

# GENDER EQUALITY & THE MILLENNIUM DEVELOPMENT GOALS



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Gender  
Equality &  
the millennium  
development goals



Gender and Development Group  
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# Gender Equality and the Millennium Development Goals

## Introduction

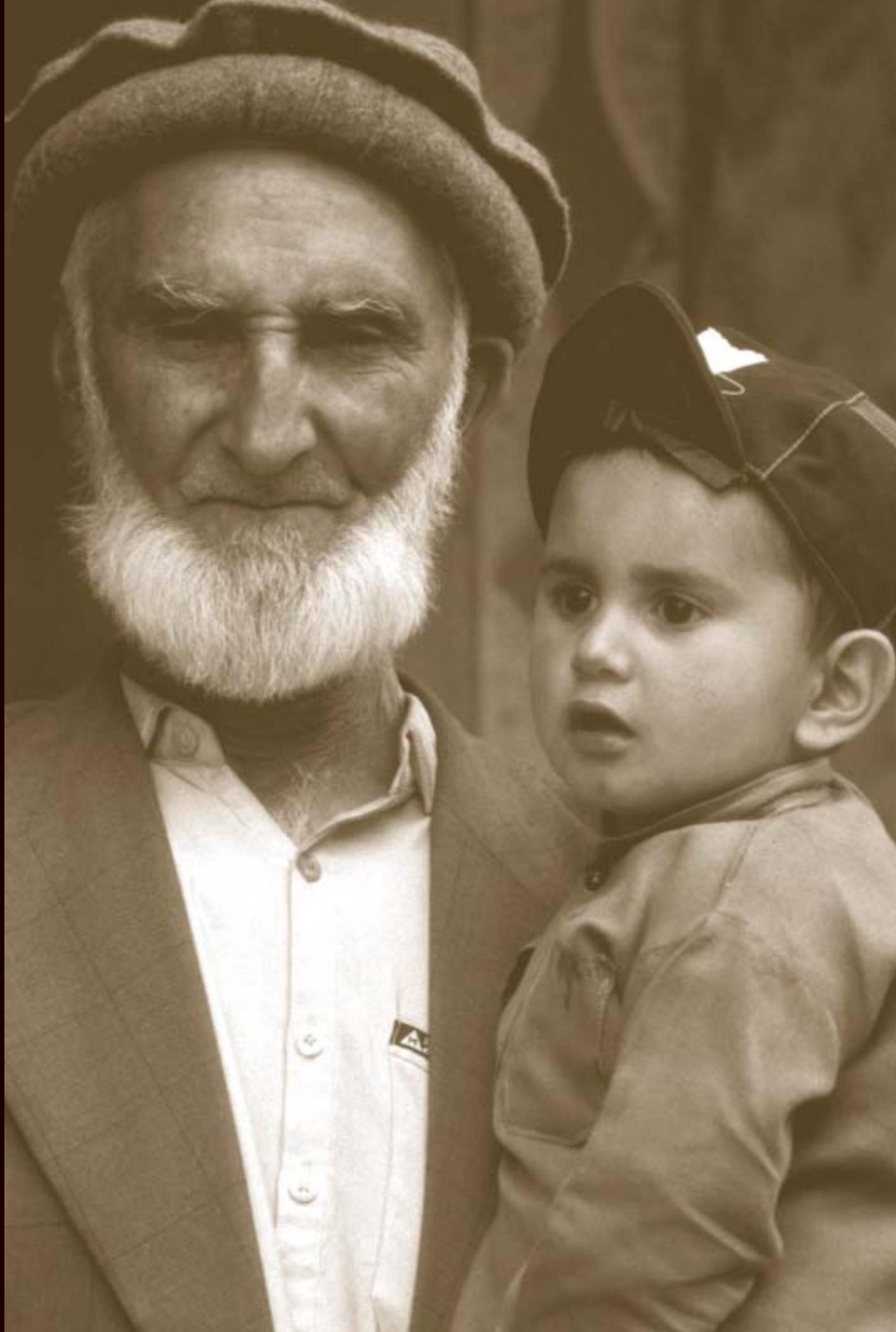
The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) provide a shared vision of a much improved world by 2015, where extreme poverty is cut in half, child mortality is greatly reduced, gender disparities in primary and secondary education are eliminated, women are more empowered, and health and environment indicators improve within a global partnership for development (see Box 1). These goals are ambitious and their attainment will require a serious and concerted global effort. Progress toward achieving the MDGs has been mixed: the goals for eradicating extreme poverty and providing access to safe water are likely to be met, at least at the global level. However, based on current rates of progress, it may be more difficult to meet many of the other goals by 2015, such as achieving universal primary education, promoting gender equality and reducing child mortality. A gender equality perspective will facilitate attaining the goals – gender equality is important not only as a goal in itself, but also as a path towards achieving the other goals.

Gender inequality, which remains pervasive worldwide, tends to lower the productivity of labor and the efficiency of labor allocation in households and the economy, intensifying the unequal distribution of resources. It also contributes to the non-monetary aspects of poverty – lack of security, opportunity and empowerment – that lower the quality of life for both men and women. While women and girls bear the largest and most direct costs of these inequalities, the costs cut broadly across society, ultimately hindering development and poverty reduction.

The main objectives of this paper are: i) to show the strong linkages between gender equality and all the MDGs; ii) to show that working for gender equality offers a compelling, win-win approach for policy makers and planners towards attaining and implementing the MDGs; and iii) to give examples of how gender equality can be integrated into MDG policies and interventions.

The paper starts with a general overview of the Gender Equality Goal, followed by sections on the links between gender equality and the Millennium Development Goals on Poverty, Education, Health and Nutrition, and Environment.

*“These goals are ambitious and their attainment will require a serious and concerted global effort.”*



# Linking Gender Equality to the Millennium Development Goals

The Millennium Declaration, signed in September 2000 at the United Nations' Millennium Summit, commits the member countries "to promote gender equality and the empowerment of women, as effective ways to combat poverty, hunger and disease and to stimulate development that is truly sustainable."<sup>3</sup> A year after the adoption of the Millennium Declaration, UN Secretary General Kofi Annan proposed a "road map" for implementing the Millennium Summit Goals. The "road map" identified the Millennium Development Goals, along with a set of 18 time-bound targets and 48 indicators. The Millennium Development Goals thus mirror the Millennium Declaration's commitment to gender equality.

The goals of the Millennium Declaration are not new; they are intended to advance progress on some of the 12 critical areas identified by the Beijing Platform for Action, which was adopted by all 189 United Nations member countries at the Fourth World Conference on Women in 1995. They also support the goals of the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), adopted by the UN General Assembly in 1979, and ratified by 170 countries, and the other international conventions and treaties that guarantee the rights of women and girls. What is new about the MDGs is that they involve concrete, time-bound, quantitative targets for action.

