



2010 UNDP/UNDESA E-discussion on Women and Poverty

Responses in Full by Contributors: Part III

Vanessa Farr, UNDP/PAPP
Rita Luthra, USA

Dated: 11 February 2010

Vanessa Farr, UNDP PAPP

Dear Mark and colleagues,

I am writing to all of you from Nairobi where I'm visiting the Somali CO from my duty station, the occupied Palestinian territory, as a participant in a workshop on Community Security. This setting prompts my response to your request for more core messages about new (or indeed ongoing!) challenges and specific messages/intentions that need to be articulated as commitments for 2015 and beyond.

In my view, the most important thing that needs to take place this year is a significant corrective: **we have to make a commitment to understanding how violence, including armed violence, leads to de-development and impoverishment, and how such violence specifically undermines advancement towards women's empowerment and gender equality; and we have to work out how to mitigate this complex problem.**

May I remind everyone that in 2000, not one but two instruments were passed that have profoundly shaped the collective gender work of the United Nations over the last decade. In September, the Millennium Summit resulted in the Millennium Declaration, a new global partnership to reduce extreme poverty by 2015 as articulated in the eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). *However, despite the human security work that began in earnest in 1999 in Norway (at the first Ministerial Meeting of the Human Security Network in Lysøen), not one of these goals mentions the impacts on development of violence, including armed violence in non-conflict settings and situations in which security is severely degraded although there is not officially a war; and none considers the nexus between all forms of violence, the absence of human rights, and poverty, especially as these combine to dis-empower women, maintain and aggravate gender inequality.*

Only a month later, in October, the Security Council passed Resolution 1325 (on women, peace and security), the first ever such Resolution on women and the first to result from the efforts of an international civil society lobby (the global women's peace movement, which had begun working towards the goal of this SCR at the UN Women's Conference in Beijing in 1995). *While SCR1325 makes a clear demand for the inclusion of women in all aspects of security decision-making, it neither references the freshly minted MDGs nor the human security discussion and so it, too, misses a chance to articulate the necessary relationship between the promotion of human rights (with a specific emphasis on women's rights), the achievement of peace and security for all, and the achievement of development goals.*

How does the violence in this society undermine, reverse or make impossible development gains? How does this violence prevent individuals from gaining access to their rights and the fruits of development?

What are social attitudes to sex and gender based violence? Has it become more common since the crisis? Who is most commonly the perpetrator, and who the victim? Do weapons play a part in perpetrating such violence?

What other forms of interpersonal violence (i.e. violence between individuals, including in families) and organized violence (i.e. violence by militaries, police, armed gangs) are common in this society? What measures are in place to address this violence, whether it is public or private?

Do survivors of sexual and other interpersonal violence have access to justice? Are perpetrators likely to be punished?

Do people in this society understand their human rights and have access to human rights defenders?

What are social attitudes to small arms and light weapons? Are such weapons readily available in this society, and if so, who has access to them (women or men, old or young)? Who is most likely

Repositioning Maternal, Newborn and Child Health:

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Ameena Alrasheed, University For Peace, Mandated United Nations University, Costa Rica

Dear All,

Greetings from the University for Peace, mandated United Nations University, in Costa Rica. Thank you very much for the UNDP Gender Team for providing us with such a great opportunity to participate in an e-discussion, dedicated to the promotion of gender equality and women's empowerment. This is my brief input that would have led to more academic substances should the time allow us, nevertheless, the whole issue of poverty has turned into a quandary that needs serious articulation.

What are your core policy messages for the UN inter-governmental decision-making?

Gender equality is a multilayered issue that encompasses different variables, and I believe it is important to surface the floor in front of us before we rush rightly to the issue of women and poverty, nonetheless women are the great bearer of such unfortunate position. The UN inter-governmental decision –making has the duty of contextualizing and identifying the mechanism through which any polices or programmes should be effectively implemented. Enforcing measures on policies and programmes of income generating activities, or lifting women and children from the grip of poverty, all necessities a holistic approach, starting form addressing the political the social and the economic situation. All efforts seems to be endless in their failure to tackle poverty and women's equality, so why don't we start addressing the issue globally as well as locally simultaneously, women are poor across culture in developing countries, while the metropolitan economies are flourishing, economic crisis as well as climate change hitting these women harder, are we able to enforce an alternative global politics? The MDGs now approaching the year 2015, what will be the outcome, not much as we can all see that, I would call for an alternative policy messages that would reinforce new politics and policies globally.

What critical actions on gender equality are now required in light of the new challenges (e.g. economic crisis, climate change)?

The economic crisis and the climate change are just an extension of an already existing challenge for women in the developing countries; it adds more misery and aggravated an already strenuous situation. Now; those who are in the academia would wonder whether it was /is a viable articulation, that the chain should be broken between the monopolies and the peripheries, endless features of the crisis takes place over time. Should we start a serious investigation of the neo-liberal policies, neo liberal economy? Or should we wait and witness yet another phase of crisis and troubles that impact women even within the neo-liberal economy zones ? Gender equality would effectively and critically take place, within a global economy that does not repatriate, and extract from the poor, and when we have balanced policies, fair trade, in place of economic hegemony, of neo-liberalism, and then we might be able to challenge gender inequality effectively.

What are the specific commitments that you would like leaders to take forward to 2015 in order to advance achievements on the MDGs?

