sources of energy offer significant ways of reducing burdens on women and children. Refugees displaced by environmental crises and other migratory emergencies forcibly reduce the access of children to educational opportunities.

3. To reduce by two-thirds the infant mortality rate in children under five years of age.

- In addition to the 6.3 million children who die every year from starvation, 13 million more die before their fifth birthday due to preventable causes, such as diarrhea.
- Approximately 2200 children die each hour of the day. Stopping this silent war, whose victims are powerless children, demands compliance with MDG objectives by Member States. To contain diarrheas, malnutrition, contagious infectious diseases and respiratory ailments that cause such deaths requires an urgent environmental agenda.

4. To reduce the maternal mortality rate by three-fourths.

- More than five hundred thousand women die each year, during pregnancy or childbirth. Of these deaths, 99% occur in developing countries.
- Pregnant women are particularly susceptible to vector and waterborne diseases. Anemia – resulting from malaria- is responsible for a quarter of maternal mortality. Many other maternal deaths are linked to carrying heavy loads of wood and water soon after childbirth.



FURTHER INFORMATION ON THIS TOPIC CAN BE FOUND AT:

Millennium Project
www.un.org/millenniumgoals

United Nations
www.undp.org/mdg

International Development Research Centre (IDRC)
web.idrc.ca/en/ev-42959-201-1-DO_TOPIC.html

Women Environment and Development Organization (WEDO)
www.wedo.org

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New York, U.S.A. 2001.

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New York, U.S.A. May, 2004.

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New York, U.S.A. 2003.

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- Desertification and degradation of lands result in ever-increasing and prolonged efforts on the part of women, to obtain agricultural yields. These exhausting chores have negative effects on a woman's health during pregnancy. Pregnant women are more vulnerable to sicknesses such as malaria and hepatitis, both closely related to climate change and poor sanitary conditions.

5. To stop the spread of HIV/AIDS and reduce the propagation of malaria and other serious illnesses.

- Globally, women constitute just under half of adults with HIV/AIDS, but in Sub-Saharan Africa more than 55 percent of infected adults are women; young women are two to four times more likely to be infected than young men. In South and South-East Asia, 60 percent of young people infected with HIV/AIDS are female.
- Temperature, water and vegetation changes contribute to increased prevalence of vector and waterborne diseases. One million people die each year from malaria, and tuberculosis kills two million more every year.

6. To ensure environmental sustainability, cut in half the number of people without regular access to potable water and significantly improve the living conditions of at least 100 million inhabitants of slum neighborhoods.

- 2 billion people around the world have no access to regular energy sources. More than 1 billion in developing countries have no access to potable water. 2.4 billion people in the world cannot count on an improved sanitation infrastructure. The lack of potable water, of adequate sanitary conditions and of a regular energy source represent a heavy burden on women who must work to prepare, cook and conserve foods, clean their homes and wash, while at the same time being responsible for the nutrition and health of their families.
- The incorporation of sustainable development principles in national policies and programs, with a clear gender perspective and commitment to revert the loss of environmental resources, is one of the compromises adopted by the 189 Member States, as well as an indispensable means to advance toward accomplishment of the Millennium Development Goals.

7. To eliminate gender inequalities in primary and secondary education, preferably by the year 2005 and in all levels of education before the end of 2015.

- Gender equity is a human right and goal, but it can also be seen as a critical factor for achieving other human development goals. The education of young girls has a multiplying effect on human development. There exist important connections between the welfare of women, their levels of initiative, freedom of association and access to resources, and a general improvement in the welfare of the population at large. The instrumental role of women in the well being of families is an important path to social change. But family welfare is not synonymous to women's well-being and empowerment. A rights-based approach is needed to provide them with leverage to challenge power relations within society. Gender equality is about promoting new models of gender relations that help to expand the range of possibilities available to women and men in organizing their lives. Because gender inequities are rooted in a structure of power, equality for women will not come about through the free workings of economic and political processes.

8. To develop a global partnership for development.

- A global partnership for development that includes environmental responsibility and cooperation for general development is the only way forward. Cooperation for development must include the allocation of more financial resources from developed countries, not only to change production and consumption patterns, but to open new markets for products and eliminate subsidies in developing countries. Only 15% of the world's population live in the richer countries, but they are responsible for 50% of carbon dioxide emissions in the planet. During the next 25 years, the world's population will increase by 2 billion inhabitants, most of them living in poor countries, where huge demands will be made upon energy, consumption and economic resources. If such growth does not occur in an environmentally sound and sustainable framework that takes into account gender inequities, its effects on the welfare of humankind, especially the poor, will be catastrophic.

25 years from now is too late to make the right decisions!