Gender issues are highly relevant to achieving all the MDGs, be it protecting the environment, achieving sustainable development or enabling universal access to health care. Because the MDGs are mutually reinforcing, progress towards one goal affects progress towards the others. Success in many of the goals will have positive impacts on gender equality, just as progress toward gender equality will help further other goals. The third of the Millennium Development Goals (to promote gender equality and empower women) addresses gender equality specifically.

Although the target of the MDG on gender equality (Box 2) appears to be associated mainly with eliminating gender disparities in primary and secondary education, the road map includes three additional indicators of gender equality: literacy rates, the share of women working in non-agriculture jobs, and the proportion of seats women hold in national parliaments. The inclusion of these indicators suggests that while achieving equal access to education is an important step towards gender equality, it is by no means sufficient. Even as gender disparities in education are reduced, other gender differences tend to persist – in labor market opportunities, legal rights, and the ability to participate in public life and decision making.

## Box 1

### The Millennium Development Goals

1. Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger
2. Achieve universal primary education
3. Promote gender equality and empower women
4. Reduce child mortality
5. Improve maternal health
6. Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases
7. Ensure environmental sustainability
8. Develop a global partnership for development

<sup>3</sup>United Nations 2000. *United Nations Millennium Declaration*

## Box 2

### Goal 3. Promote Gender Equality and Empower Women

**Target:** Eliminate gender disparity in primary and secondary education, preferably by 2005, and in all levels of education no later than 2015

**Indicators:**

- Ratio of girls to boys in primary, secondary and tertiary education
- Ratio of literate females to males of 15-to-24-year-olds
- Share of women in wage employment in the non-agricultural sector
- Proportion of seats held by women in national parliaments

### Gender Inequalities Remain Pervasive Worldwide

In no region of the developing world are women equal to men in legal, social, and economic rights (Figure 1). Gender gaps in access to and control of resources, in economic opportunities, and in power and political voice are widespread. To date, only four countries (Denmark, Finland, Norway and Sweden) have achieved a combination of approximate gender equality in secondary school enrollment, at least 30 percent of seats in parliaments or legislatures are held by women, and women represent approximately 50 percent of paid employment in non-agricultural activities.

In most countries, women continue to have less access to social services and productive resources than men:

- women remain vastly under-represented in national and local assemblies, accounting

for less than 10 percent of the seats in national parliaments, on average (Figure 2);

- in most low-income countries, girls are less likely to attend school than boys. Even when girls start school at the same rate as boys, they are more likely to drop out (in many cases after getting pregnant, often due to lack of access to reproductive health services);

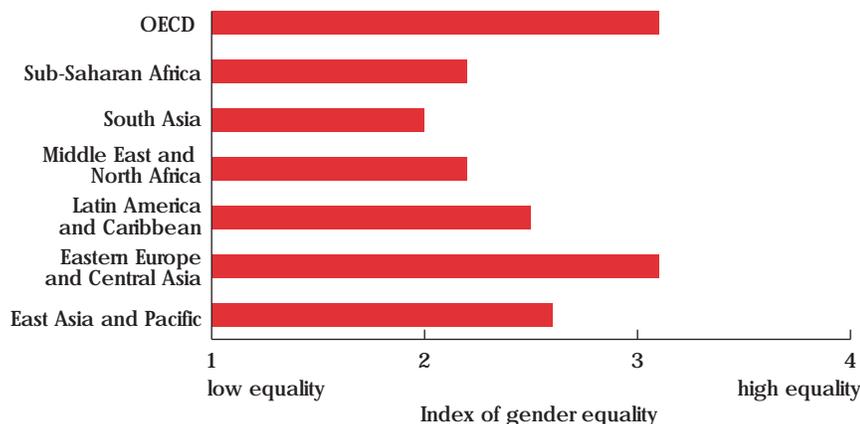
- in industrial countries, women in the wage sector earn an average of 77 percent of what men earn; in developing countries, they earn 73 percent. Only about one-fifth of the wage gap can be explained by gender differences in education, work experience, or job characteristics.

Despite persistent gender inequalities worldwide, there has been progress since 1975, when the first World Conference on Women was held in Mexico City. In many parts of the world, gender inequalities in schooling and health have decreased,<sup>4</sup> though significant gaps persist in some countries.

Progress has also been made in recognizing the cross-cutting nature of gender issues and their relevance to development effectiveness and poverty reduction.<sup>5</sup> There is now a shared understanding within the development community that development policies and actions that fail to take gender inequality into account and fail to address disparities between males and females will have limited effectiveness and serious cost implications. For example, a recent study estimates that a country failing to meet the gender educational target would suffer a deficit in per capita income of 0.1-0.3 percentage

**Figure 1**

### In No Region of the World are Women and Men Equal in Legal, Social or Economic Rights



Source: World Bank, 2001.

<sup>4</sup>For example, during the second half of the 20th century, the primary enrollment rates of girls about doubled in South Asia, Sub-Saharan Africa, North Africa, and the Middle East, rising faster than boy's enrollment rates; and women's life expectancy increased by 15-20 years in developing countries. World Bank. 2001. *Engendering Development - Through Gender Equality in Rights, Resources and Voice*.

<sup>5</sup>The increased awareness of the relevance of gender issues to development effectiveness is due in part to conferences on gender issues such as the four World Conferences on Women held in Mexico City, Nairobi, Copenhagen and Beijing, as well as other global conferences, such as the World Summit on Environment and Development in Rio, the International Conference on Population and Development in Cairo, and the Social Summit in Copenhagen.

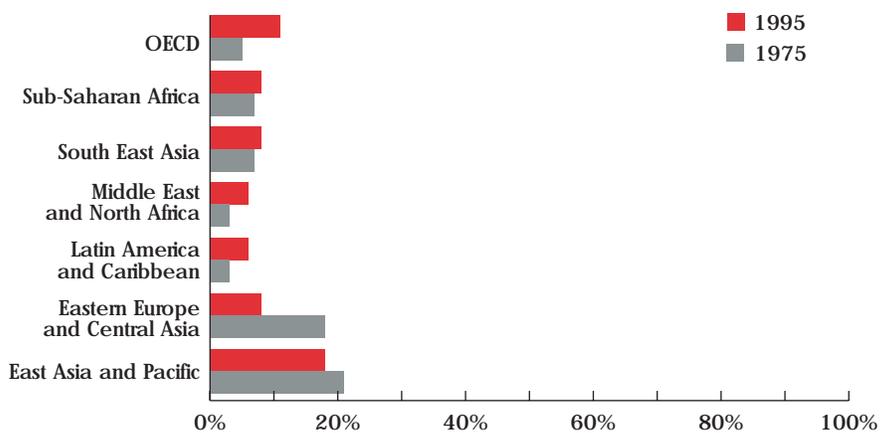
points.<sup>6</sup> Also, one of the main findings of the Arab Human Development Report 2002 is that the low empowerment of women is one of three deficits which have seriously hampered human development in the region over the last three decades.<sup>7</sup> Thus, an approach to development that strives to increase gender equality has high payoffs for human well-being.