1. Hard hitting poverty reduction/alleviation programmes.

2. Locally social reforms, laws and policies and programmes, that challenges inequalities and poverty at large.
3. Women in the decision making process, addressing here particularly the mishaps of peace agreements, across the globe, where the UN has failed women in Kosovo, Nepal, Sudan and continuing to do so in other parts of the world.
4. A robust articulation of gender and poverty issues that does not compromise.
5. Women in decision making process quantity as well as quality need to be emphasized.
6. Commitment to women's issues as core issues in development, and not a secondary issue. Access to food, shelter and education are rights.

Ameena Alrasheed Nayel,
Assistant Professor
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Marina Durano, Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era (DAWN)

Dear All,

2. Involvement of more women in all levels of decision making whether at the grassroots or key opinion leader level.
3. Mainstreaming gender in the school / college curriculums, in work places, in other public institutions i.e. churches among others.
4. Involvement of more men in all matters that concern gender equality. One lesson learnt from MEGEN is that men always want to generate ideas, want participate in the implementation of the ideas and in so doing be part of the solution. “Women’s rights are human rights” but in order for this message to be embraced by all in the community, men need to be involved in all the processes that will ensure gender equality is achieved ahead of 2015

What critical actions on gender equality are now required in light of the new challenges (e.g. economic crisis, climate change)?

1. Some of the critical action required includes involving more men both at the grassroots and in key decisions making positions in dialogue that will foster gender equality.
2. Target boys and girls of school going age (6 – 18 years) and sensitize them on gender issues; give them life skills which will enable them make informed choices in future; inform them of necessary steps and measures to take in order to get justice for crime committed against them in case they fall victim to abuse.

What are the specific commitments that you would like leaders to take forward to 2015 in order to advance achievements on the MDGs?

Some of the specific commitments that I would recommend to leaders as they prepare for 2015 include:

1. Engaging men more in enhancing gender equality. For a long time men have been perceived to be the key perpetrators of gender violence whether social, economic or physical. At Men for Gender Equality Now - MEGEN we have learnt that sensitized men can be key allies in the fight to put an end to gender violence. Men in the areas we work in (22 Constituency teams across Kenya) have also proven that it is easier for men to talk to other men about the need / importance of promoting gender equality; about empowering women who are also their mothers, sisters, wives & daughters; about combating the spread of HIV/AIDS; about the sharing of responsibilities within the home; as well as about ratification of policies that will positively impact the lives of women and children.
2. Accountability: The leaders need to be more accountable to the public on the promotion of human rights and in addressing the realities of violence; poverty; HIV/AIDS prevalence; unemployment; and youth involvement.

Thank you for the continued contribution and for forwarding very interesting discussions for our information.

Regards,

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Bani Dugal, United Nations Baha'i International Community

I would like to express my gratitude to the UNDP gender team for hosting this e-discussion. It has brought to light many different perspectives and in

development—which is the establishment of spiritually and materially prosperous society. Within this context, poverty can be described as the absence of those moral, social and material resources needed to develop the capacities of individuals, communities and institutions. Alongside the provision of material means (and the removal of the crippling extremes of wealth and poverty)—moral reasoning, freedom from racism and conflict, collective deliberation, good governance, and institutional integrity, an orientation towards service towards one’s community—to name a few—are all important conditions for poverty alleviation. The goal at hand, we can say, is not only to remove poverty, per se, but to enable the masses of humanity to participate in the construction of a more just global order.

Here, the emphasis has been placed on girls, boys, men and women alike. Just as women are held back by the unjust and oppressive socioeconomic conditions defining their life, so too, boys and men are trapped by habits, attitudes and behaviors that hold back from reaching their spiritual and social potential.

As a concrete effort to work towards the construction of such an order, the worldwide community has been involved in grassroots efforts to establish new patterns of community life—patterns conducive to the spiritual empowerment of its members and institutions and towards the wider community. In this context, spiritual empowerment refers to the development of qualities and attitudes that help to develop a strong moral foundation and a capacity to serve the wider community. In hundreds of thousands of neighborhoods around the world, Bahá’ís have turned their attention to the needs of children and youth. Cognizant of the aspirations of children, Bahá’ís have focused on helping children to build a strong moral framework—incorporating themes of the unity of humankind and a love of humanity in all of its diversity, helping them to achieve excellence intellectually, materially and spiritually. These classes are open to all children in the community. Similarly, for youth, ages 11-14, classes have been created to assist youth to navigate this crucial period in their lives, helping them to develop the power of expression, and to develop in them to desire to serve and to be of service to society around them. The fundamental purpose of this kind of education is seen in light of social transformation—the building of capacity in children and youth to play their role building a social order that enables all of humankind to prosper and benefit there from.

At this stage we need leaders who are prepared to show moral leadership and integrity; who can demonstrate a commitment to the most marginalized among their population; who can lead their populations in the direction of greater solidarity with the peoples outside of their borders; and who can balance national responsibilities with the development imperatives of populations around the world.

Bani Dugal
Principal Representative to the United Nations Baha'i International Community

Shirley Randell, Kigali Institute of Education (KIE), Rwanda

Congratulations on moderating this excellent topic Mark,

I am sure others will bring it up but I think one of the key recommendations has to be insisting on sex-disaggregated data in every ministry, department, private sector and non-governmental organizations (NGO). We need targets and measures for all recommendations. Even when policy will is great as it is in Rwanda, if you cannot track what is happening to girls and women, boys and men, you miss out on key information that will lead to effective policy development.

I will be in NY for CSW and Beijing plus 15 – will you be there. It would be good to catch up again.

Best,
Shirley

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Anita Mathew, Consultant on Women and Children Rights, India

Dear Mark,

My suggestions are the following:

- Women's participation across the board, at least 50% in all decision making bodies should be ensured;
- The meaning of empowerment needs to be clarified when it comes to gender-related matters especially that it applies to human rights programmes to be part of the school curriculum to make this happen effectively;
- Legal instruments implementation must be monitored especially those based in countries that have signed the CEDAW and UNCRC;
- MDG goals must be rethought of within cultural contexts to enable change in attitudes and values to make them relevant at the country level;
- Poverty is related to health and when it comes to women reproductive health and sex education for both men and women needs to be reassessed in a country like India to make it linked to rights education where participation of children must be allowed in schools and colleges to understand how it affects psychosocial well being; and
- Economic requirements should be balanced with the ecology and women are the leaders in this aspect as they work on land and climate change policies must listen to women again to

quite a few do two full time jobs all the time (regarding the time spent on each of them) in office as well as in home care or elderly care).

Some kind of insurance is needed to cover the period that they give up from jobs to care of the house, children and elderly so that their pensions do not suffer. Poor elderly have given their life to offices, manual work and home care and have a miserable old age to look forward to.

Ancient wisdom proclamation that children would look after the elderly is no longer valid, not because children have become callous or selfish, they too have tough lives and cannot be expected to do more than certain amount of work for their elders.

Percentage of elderly is not small and a planned approach is needed. Elderly women get more neglect than men, they have lesser pensions if any and live longer.

These are very general remarks but true in most of the developing countries where the tradition of looking after the elderly is still somewhat there.

Sushil Bhardwaj

Hope Kabuchu, Uganda

Many thank to the UN, to Mark Blackden and all participants for providing this forum and platform for us to express our thoughts. I am a Ugandan, a social development practitioner, based in Kampala, Uganda. I contribute to this forum as an African Woman who has watched the wave of promoting gender equality rise and fall, and who is wondering how high or how low it will go this time round with this new interest. My reflections and thoughts on your questions are mainly on Sub-Saharan Africa.

What are your core policy messages for the UN inter-governmental decision-making?

1) Positive Progress: World Political Leaders and the UN should be commended for the MGDs agenda, especially which concretely focused world attention and resources on addressing human development challenges. There is no doubt that the MDG Agenda is well intentioned and if the intention was met with commitment with resources and investment, the world leaders would indeed go a long way in addressing gender inequalities in accessing practical and some strategic gender needs. The leaders should be commended for the current progress towards attaining MGD 2 on Universal Primary Education and MDG 3 - in relation to the indicator for attaining gender parity in Education where some regions such as Asia have reported over 90% net enrollment. This is good testimony that a lot of positive progress can be made on goals that are supported by targeted financial resources and commitment. However, Quality education and retention especially of girls in upper primary and secondary school is still a major challenge that many countries are still grappling with. It is important for the leaders and the UN not to lose sight of the goal of gender equality: In the discussion for achievement of MGDs and 2015 agenda, leaders should not lose site of the ultimate goal - MGDs, should not become an end in themselves, they are a means to attaining gender equality and a more just society.

2) Limited Progress in Sub Saharan Africa: Reports on Global Progress on MDG goals show slow progress on attainment of MGD goals in Sub-Sahara

World Bank. The Leadership in Sub-Saharan Africa still hides behind Cultures and tradition and has failed to address fundamental issues of power relations between men and women- and how these perpetuate gender inequality. Leadership commitment needs to be backed by clear actions and investment in time, finances and human resources. The indicators for MDG Goal # 3: Promote gender equality and Empower Women - should therefore reflect more of the strategic indicators and interventions that can genuinely address gender inequality. There should be more investment in the indicator for wage employment in non-agricultural, and in agricultural sector where the majority of women work. The goal should reflect indicators that protect the rights of women and girls - such as Laws and Practices that promote Women's Rights, Property and Economic Rights, - indicators that address rights in Culture and Traditions - indicators that protect the rights of women, girls and boys. This Goal is central and fundamental to the achievement of ALL the MDGs.

2) Effective Leadership, Commitment and non-resistance to change: African Political leaders, including the UN leadership has made and signed to good statements and international instruments and protocols that "claim" to promote gender equality and women's empowerment. Some have gone ahead to write "Good Constitutions" that proclaim gender equality, and "give concessions" for affirmative action for women. This is good for public relations and gives them what to write and report about in the next UN Session, ECOSO AMR and CSW, AU etc - and gives a good feeling of what to talk about when the next national elections come round. Sadly, Development Partners have also joined the rhetoric and write "good statements" on gender equality as a "core principle" for their support. At the end of the day, they do not hold themselves accountable to their promises. Words mean nothing - we have become comfortable with political correctness and very little commitment. In many nations in Africa, there is no commitment shown by any of the leadership - Governments, UN and Development Partners - in genuinely wanting to change the status quo in power relations between men and women. Promoters of gender equality, and we as women are fatigued by the rhetoric and the many statements and documents. They weigh heavily on our minds, on our rights, on opportunities for attaining gender equity and equality. The least we expect of leaders especially, the UN Leadership Globally and at Country level is to make good their statements and translate these into clear goals and actions for attaining gender equality in the instruments especially the UNDAFs and UNDAPs and CPAPs etc ! Continued silence in the UN goals,

5) Impact Assessment: It is currently difficult to know the impact of national and global interventions on gender equality. Concerted effort should be put in developing instruments for monitoring and tracking progress, and investment in processes for collection and analysis of gender statistics in all sectors.