<sup>6</sup>Dina Abu-Ghaida and Stephan Klasen. *The Costs of Missing the Millennium Development Goal on Gender Equity*. World Bank, 2002.

<sup>7</sup>Arab Human Development Report 2002. *Creating Opportunities for Future Generations*. United Nations Development Programme. Arab Fund for Economic and Social Development, 2002.

**Figure 2**

**Female Representation in Parliament Continues to be Low**



Source: World Bank, 2001.



# Gender Equality and the Poverty Goal

The poverty goal (Box 3) calls for reducing by half the proportion of people living in extreme poverty by 2015—from 29 percent to 14.5 percent of all people in low and middle income countries. It also calls for halving the proportion of people who suffer from hunger.

The definition of poverty has traditionally been based on per capita income. Focusing solely on this indicator, global poverty at present encompasses more than a billion people who live on less than a dollar a day, or, more broadly, over 2.5 billion who live on less than \$2 a day. But the definition of poverty has been broadened to encompass other dimensions, such as lack of empowerment, opportunity, capacity and security.<sup>8</sup> Meeting the poverty goal will therefore require a multi-dimensional approach. Because many aspects of gender inequality influence the different dimensions of poverty, interventions that promote gender equality are critical in the design of strategies and actions to meet the poverty goal.

By raising the productivity of labor and improving the efficiency of labor allocation, gender equality has a direct impact on economic growth and the reduction of income poverty; it also increases economic opportunities and empowers women. Gender equality's importance for economic growth makes it critical in accelerating progress towards achieving the income poverty target. The PRSP process provides a good forum for adapting the MDGs to country circumstances and for integrating gender throughout a country's poverty reduction strategy.

## Links Between Gender Equality and Poverty Reduction

Many variables are critical for poverty reduction, both on the investment climate side and on the empowerment side. However, one of the key conclusions of recent research is that, other things being equal, gender inequality retards both economic growth and poverty reduction.

Among the links between gender equality and growth are:

- *Investment in human capital, especially girls' and women's education and health, raises productivity.* Educated, healthy women are more able to engage in productive activities, find formal sector employment, earn higher incomes and enjoy greater returns to schooling than are uneducated women who suffer from poor nutrition and health, or are victims of domestic violence. Moreover, educated women give greater emphasis to schooling their own children, thereby improving the

### Box 3

#### Goal 1. Eradicate Extreme Poverty and Hunger

**Target:** Halve, between 1990 and 2015, the proportion of people whose income is less than one dollar a day.

**Target:** Halve, between 1990 and 2015, the proportion of people who suffer from hunger.

<sup>8</sup>World Bank 2000. *World Development Report 2000/2001: Attacking Poverty*.

productivity of the next generation. For example, children of literate mothers in India spend two more hours per day studying than do the children of illiterate mothers.

- *Increased access to productive assets and resources also raises productivity.* Many societies have institutions and practices that limit women's access to productive assets and resources such as land, financial services and employment in the formal sector. Land titling is especially problematic. Women rarely have title to land, even when they are its primary users, and are thus often unable to use land as collateral for credit. Evidence from several African countries suggests that female farmers are as efficient as male farmers, but are less productive because they have less access to productive inputs and human capital. *In Sub-Saharan Africa, if women's access to agricultural inputs was on a par with men's, total agricultural outputs could increase by 6–20 percent.*

- *Time poverty created by poor infrastructure reduces productivity.* In many settings, including the middle income countries of Eastern, Central and Southern Europe, women work significantly more hours per day than men; in many low income countries, they spend long hours collecting fuel and water. This time poverty limits their ability to engage in income generating activities and to participate in community affairs. Because the gender-based division of labor extends to children, women's time poverty means that girls are often kept out of school to help with household work.

- *Information and Communications Technologies (ICTs) can enable greater participation of poor women and men in the world economy.* ICTs have an enormous potential to reach dispersed rural populations and provide them with education and training, job opportunities, access to markets, availability of information important for their economic activities, and greater

participation in the political process. For example, *Tortas Peru* is a women-owned enterprise that uses the Internet to reach and service a wider market, selling cakes and desserts through their website, mainly targeting the 2 million Peruvians living outside the country, who send orders by email. With just three hours of instruction, the housewife-members of the network, who bake and deliver the cakes, learn to use email, find the website, and interact with clients through public computer booths.

Not only does gender inequality exacerbate poverty; poverty also exacerbates inequality between males and females. Inequalities between girls and boys in access to schooling or health care are more acute among the poor than among those with higher incomes. Whether measured in terms of command over productive resources, or in terms of power to influence the political process, poor men tend to have less influence in the community than non-poor men, and poor women generally have the least influence. These disparities disadvantage women and girls and limit their capacity to participate in and benefit from development.

*“Not only does gender inequality exacerbate poverty; poverty also exacerbates inequality between males and females.”*

The World Bank Photo Library/Curt Carmemark



## Links Between Gender Equality and Reducing Hunger

One-hundred-and-fifty million children in low and middle income countries are malnourished; at current rates of improvement, 140 million children will still be malnourished in 2020.<sup>9</sup> There is a strong negative association between the mother's schooling and child mortality, because low maternal levels of education translate into malnutrition and poor quality of care for children. The latest Demographic and Health Surveys, for more than 40 developing countries, show that the mortality rate of children under five is lower in households where mothers have some primary schooling than in households where they have no schooling, and is much lower in households where mothers have secondary schooling.<sup>10</sup> A study of 63 countries showed that gains in women's

### Box 4

#### Gender and Access to the Legal System

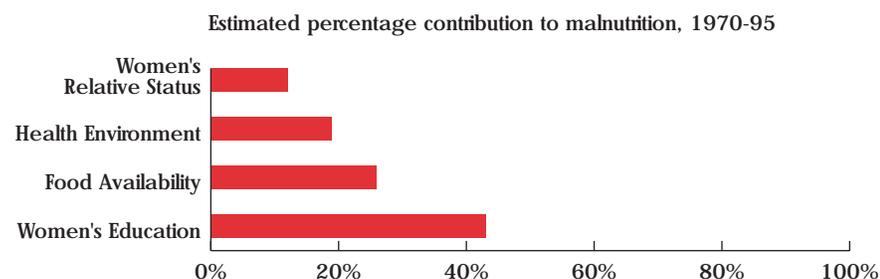
In many parts of the world, laws discriminate against women by constraining the conditions of their employment, restricting their ownership of productive resources, or limiting their rights to travel or to political representation. In Ecuador, for example, mandatory court representation by lawyers and unofficial fees have restricted women's access to justice. The Ecuador Judicial Reform Project included a legal aid component to respond to the needs of poor women. Under this project, four pilot centers were established in urban areas to provide legal services to low-income women. The centers increased women's access to the courts and significantly improved the efficiency of the legal system. For example, they were able to resolve child support cases in 3-8 weeks, cases which had previously languished in the courts for several years.