Dated: 12 February, 2010

Jelena Tadzic, UNDP Serbia

What critical actions on gender equality are now required in light of the new challenges (e.g. economic crisis, climate change)?

UNDP Serbia is currently supporting study to map the most vulnerable groups at the labor market and investigate the impact of economic crisis on their position with the aim to provide recommendations on the measures for improvement, taking into account a wider perspective of their social exclusion.

The study was conducted in 2009 by leading Serbian economic think tank, Foundation for Advancement of Economics (FREN). In the final stage of research, results were presented to Government representatives on 11th February 2010 with the aim to incorporate their comments in final study recommendations. Representatives of the Ministry of Labor and Social Policy, Ministry of Economy and Regional Development, National Employment Service, Gender Equality Directorate, Social Inclusion and Poverty Reduction Unit of the Deputy Prime Minister's Office, ILO and UNDP participated in the discussion.

According to study indicators (participation in the labor market, unemployment/employment rate and level of employment vulnerability) the most vulnerable groups on the labor market in Serbia whose members are disproportionally affected by the crisis are *the young, Roma, rural population in the Southeast of Serbia, persons with disabilities and women belonging to marginalized groups*. The study confirmed that significant majority of working age population belongs to at least one of the vulnerable groups in the labor market. As a rule, the risk of extreme vulnerability and ultimate exclusion from the labor market for an individual increases with the number of vulnerable groups this individual belongs to simultaneously. The vulnerability of women is even deeper according to data obtained through the research: unemployment rates in 2009 within each of the most vulnerable groups are higher for women than for men: 43,7% of young women compared to 38,5 % for young men; 68,2 for Roma women compared to 28,0 % for Roma men. According to data from the Labor Standard Measurement Survey from 2007, employment vulnerability of persons with disabilities is extremely deep. Women with disabilities are especially vulnerable as unemployment rate is higher than it is the case with men (16,5% compared to 11,8% for men).

Recommendations suggest that active labor market measures need to be better targeted, combined and treated within a wider social exclusion context in order to have significant positive impact on the position on the most vulnerable men and women. Specific recommendations for women suggest that particular attention should be paid to:

- Multiple factors of vulnerability (for instance less educated and single mothers or Roma women in rural areas...);
- Making more investments in vocational programmes, functional literacy and ensuring subsidies for employment;
- Enabling non-discriminatory institutional framework in the area of labor as well as development of flexible forms of work;

- The fact that programmes leave stronger effects on women than on men (as confirmed by comparative experiences);
- Ensuring proportional participation of women in the labor market measures to their participation among the unemployed.

What are your core policy messages for the UN inter-governmental decision-making?

On strengthening the UNDP expert and advisory role at the country level to support government to develop gender responsive policies, especially in a changing host country environment.

Serbia shifted from PRSP country to the status of middle income country and EU candidate country few years back. Positive social developments imposed need for remodeling and re-examining the role of UNDP. The country is obliged to set the policy standards in line with the EU requirements which also stands for social inclusion and human rights agenda that are capturing gender equality issues. The state often lacks both political will and capacity to shape gender mainstreamed policies. UNDP role as a reliable provider of policy advice to the government of Serbia in the area of gender equality is positively assessed both externally and internally in recent surveys (MOPAN, 2009 /GSS, 2009, CPD Evaluation, 2009). UNDP is strategically committed to program gender equality into its activities, yet it is not adequately supported by the organizational structure. Visible and sustainable results with government counterparts cannot be achieved if gender equality related issues are tasked to staff on an ad hoc basis. Strategic and systematic approach needs to be introduced in HR policies which will sustain already introduced mechanisms/tools aimed at strengthening and evaluating the level of gender mainstreaming of UNDP programme (UN scorecard, gender marker, RCAs....).

Best regards,
 Jelena Tadzic
 Programme Officer
 UNDP Serbia

Bernd Wachholz, Center For PROFS

UNDP and UN/DESA – E-Discussion on Women and Poverty: *“Sharing of experiences and good practices, with a view to overcoming remaining obstacles“* (the emphasis of the 54th session of the CSW).

Dear Mr. Mark Blackden,

Thank you very much for your good final questions that bring us forward and your commitment.

The global community – the United Nations, its Agencies as well as the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) – have for years now asked that the scientific community develop and implement *solutions* to the global challenges that are on their agenda.

The CENTER for PROFS is committed and acting with determination to take on these challenges – resulting in *solutions* that have been introduced and are available.

These are in respect to *“poverty reduction, gender equality and women’s empowerment”*.

Here an insight in *“challenges and remaining obstacles”*: The Participants of the *“Global Consultation on Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting”* (Addis Ababa, August 2007) *“note with concern the slow pace of*

progress despite decades of interventions to end the practice and the continued unnecessary suffering of

The research findings of the CENTER for PROFS, which represents *practice-oriented* scientific work and research, has shown that the most “*critical action*” now required is to get the attention of leaders and

A concrete situation to face the social components that sustain the political marginalization of women, has been the struggle for dignity –in the face of a chauvinist system of legal, judicial and political prerogatives-, that have allowed the conditions for the extreme violence and impunity, from which the women in Ciudad Juárez have become ‘famous’ for.

As it has been said before, and as the case of México neatly manifests, I believe that “the institutional and policy environment for addressing the gender dimensions of poverty be strengthened, building on the Beijing Platform for Action and the Millennium Declaration” –should keep in mind that as a historical fact, those at the top of the political ‘representation’ of our societies, are the representatives of the legacy of the oligarchic prerogatives that shaped “underdevelopment”, as a requisite of the geographical aspect of development-.

Therefore, I would like to point to the experience where the “international aid” has resulted in many stances, as a political encouragement to the local groups, that keep the social disparities inherent to the face of underdeveloped nations. The so called “paternalism”, where the international scope of developed nations, avoids to acknowledge the historical right of ‘vulnerable’ groups to speak for themselves.

Therefore, I would point at the need to address ‘development’ as a possible scenario where women’s views, experience and needs, are acknowledged –as the very ‘reproductive’ vectors of generational conditions-. A starting point, could be to implement economic policies of investment, related to the historical need to address the access of girls to schooling and health (as alternative to abstract stock criteria of investment).

From that point of, and considering that as the last resource of ‘peace’ the UN has are the “blue helmets” –where most of those exposed to war are women and children-; investment alternatives of women empowerment, should seek to reach out beyond the *facto* structures that sustain social disparities.

But certainly, the main and most urgent point to address women’s poverty, as the trans-generational condition to make the Millennium Declaration a sustainable policy; and chore of the agricultural aspect that allows the ‘legal’ scope, that lead to the environmental depletion –is to address the right to land tenure and inheritance of women, specially and rural areas-. By far and definition the most pervading condition of patriarchy.

Carmen Rodríguez
Ñaa te Kuni, Coordinadora de Mujeres Oaxaqueñas

Natalia Cardona, Social Watch

Dear Colleagues,

Given the questions in this note. We would like to share with you Social Watch’s most recent occasional paper and Gender Equity Index. The Occasional Paper is entitled Beijing and Beyond: Putting Gender Economics at the Forefront, Fifteen Years After the World Conference on Women.

This paper demonstrates that, notwithstanding some advances since the Beijing Conference and the adoption of CEDAW, the UN member States still have not fully implemented their commitments to gender equity as an essential condition for sustainable economic and social development. Also, the evolution of the gender statistical indicators, along with the narratives included in this publication, prove that that there is an evident gap between gender legislation and its implementation of actual policies.

Furthermore, the GEI uncovers a staggering wipe out of the economic gains made by women at the global level and the negative impact of the global financial crisis on them. These commentaries draw attention most specifically to the financial crisis as its effects are widespread and exacerbate already existing inequalities. They also highlight the gendered nature of the crisis and its effects on women and women-dependent economies. Moreover, the articles point to concrete policies that wh

all, and the achievement of development goals". At the global inter-governmental level, the UN and its agencies need to take the policy and programmatic lead aggressively, and follow through on Kofi Annan's 2005 statement in which he "concludes that it is only through the perfection of the "triangle of development, freedom and peace" which understands the connectedness between threats, challenges and opportunities, that the larger freedom – freedom from want, the purpose of the MDGs – will be achieved". Gender equality and women's empowerment (economic, political and social) sits squarely at the center of the triangle of development, freedom and peace to which Mr. Annan refers.

Judith Wedderburn
Director
Friedrich Ebert Stiftung
Jamaica and the Eastern Caribbean

Khaled El Mohtar, National Rehabilitation and Development Center, NRDC - Lebanon

Let me first extend my gratitude for raising this important and interesting issue through the e-discussion which helps in exchanging thoughts, Ideas and useful information.

Even though we are going through 21st century still this issue is facing many challenges because of lack of knowledge and education.

In Lebanon and some other Arabic Countries we have had many and many activities and attempts, and we have reached a considerable development in regard of women rights and participation in different fields such as Parliamentary Elections, Administration, Municipalities, Universities and many other fields on National bases, but still women are suffering from a deep poverty and lack of opportunities in the rural areas because of literacy and very retarded customs and beliefs.

First of all, the main reason is that lack of knowledge and education, nothing is to be developed without education. Education should be compulsory and free for all, at least in elementary levels in all areas. Other resources come after education such as sustainable programs for training and empowerment of women to enjoy opportunities of work and development. Another important factor should be taken into consideration is the Gender discrimination which is a major barrier and essential reason for poverty in many societies where the systemic discrimination is still clearly noted, leaving women , and mainly women with disabilities deprived from their basic rights such as health and Medical care, housing, clean water, nutrition, etc...

Théodore Mpatswenumugabo, UNDP Republic of Guinea

Chers Collègues,

En relation avec ce thème, je voudrais attirer l'attention sur un aspect qui n'est pas suffisamment pris en compte et sur lequel il faut beaucoup travailler dans certains pays africains : il s'agit du lien entre les activités génératrices de revenus (AGR) des femmes et les conditions de vie des enfants, la nutrition en particulier.