<sup>9</sup>World Bank. 2002. *World Development Indicators*.

<sup>10</sup>World Bank. 2001. *Engendering Development-Through Gender Equality in Rights, Resources, and Voice*.

**Figure 3**

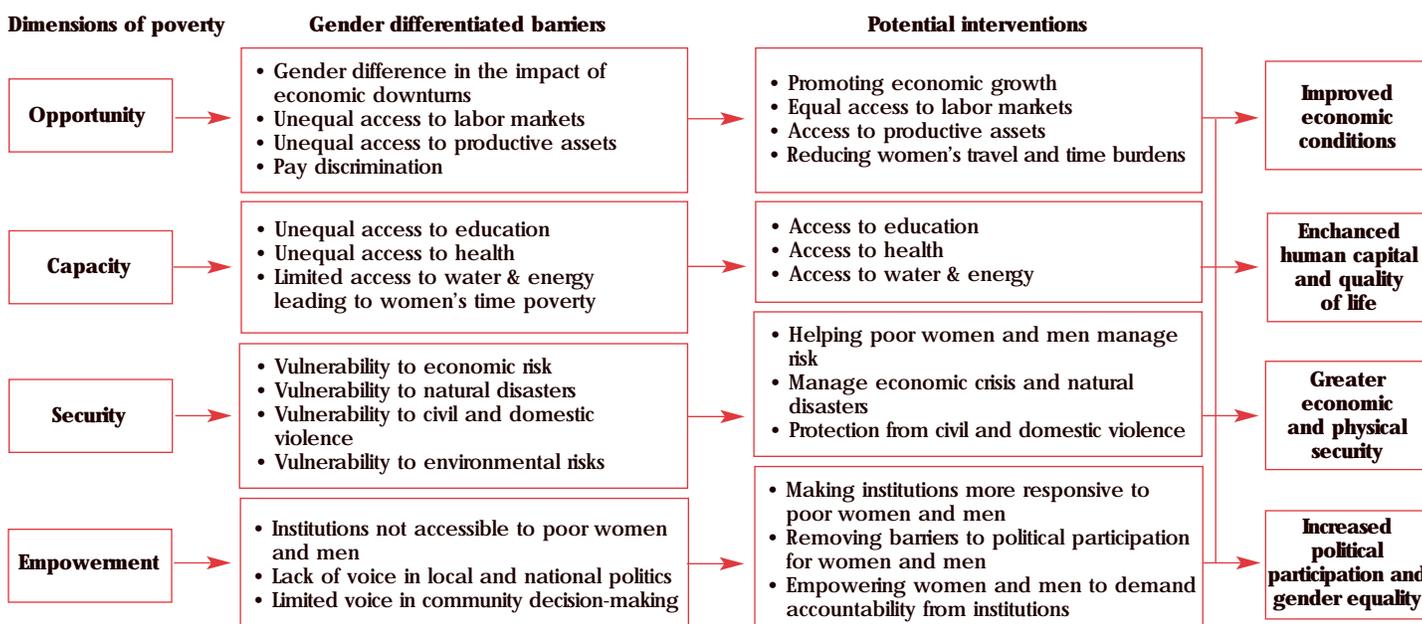
#### Women's Education Significantly Reduces Malnutrition



Source: Smith and Haddad, 2000.

**Figure 4**

#### Gender Equality and its Links to Poverty



Source: Adapted from *A Sourcebook for Poverty Reduction Strategies*. Chapter 2. Cross-Cutting Issues: Gender, World Bank, 2002.

education made the single largest contribution to declines in malnutrition in 1970-1995, accounting for 43 percent of the total, followed by food availability, the government's commitment to health at local and national levels, and women's relative status (Figure 3).<sup>11</sup> In the fight against hunger, it is important also to note that women and girls are more affected by hunger than men and boys, as females often are the ones to eat last – and least – in poor families.

### Gender Sensitive Approaches to Poverty Reduction

Meeting the poverty goal requires a multi-dimensional approach that takes into account economic growth and the other dimensions of poverty: empower-

ment, security and capacity. Gender issues affect the different dimensions of poverty in many different ways, as Figure 4 illustrates. For example, improving poor women's legal literacy and facilitating their access to the legal system can increase their chances of inheriting or gaining title to land, thereby making it easier for them to obtain credit and providing them with stronger incentives to improve the productivity of land (Box 4). Similarly, interventions aimed at increasing women's agricultural productivity can reduce poverty (Box 5). These potential interventions are broadly defined here, and would be made specific as they are adapted to individual country circumstances, for example, through the PRSP process.

#### Box 5

#### Gender and Agricultural Productivity

Recent advances in agricultural productivity have often by-passed women farmers and reduced their productivity. The Xinjiang Agricultural Project in China permitted individuals to obtain land and resources for activities traditionally carried out by women, such as grape production and raising small livestock. The project helped increase women's income and agricultural production. In Hami, more than 60 percent of grape production is now contracted to women. In Zhaosu, where women keep small ruminants, one participant increased her income tenfold from 52 to 580 yuan/month by raising 200 lambs. In addition to raising family income, women's greater economic contributions helped to increase their social standing.



The World Bank Photo Library/Yosef Hadar

<sup>11</sup>Smith and Haddad. 2000. Women's relative status was measured by the ratio of female life expectancy at birth to male life expectancy at birth.



# Gender Equality and the Education Goal

The education goal (Box 6) is to ensure that all children, boys and girls alike, complete primary education by 2015. The goal captures components of the Dakar Framework for Action<sup>12</sup> as well as targets set at the Social Summit in 1995.

Of the 150 million children aged 6–11 not in school, over 90 million are girls. Gender equality in schooling is thus critical for meeting the educational goal. Moreover, there are region-specific issues. Women in South Asia have on average only half as many years of schooling as men. In Sub-Saharan Africa, female gross primary enrollment is less than 60 percent, far short of the 100 percent called for in the education goal.<sup>13</sup> In Eastern Europe and Central Asia, the increasing incidence of poverty has resulted in reduced enrollment and completion rates for both boys and girls, boys being at a particular disadvantage with regards to secondary education.<sup>14</sup> Although there has been a clear trend toward gender equality in education in the last three decades, the gains have been slow and uneven (see Box 7).

## Links Between Gender Equality and Achieving Universal Primary Education

Meeting the education goal requires addressing the conditions peculiar to girls or boys that prevent them from attending or completing primary school. For example, girls often contribute significantly to household and agricultural work, which may adversely affect their school attendance and performance. Where women face limited employment and income-generating opportunities, families are often reluctant to invest in girls' education. In some settings, concerns about girls' safety and modesty may make families unwilling to send girls to school, particularly if schooling requires distant travel or schools fail to provide sex-segregated sanitary facilities.

Evidence suggests that reducing the costs to households of girls' schooling can be an effective strategy for promoting female attendance and improving girls' enrollment and retention rates. Families' willingness to school, feed and provide health care to girls is far more strongly determined by income and the costs of providing these services than is the case for boys.<sup>15</sup> Where policies and programs help to reduce these costs (or raise family income), girls are more likely to be sent to school.

In general, reducing the costs of schooling, addressing parental concerns about female modesty or safety, and increasing returns to families from investing

### Box 6

#### Goal 2. Achieve Universal Primary Education

**Target:** Ensure that, by 2015, children everywhere, boys and girls alike, will be able to complete a full course of primary schooling.

<sup>12</sup>In Dakar in April 2000, the international community endorsed a Framework for Action to achieve six education goals, including the achievement of universal primary education by 2015 and the elimination of gender disparities in primary and secondary education by 2005.

<sup>13</sup>World Bank. 2001. *Engendering Development: Through Gender Equality in Rights, Resources, and Voice*.

<sup>14</sup>Paci, Pierella. 2002. *Gender in Transition*. World Bank.

<sup>15</sup>Schultz, T. Paul. 1987. *School Expenditure and Enrollments, 1960-1980: The Effects of Income, Price and Population Growth*. In D. Gale Johnson and R. Lee, eds. *Population Growth and Economic Development*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press.

## Box 7

### Declines in Girls' Secondary School Enrollment

Between 1985 and 1997, girls' secondary school enrollments rose in a majority of countries, but declined in:

- 11 out of 33 countries in Sub-Saharan Africa;
- 7 out of 11 countries in Central and Western Asia;
- 2 out of 21 countries in Asia and the Pacific;
- 6 out of 26 countries in Latin America and the Caribbean;
- 6 out of 9 countries in Eastern Europe;
- 1 out of 23 countries in Western Europe and other developed countries.

Source: UNIFEM, *Progress of the World's Women*, 2000.

## Box 8

### Gender Aware Design Can Have Positive Influence on Education Delivery

The design of school systems plays an important role in facilitating equitable access for girls and boys. Evidence from Bangladesh, Kenya and Pakistan indicates that girls' enrollment is more sensitive than boys' to school quality and to specific delivery attributes such as the presence of female teachers, sex-segregated schools and facilities, and safe transport to and from the school. Addressing such considerations can significantly increase girls' enrollments.

in female schooling through improvements in school quality can overcome social and economic barriers to girls' education. Some effective strategies to increase the enrollment and retention of girls include: providing stipends for rural girls to cover the educational costs of secondary school attendance; training and hiring more female teachers; building and improving sanitary facilities and providing a source of clean water for girls to carry home after school; supporting village education committees, formed by parents, teachers, and community representatives to provide parents a visible role in promoting quality education; and using vouchers to channel public funds to private and non-profit groups, to open and maintain public schools.

Goal 2 is especially important for achieving Goal 1. Evidence from around the world shows that eliminating gender disparities in education is one of the most effective development actions a country can take. When a country educates both its girls and boys, economic productivity tends to rise, maternal and infant mortality usually fall, fertility rates decline and the health and educational prospects of the next generation are improved. For example:

- If the countries of South Asia, Sub-Saharan Africa and the Middle East and North Africa had closed the gender gap in schooling between 1960 and 1992 as quickly as East Asia did, their income per capita could have grown by an additional 0.5-0.9 percentage point per year (Figure 5).<sup>16</sup> In Africa, this would have meant close to a doubling of per capita income growth.
- There are strong statistical associations between the number of grades of schooling mothers complete and such outcomes as their age at marriage, their number of births, the health and mortality of their children, and their children's educational attainment.<sup>17</sup> In Brazil, for example, illiterate women have an average of 6.5 children, whereas women with secondary schooling have an average of 2.5 children.<sup>18</sup>

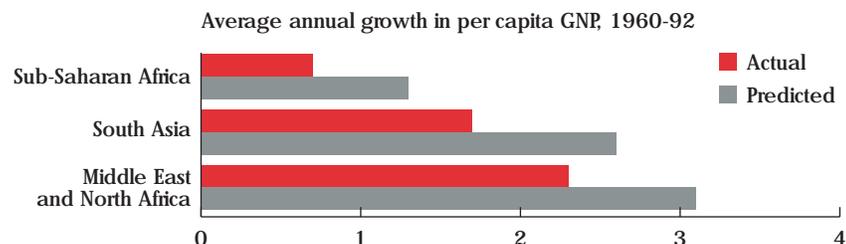
<sup>16</sup>Klasen, Stephan. 1999. *Does Gender Inequality Reduce Growth and Development? Evidence from Cross-country Regressions*.

<sup>17</sup>Jejeebhoy, Shireen. 1995. *Women's Education Autonomy and Reproductive Behavior: Experience from Developing Countries*. Oxford, UK, Clarendon Press. Bledsloe, Caroline, ed. 1999. *Critical Perspectives on Schooling and Fertility in the Developing World*. Washington, D.C., National Academy Press.

<sup>18</sup>Chlebowska, Krystyna. 1990. *El Otro Tercer Mundo, La Mujer Campesina ante el Analfabetismo*. Paris. UNESCO.

Figure 5

### Faster Progress in Closing Gender Gaps in Schooling Would Accelerate Economic Growth



Source: World Bank, 2001.

## Gender Sensitive Approaches for Achieving Universal Primary Education

Recognizing the nature of gender gaps in schooling, and the reasons that lie behind them, is important for meeting the education goal (see Box 8). In parts of Eastern Europe, Central Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean, boys have lower secondary enrollments than girls. Here, meeting the gender goal will require an understanding of why boys drop out of secondary school more often than girls do. Possible causes of gender gaps in schooling include household demands on girls' and boys' time (see Box 9), the opportunity cost of sending boys and girls to school (such as lost earnings from income-generating activities), and aspects of the supply of schooling, including its quality and cost.

An array of gender sensitive strategies and interventions can be used to meet the education goal. The World Bank's Girls' Education Initiative<sup>19</sup> suggests the following strategies:

- elimination of school fees, particularly at the basic education level, and carefully designed and well targeted scholarship and stipend programs (See Box 10);
- provision of nursery and pre-school centers attached to schools, allowing girls to leave younger siblings in care while they attend school;
- construction of facilities, including rural schools, toilet blocks, and water sources;
- abolition of school uniforms and the provision of free or subsidized textbooks;
- programs to improve educational quality, including gender-sensitive textbooks and learning materials, and gender sensitization training of teachers;
- provision of water points and grain mills close to school complexes.