Dans beaucoup de pays, il va de soi que si les revenus des femmes augmentent, cela va se répercuter rapidement sur les conditions de vie des enfants. Ceci n'est malheureusement pas le cas dans certains pays

Merci.

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Dated: 16 February, 2010

Bhawani Shanker Kusum, The World Bank

Dear friends,

At the outset I must be thankful to Mark Blackden for facilitating such a pertinent question with regards to women and involving so many activists working on this issue around the world.

I would like to share with you the experience of Gram Bharati Samiti (GBS) derived from its work with the rural poor and tribal women in hundreds of villages in the Rajasthan state of India for last 25 years.

In its work on empowering the women GBS as a national NGO has been working with women of two categories e.g. tribal and rural poor. Firstly, the tribal women (tribes like Rajnat, Kanzer and Bedia) who are traditionally involved in sex work for hundreds of years and still they are not in the main stream of the society. Living in the thatched hamlets at the outskirts of the villages far from the highways these tribal populations are deprived of even basic amenities i.e. safe drinking water, general health care, electricity etc. Primary level school education for their children is still not less than a day dream for them.

There are very peculiar customs in the 'Rajnat' and 'Bedia' communities where the daughters are involved in sex work and whole of the family members (normally 7-8 in a unit) depend on her income. The male members of the family without education and with no technical skill or land to cultivate on keep sitting idle, serving their daughters/sisters in sex work or the clients visiting them. Though the wives of the family are not involved in commercial sex, but they live a life like slaves. Cooking food and tea etc, washing clothes, cleaning (though so called cleansing doesn't mean anything for them as they enjoy everything sitting on the debris and other excessive household activities are the responsibility of the wives of the family. They can't wear shoes while inside the house and can't sit on the cot. That's why most of the girl children choose to be inducted into sex work and not to be married when they are asked by the parents in their childhood. These young sex workers have to serve the newcomers when they are retired normally at the age of 35 or so.

Unlike other middle or lower middle class families in India they prefer to have more and more girl children and producing a boy is seen as a burden on the family in these communities. According to the older women of the community "we have seen our grandmothers selling sex, we are doing that and our younger generation too have to do the same, hence there is no meaning for us to get our girls educated". **Human rights, gender discrimination or advancement of women doesn't mean anything for these tribal women**

In another scenario the poor rural women of backward castes i.e. Harizen, Raigar, Chamar, Balai etc. involved in comparatively low profile work i.e. sanitation, building construction, weaving etc. are living a

different kind of life. They don't have any say in any kind of decision making process of the family. All the decisions are taken by their husband or other male members of the family, even the number of children they have to be born is not decided by them. They don't have any status in the family in spite of doing lot of household work from dawn to dusk including fetching water, fuel wood and fodder from long distances, cleaning house, washing clothes, cooking food, taking care of a number of children, grazing the cattle etc. they are just a sex machine for their husband and an unpaid servant for the rest of the family. Having sex (without their will or choice), begetting children, performing unlimited household work under the veil and to die one day is the harsh truth of life of these poor rural women. It becomes nastier and more cumbersome for those who can't produce a son.

Though I have described the situation of the women in the state of Rajasthan, but it is more or less the same in the rural areas in other states of India. **Human rights or advancement of women doesn't mean anything for these rural women too. Both these populations have never heard about MDGs or the gender equality.**

GBS, after carrying out a baseline survey in 160 villages in 10 districts of Rajasthan, has been implementing number of programs/projects with both of these populations on various issues including awareness on reproductive and sexual health and rights, prevention of infection from HIV/AIDS and other STIs, human rights, women's rights etc. and providing the women with general health care services, source of potable water and non formal education for their children during last 15 years. GBS has been organizing the women in Self Help Groups (SHG), motivating them for small savings every month and depositing in the Bank accounts opened in the name of their SHG. Also, they are provided with vocational training and involved in income generating activities. More than 8,500 poor rural women have so far been involved in 820 SHG. More and more women are now joining SHG in order to become economically independent. Focus of GBS work has mainly been on reducing the drudgery of these rural/tribal women and upgrading their status in the family and society as well.

What are your core policy messages for the UN inter-governmental decision-making?

Keeping in mind the situation of women in thousands of the villages in India I would like to mention here that the focus of the core policy must be on rural areas where the women are still deprived of any ray of development and so called '**advancement of women**'. Following could be some steps towards improving the situation:

- More budgetary allocations of funds for over development and advancement of the women of rural/tribal areas;
- Special cell to be established for advancement of women in rural areas;
- Focus of the work for the development of women in rural /tribal areas must be on education, RSHR, creating basic amenities and infrastructural facilities, mobile health care centers etc.
- Involvement of women representatives and civil societies including NGOs/CBOs at all stages of development works planned for them must be mandatory
- Rigorous M & E should be carried out in collaboration with the women representatives.

What critical actions on gender equality are now required in light of the new challenges (e.g. economic crisis, climate change)?

The two main reasons of low status of the women in the family and society in rural/tribal areas are their economic dependence on men; illiteracy and ignorance. Therefore, the preference must be given to:

- Non formal education for the women in rural/tribal areas;
- Establishing vocational training centers in order to develop their skill and making the women economically self-sustained;

Awareness building on the relevant issues i.e. forestation, water conservation, sanitation, hygiene, adopting small family norms and health seeking behavior etc.

What are the specific commitments that you would like leaders to take forward to 2015 in order to advance achievements on the MDGs?

The following might be the most relevant commitments and appropriate to achieve the MDGs:

Free and compulsory primary education for the girls;

Making the women of all ages literate must be mandatory;

Earmarking special budgetary provisions for delivering services and facilities to women in rural areas for reproductive and sexual health;

Now if this is the fact about a country like Sudan- which is in my opinion resembles many other countries- what is left for women?

Corrupt politics, globally and locally, repressive rules, and while the governors of the country are busy accumulating profits and stealing resources they were never busy targeting women, and hunting them on the streets, flogging, imprisoning, depriving them from their rights to work , and violating all their rights, that was established under International conventions .

How poverty looks like? Ask the women and you will get the full picture. Without a collaborative and holistic attitude towards challenging women's poverty, our efforts will be in vain and 20 years from now we will be saying the same. What changes in Sudan since 1995 is that more women now are aware and ready to challenge and to struggle form better positions in the society, more organizations and local group are struggling to address women's issues in the absence of rules or laws that protect women, and I believe the international community is more aware of the grav

of social reproduction, this problem is rather unnoticed because of the invisibility of social reproduction activities – undertaken mostly within the family and through female unpaid work – for traditional economic analysis.

Therefore, it is critical to:

- Recognize the fundamental role of social reproduction activities to the functioning of the real economy, by collecting data on the amount of work and its impacts on social well-being, as well as developing public policies to avoid overreliance on women's unpaid work, thus overburdening women. Social reproduction work should be shared across government, market, communities and families – and equally between men and women.
- Ensure diverse sources of financing for development – especially needed in times of crisis.
- Not reinforce gender inequalities and thus assess the quality of financing for sectors of economies that are intensive in female labor.
- Ensure the participation of women's organizations and women's rights advocates in debates and decision making processes to find ways out of the crisis.
- Re-conceive and strengthen the role of the state at many levels, countering its on-going erosion (and address the need to reinvent the boundaries and interactions between the state and the market, focusing on strengthening citizenship and democracy).
- Focus on human rights, democracy and social justice, when seeking ways out of the crisis, not on the 'needs' of the macro-economy or the main economic players.
- Ensure that short-term responses do not come at the expense of long-term sustainability and the achievement of social justice.
- Have a moratorium on debt; funds that are needed to mitigate the fallout from the financial crisis should be non-debt creating, as well as in addition to the existing commitments on Official Development Assistance (ODA).
- Reform the International Financial Institutions and work towards a new global governance system.
- Have the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank eliminate policy conditions attached to their loans. All countries should be able to use counter cyclical policies to protect living standards and decent work.
- Consistently integrate a human rights based approach when examining and deciding on responses to tackle the current crises. In fact, this is the duty of the state as it has to protect its citizens and fulfill human rights obligations.
- Promote the human rights based approach as an accountability mechanism (with an ESCR perspective), not as a northern or UN imposition, but as states' obligations across the world. This will require stronger civil societies (and women's organizations in particular) and direct financial support for advocacy, watchdog and accountability actions; as well as stronger support to enable developing countries to strengthen their own state capacities to implement, report and be accountable for their international obligations.

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example, issues of land property laws and regulations within financial institutions that often discriminate against women and prevent them from accessing larger loans, etc. need to be addressed and changed.

Responses to the systemic crisis must put human rights norms at the centre, including participation, non-discrimination and universality of measures, if they are to reduce vulnerabilities and promote sustainable change and just development for all and are not to lead to a new crash with the next speculation bubble.

Responses promoting policy coherence must also ensure coherence towards Human Rights standards and Internationally Agreed Development Goals including gender equality.

Investments in women should be firmly rooted in a rights-based approach based on the inherent dignity of every human being. Greater opportunities for women are linked to economic growth and development, but this can only be achieved if the international division of labor is deeply reformed and sustained through long-term investments in responses to the whole spectrum of women's rights violations.

Investments in women should take a holistic approach that recognizes the varied social, economic, cultural and political factors that dictate the roles and expectations placed on women. Linear strategies addressing any of these factors in isolation are unlikely to achieve lasting change, and a micro perspective that can deliver locally in the short-term will probably not be sustainable in the medium term, if this woman or group of women are then burdened by trade, financial or economic international rules that undermine their and their country's capacity to promote endogenous development.

Direct strategies that are being launched in response to the crisis to invest in women should be based on the priorities and agendas articulated by women themselves, and draw on their own experiences and lessons from the history of women-led organizing by women's rights movements and organizations. If we repeat the sad history of imposing development models, we will undermine the women's rights and women's empowerment agenda and reproduce a "paternalistic" approach that is not owned by those that are supposed to be "empowered" and thus, another waste of time and money.

c) A stronger UN policy and operational role on economic development and gender equality

1) A central UN role in crisis responses and the emerging global governance

The main forum for coordinating responses to the crisis, providing a space to build a common vision, representing 192 countries' visions and interests and with an existing institutional reality, is the United Nations (UN).