### Box 9

#### Care Activities Influence Girls' Enrollment

Girls' enrollment and completion rates tend to be influenced by the time they need to dedicate to household maintenance and care activities. In Burkina Faso, Uganda and Zambia, for example, girls could save hundreds of hours a year if walking time to sources of fuel and potable water were reduced to 30 minutes or less, thereby freeing up time for girls to attend school.



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### Box 10

#### Subsidizing Girls' Education: Evidence from On-The-Ground Experience

Program evaluations from recent initiatives that subsidized the costs of schooling indicate that interventions to lower the costs of girls' schooling to families can increase girls' enrollment rates and close gender gaps in education. A school stipend program operating in Bangladesh since 1982 subsidizes various school expenses for girls in secondary school. According to the first program evaluation, girls' enrollment rates in the pilot area rose from 27 to 44 percent over five years. After girls' tuition was eliminated nationwide in 1992 and the stipend program was expanded to all rural areas, girls' enrollment climbed nationally to 48 percent. Similarly, a fellowship program in Balochistan, Pakistan helped nongovernmental organizations build schools in poor urban neighborhoods, with a subsidy tied to girls' enrollment. Schools could admit boys as long as they made up less than half the enrollment. After this program was established, girls' enrollment increased 33 percent. Interestingly, the program appears to have expanded boys' enrollment, too, suggesting that increasing girls' educational opportunities may have spillover benefits for boys.

Source: World Bank, 2001.

<sup>19</sup> <http://www.girlseducation.org/>



# Gender Equality and the Health and Nutrition Goals

The three health and nutrition goals (Box 11) call for reducing child mortality, improving maternal health, and combating HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases. A wealth of evidence from countries around the world demonstrates that gender equality is a key to improving maternal and child health and stemming the spread of HIV/AIDS and other diseases.

## Links Between Gender Equality and Reducing Child Mortality

Each year, approximately 11 million children under five in developing countries die, mostly from preventable diseases.<sup>20</sup> Low levels of maternal schooling and high illiteracy rates contribute to this mortality through poorer quality of care for children and higher infant and child malnutrition. Rigid social norms about the appropriate gender division of labor also often restrict women's ability to earn income and take children to health care providers, which tends to degrade child survival rates. Addressing these and other gender inequalities would facilitate the achievement of the health and nutrition goals:

- A study of 25 developing countries found that, all else being equal, one to three years of maternal schooling would reduce child mortality by about 15 percent, whereas similar increases in paternal schooling would achieve only a 6 percent reduction.<sup>21</sup>
- If Sub-Saharan Africa had had the same female-to-male ratio of years of schooling as Eastern Europe had in 1990, the under five mortality rate could have been 25 percent lower, even after controlling for income, average levels of schooling and other regional differences.<sup>22</sup>

Greater control of income by women also tends to lower child mortality, even when the household's total income is taken into account. Generally, increases in household income are associated with reduced child mortality risks, but the marginal impact is substantially greater if the income is in the hands of the mother rather than in the hands of the father. The marginal effect of female income is almost 20 times as large for child survival, about eight times as large for

### Box 11

#### Health and Nutrition Goals

##### Goal 4. Reduce Child Mortality

**Target:** Reduce, by two-thirds, between 1990 and 2015, the under-five mortality rate.

##### Goal 5. Improve Maternal Health

**Target:** Reduce by three-quarters, between 1990 and 2015, the maternal mortality rate.

##### Goal 6. Combat HIV/AIDS, Malaria and Other Diseases

**Target:** Have halted by 2015 and begun to reverse the spread of HIV/AIDS.

**Target:** Have halted by 2015 and begun to reverse the incidence of malaria and other major diseases.

<sup>20</sup>United Nations. *The World's Women. 2000*. South Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa have the highest rates of child mortality. In 1995-2000, on average 86 girls and 98 boys died before the age of one for every 1,000 born in Sub-Saharan Africa, compared to 41 girls and 48 boys, respectively, in North Africa.

<sup>21</sup>Kirk, Dudley and Bernard Pillet. 1998. *Fertility Levels, Trends, and Differentials in Sub-Saharan Africa in the 1980s and 1990s*. Studies in Family Planning, Vol. 29, No. 1.

<sup>22</sup>Klasen, Stephan. 1999. Does Gender Inequality Reduce Growth and Development? Evidence from Cross-cutting Regressions. Background Paper for *Engendering Development – Through Gender Equality in Rights, Resources, and Voice*. World Bank. 2001.

## Box 12

### Death from Pregnancy or Childbirth Complication

1 in 16: The risk of an African woman dying from a complication related to pregnancy or childbirth  
1 in 3700: The risk of a North American woman dying from a complication related to pregnancy or childbirth.

Source: UNFPA, 2002.

weight-for-height measures (an indicator of child nutrition), and about four times as large for height-for-age (another child nutrition indicator).<sup>23</sup>

Child mortality rates are also linked to gender-related norms and customs. In countries where parents regard the health and survival of sons as more critical to their well-being than the health and survival of daughters, sons may receive preferential treatment in nutrition and health care, thereby reducing the survival chances of girls. In India, at one time, gender differences in health care of young children, particularly for higher order female births in rural families, helped account for higher female child mortality.<sup>24</sup>

### Links Between Gender Equality and Improving Maternal Health

Every minute, a woman dies in pregnancy or childbirth. This adds up to 1400 dying each day and more than 500,000 each year, 99 percent of them in developing countries (see Box 12). While many other health indicators in developing countries have improved over the last two decades, maternal mortality rates have shown little change.<sup>25</sup>

Gender inequality in the control of the household's economic resources, in the right to make decisions and in the freedom of movement outside the household contribute to poor maternal health in many settings. So, too, do poor nutrition, high fertility rates, high levels of anemia (itself a reflection of poor nutrition), and poor quality or non-existent reproductive health services. Only 58 percent of women in developing countries deliver with the assistance of a trained midwife or doctor, and only 40 percent give birth in a hospital or health center.