As members of the Women's Working Group (already referenced by Marina Durano from DAWN), we have been and are calling for a re-positioning of the UN's leadership role in a new global development, economic and financial architecture that fully integrates gender equality and women's rights, this includes amongst other points the need to strengthen the authority of the UN to lead the necessary rights-based pro-development economic and financial reforms, in particular responding to issues of global macroeconomic policy including its social and ecological dimensions.

Also the G20 and the IMF should be brought under the mandate and authority of the United Nations. The existing relationship between the UN and the Bretton Woods Institutions will need to be reviewed and revised in support of a new deal for a sustainable future while the G20 must immediately take its rightful place among, not outside of, the G192, which has become the commonly used term when speaking of the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA).

2) The new UN gender entity should have a strong operational capacity on the ground. The proposed new UN gender entity is an important opportunity to build on lessons from past experience and take a significant step forward in advancing women's rights and gender equality. However, it can only fulfill this promise if it has strong, operational capacity on the ground and avoids the pitfalls that past experience has shown come with a reliance on gender mainstreaming. Strong, specific accountability mechanisms and adequate resources are also vital for the new entity to deliver on its mandate.

d) Moving from aid effectiveness to inclusive and sustainable development effectiveness

The current Aid Effectiveness process under the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) with its Paris Declaration (2005) and Accra Agenda for Action (2008) has been evaluated by many civil society organizations, including women's organizations and other development actors as a narrow framework for development cooperation and as a very technical or instrumental agenda with a strong focus on procedures for aid management and delivery, not on the impact aid is having on achieving development goals. An understanding has evolved that sustainable development effectiveness (not aid effectiveness) is a more inclusive or comprehensive framework.

While such a development effectiveness framework must mean that any efforts directed towards improving the effectiveness of aid must ultimately aim at sustainable, inclusive, broad based and just development, there are several components to be taken into consideration:

- Any development processes, policies or practices must ensure that Human Rights, including Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ESCR) and environmental rights, are respected, protected and fulfilled with an integrated gendered approach.
- Developing countries' priorities and development plans are paramount; as such no policy conditionalities of any kind must be imposed explicitly or implicitly upon developing countries. The same applies for tied aid.
- Predictable and long-term aid must be the norm rather than the exception.
- Root causes of poverty and structural inequalities (such as gender inequalities or inequalities between and within countries) must be addressed systematically and be taken into consideration in all policies and practices.
- Indicators measuring progress must focus on development effectiveness outcomes and be gender sensitive and gender specific.
- International cooperation or "a new aid architecture" must be established and based on a holistic, rights-based approach and situated in a truly democratic and multi-stakeholder space (and thus the OECD should not be its norm-setting forum, considering its donor oriented vision and composition). The UN Development Cooperation Forum (DCF), under the United Nations Economic and Social Council, should be strengthened to become the main space for standard-setting on development cooperation.

e) MDG 8: Haiti as evidence of the lack of progress on a global equal partnership

There is no doubt that the international community is facing a difficult test in the current disaster in Haiti, and this, among many other considerations, shows the need for a real and equal global partnership, but also highlights the fragility of the current aid mechanisms and frameworks (official and NGOs, etc.).

With the Women Human Rights Defenders International Coalition we suggest the following policy considerations to address critical concerns for integrated security in Haiti following the recent disaster:

- Security and support for women human rights defenders and other activists and relief workers are paramount to uphold human rights and restore peace and security.

- Humanitarian aid delivery systems must uphold the principle of non-discrimination and meet the specific needs of vulnerable groups, including pregnant women and women-headed households.
- Humanitarian responses must include urgent attention to the psychological impact of the disaster, the need to grieve and recover.
- A safe space must be secured for women and LGBTI people to meet and organize as a key security consideration given the prevalence of gender-based violence in situations of crisis.
- Donors should allocate funds not only for emergency relief, but also to determine the distribution of aid with the aim of securing human rights and long-term development in the country.
- The highly militarized response to delivering humanitarian aid in Haiti should eventually give way to increasing participation of civil society and defenders of women's and human rights in the rehabilitation and reconstruction of the country.

You can access the full statement from which these points are drawn (<http://www.awid.org/eng/Issues-and-Analysis/Library/Women-and-Sports/Policy-Recommendations-to-Address-Critical-Security-Concerns-and-Needs-of-Women-Human-Rights-Defenders-in-Haiti-in-the-Aftermath-of-the-12-January-2010-Earthquake>)

Kind regards,

Natalie Raaber, on behalf of the Association for Women's Rights in Development (AWID)

Linnette Vassell, Women's Resource & Outreach Centre, Jamaica

Dear Colleagues:

Thanks all of you for this wonderful discussion.

Among the specific commitments that I propose that we seek towards 2015 are :

- 1) Addressing the provision of water and sanitation as a priority to support, enhance and undergird the struggle for gender equality and women's empowerment. A discussion on the link of water and sanitation and the MDGs and in particular MDG 3, and strategies to bring this as a key aspect of the work of the international women's movement is needed and can perhaps be part of the agenda of CSW and CSD
- 2) Supporting with resources (financial and technical) the work of civil society organizations, especially women's and community based organizations that are committed to the realization of the MDGs.

Anita Mathew, India

Dear Mark.

Regarding the three areas you have delineated here goes:

What are your core policy messages for the UN inter-governmental decision-making?

UN agencies and country governments must ensure **participation of women**

National Poverty Reduction Strategies (N