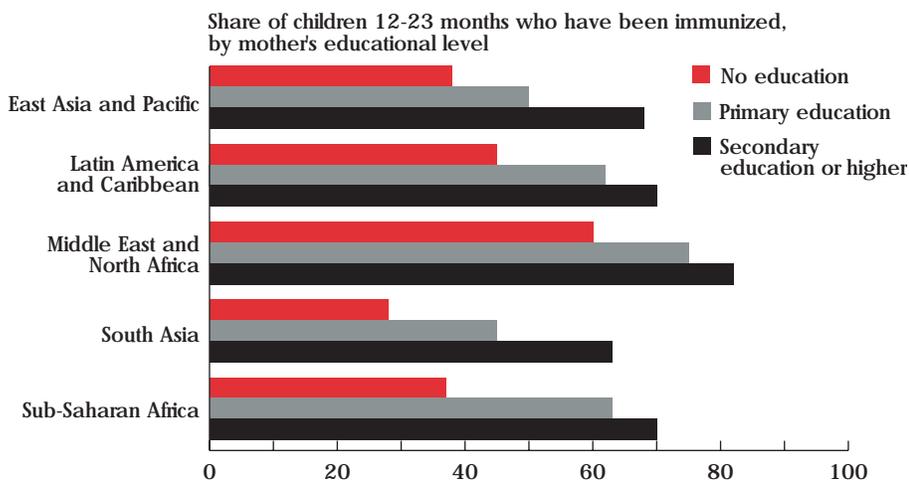
Reducing maternal mortality in developing countries brings important social and economic gains because the vast majority of women who die from pregnancy related causes are in the prime of life and are responsible for children and other dependents. It is estimated that a million or more children are left motherless each year as a result of maternal mortality. These children are 3-10 times more likely to die within two years than children with both parents alive.<sup>26</sup>

### Links Between Gender Equality and Combating HIV/AIDS, Malaria and Other Diseases

Today, 40 million people live with HIV/AIDS, over 95 percent of them in developing countries. Globally, women account for 48 percent of infected adults, but among young women, the percentage is far higher and likely to become worse (Figure 7). In Sub-Saharan Africa, 55 percent of those infected are women and in many African countries, females aged 15-24 have prevalence rates of up to six times

Figure 6

### Child Immunization Rates Rise with Mother's Education



Note: All regional values are population-weighted averages. Source: World Bank, 2001

<sup>23</sup>World Bank. 2001. *Engendering Development – Through Gender Equality in Rights, Resources, and Voice*.

<sup>24</sup>Das Gupta, Monica. 1987. *Selective Discrimination against Female Children in Rural Punjab, India*. Population and Development Review 13 (1):77-100.

<sup>25</sup>UNFPA. Fast Fact – *Maternal Mortality and Reproductive Health*. [www.unfpa.org/mothers/fact.htm](http://www.unfpa.org/mothers/fact.htm)

<sup>26</sup>UNFPA. Fast Fact – *Maternal Mortality and Reproductive Health*. [www.unfpa.org/mothers/fact.htm](http://www.unfpa.org/mothers/fact.htm)

higher than those of males of the same age. In many Caribbean countries, women are the majority of new HIV cases.

AIDS has orphaned more than 13 million children aged 14 or younger.<sup>27</sup> Female-headed households, including households headed by very young women or elderly grandmothers, are increasingly responsible for the care of orphans. Already more vulnerable than boys to HIV infection, girls are also more vulnerable to dropping out of school, being more often retained at home to care for sick relatives or assume other domestic duties. Furthermore, in parts of southern Africa, where women are the main providers of food for their families, high HIV/AIDS rates among women contribute to famine, as women who are sick or caring for sick family members are unable to farm.

Communicable diseases, such as tuberculosis, malaria and, to a growing extent, HIV/AIDS, are all diseases of poverty. Poor women are especially vulnerable because of their low nutritional status and restricted access to education and gainful employment. Moreover, once infected, women are more likely to avoid or postpone seeking care because of gender-based constraints such as domestic responsibilities and the cost of travel and treatment. When seeking treatment, women are often given low priority due to their low social status.

### Gender Sensitive Approaches that may Help Meet the Health Related Goals

Meeting the health goals requires an awareness not only of the biological aspects of disease transmission and treatment, but also of the social and cultural factors that promote or reduce good health. Issues such as the different health risks faced by men and women (see figure 8); the implications of these differences for health service

delivery; the effect of differences in the availability of and access to health services; and the ability of women to independently decide on the use of health services are important when designing strategies aimed at meeting the health goals.

Similarly, understanding the issues associated with female and male vulnerability and risk is central to combating HIV/AIDS (see Box 13). For example, physiological differences make transmission of the virus through sexual contact more efficient from men to women than vice versa. In addition, girls and young women may lack the knowledge, self-confidence or economic independence to resist sexual advances or persuade older men to use a condom.

<sup>27</sup>UNAIDS, 1999.

**Figure 7**

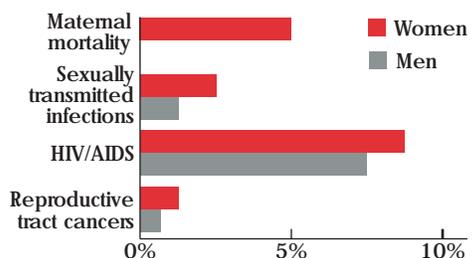
#### Women and Men (15-24) Living with HIV/AIDS in 2001

Region	Women	Men
Sub-Saharan Africa	5,700,000	2,800,000
South & Southeast Asia	930,000	590,000
Latin America	170,000	260,000
North Africa & Middle East	110,000	41,000
East Asia and Pacific	87,000	200,000
Eastern Europe & Central Asia	85,000	340,000
Caribbean	72,000	59,000
North America & Western Europe	80,000	155,000
<b>World Total</b>	<b>7,300,000</b>	<b>4,500,000</b>

Source: UNAIDS, 2001.

**Figure 8**

#### Global Burden of Disease in Adults, by Gender and Cause, 1999



Note: Measured in terms of percent of total life lost due to premature mortality. Source: World Health Report, 2000

### Box 13

#### Reducing Mother-to-Child HIV Transmission Rates in Thailand

In Phayao, a northern province in Thailand severely affected by HIV, approximately 280 HIV-infected women - 5 per cent of all pregnant women in the province - gave birth to an estimated 70 infected children in 1997. Many of these infants died within their first year of life, and thus the infant mortality rate in the province rose, after years of decline.

The province responded quickly to this crisis. Starting in July, 1997, the Ministry of Public Health (MOPH) has offered (through Phayao's seven public hospitals) a short regimen of zidovudine (ZDV) to all consenting HIV-infected women to prevent mother-to-child transmission of the virus. Women receive pre-test counseling at their first prenatal visit, are offered HIV testing and, if they accept, return for post-test counseling two weeks later. The overall prophylactic coverage for the province reached 68 per cent of all HIV-infected pregnant women in the fourth quarter of 1997. Analysis showed that compliance with the intervention was excellent, around 90 per cent. The annual per capita cost of this program to the people of Thailand is US\$0.13. The total cost represents less than 1 per cent of public health expenditures in Thailand.

Source: UNAIDS Best Practice Notes. <http://www.unaids.org/bestpractice/index.html>



# Gender Equality and the Environmental Goal

The targets associated with this goal (Box 14) refer to mainstreaming preservation of the environment into policy and programs, reversing the loss of environmental resources, and improving access to safe drinking water. The goal on environmental sustainability grew out of the 1992 Rio Earth Summit, which was viewed by many as a watershed for the way in which it linked environment and gender issues. Since Rio, the importance of pursuing environmental goals through a gender lens has been reaffirmed in successive global fora, including the World Summit on Sustainable Development held in Johannesburg in September 2002.

## Links Between Gender Equality and Environmental Sustainability

Men's and women's different roles and responsibilities are strongly linked to environmental sustainability. Women's insecure land tenure rights provides one example. Without title to land, women are often denied access to effective technologies and resources such as credit, extension, seed supply and labor saving devices that would strengthen their capacity to promote environmentally sustainable practices. A recent study of the impact of pest management training for rice farmers in Vietnam showed that only 23 percent of female farmers consulted extension service workers while 55 percent of male farmers did so.<sup>28</sup> Clearly, ensuring that agriculture is practiced in sustainable ways requires that female as well as male farmers receive the information and resources they require. Gender-based differences and roles also affect conservation practices and must be understood if policies are to be effective. Because of the gender-based division of labor, women and men often have different knowledge of plants and growing conditions. Men are often experts in primary cash crops while women are experts in 'neglected' species. This has important implications for the conservation of genetic resources because the decision to conserve a plant variety depends to a large extent on its perceived usefulness to the farm household.<sup>29</sup>

The gender-based division of labor is also closely linked to environmental health. More than half of the world's households cook with wood, crop residues or untreated coal, exposing primarily women and children to indoor air pollution because of the female specialization in cooking and other work inside the home. This results in a number of health problems, such as acute and chronic respiratory infections and blindness. In developing countries, nearly 2 million women and children die annually from exposure to indoor air pollution. In central Kenya, for example, children and women are disproportionately affected by acute

### Box 14

#### Goal 7. Ensure Environmental Sustainability

**Target:** Integrate the principles of sustainable development into country policies and programs and reverse the loss of environmental resources.

**Target:** Halve, by 2015, the proportion of people without sustainable access to safe drinking water.

**Target:** By 2020, to have achieved a significant improvement in the lives of at least 100 million slum dwellers.

<sup>28</sup>Chi, Truong, Thi Ngoc, Lisa Leimar Price, and Mahabub M. Hossain. 1998. *Impact of IPM Training on Male and Female Farmers' Knowledge and Pest Control Behavior: A Case Study of Vietnam*. Working Paper. International Rice Research Institute, Manila.

<sup>29</sup>*Incorporating Gender-Sensitive Approaches into Plant Genetic Resources Conservation and Use: Background and Purpose*. I PGRI/FAO Working Group Meeting, October 1996. <http://www.fao.org/sd/wpdirect/wpre0012.htm>

## Box 15

### Integrating Gender Issues into Irrigation Activities

In the 1980s, an irrigated rice project in Northern Cameroon failed to attract farmer interest and approximately a third of the area remained uncultivated. The project failed to understand intra-household conflicts over labor allocation and compensation. Women were not assigned land, but were expected to work in their husband's rice fields. According to traditional practice, women were entitled to a cash payment from their husbands in return for this work. Many women felt the payment was insufficient and as a result reduced their time devoted to rice cultivation, thereby leaving land unused.

Source: Sida, 1998.

respiratory infection, caused by prolonged exposure to indoor air pollution from the combustion of biomass (Figure 9).

### Gender Sensitive Approaches that can Help Implement the Environmental Goal

Knowledge of the gender division of labor in a community can be used to assess the gender-differentiated impacts of environmental conditions and how women and men can contribute to, exacerbate, or help solve environmental problems. A fuller understanding of the relationship between gender roles and natural resource management – for example, which gender group values a given natural resource and for what reason (food security, medical purposes, community needs, etc.) – is also helpful in designing effective policies and programs for environmental sustainability and poverty reduction (Box 15).

The area of water and sanitation provides a good example (Box 16). Women are most often the users, providers, and managers of water in rural households and the guardians of household hygiene. Women and girls, therefore, have a strong incentive to acquire and maintain safe, conveniently located water facilities. If women are able to take shorter trips to fetch water, they may have more time for

income-generating activities, and girls can spend more time in school. Men are usually more concerned with water for irrigation or for livestock.

Issues to consider when integrating a gender perspective into environmentally sustainable development include:

- What are the different responsibilities, roles and needs of women and men in sectors related to sustainable development, such as food production, water and sanitation, forest resources management, and energy?
- Do women and men value or use particular natural resources for different community needs? What impact do these uses have for sustainable management and environmental protection?
- Who are the main stakeholders in natural resources management and use?

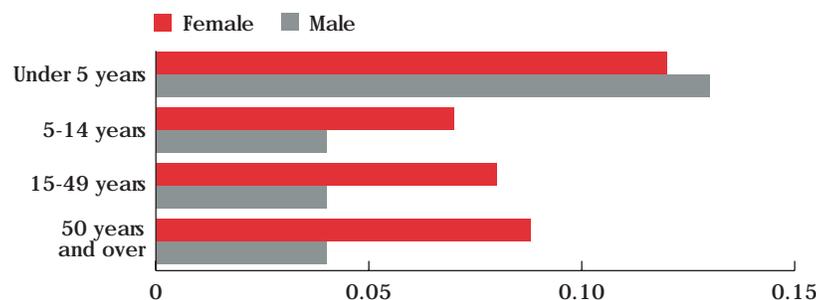
## Box 16

### Improving Water and Sanitation Projects by Integrating Gender Issues

The design of the World Bank's Morocco Rural Water and Sanitation Project took into account men's and women's different priorities. Men, who were predominantly consulted in earlier projects, were primarily interested in constructing rural roads and ensuring a supply of electricity, while women were mainly concerned with the lack of potable water near their homes. In much of Morocco, women and girls fetch water for household use, often from as far as five kilometers away. As a result, girls often miss school. In one village, a recent survey found that primary school attendance by girls had more than doubled a year after the new water supply system began operating.

Figure 9

### Acute Respiratory Infections by Gender in Central Kenya



Source: M. Ezzati, H. Saleh and D.M. Kammen, 2000

# Conclusion

Gender equality is not only a goal in its own right, but an essential ingredient for achieving all the other Millennium Development Goals. Attempting to meet the MDGs without promoting gender equality will both increase the costs and minimize the likelihood of attaining the goals. The MDGs provide a vision of a much improved world by 2015, where extreme poverty is cut in half, child mortality is greatly reduced, and gender disparities in primary and secondary education are eliminated. The specification of target dates for attaining the goals, the increased emphasis on quantitative analysis, and the consensus they represent regarding a core development agenda, set the MDGs apart from other international agreements.

But the MDGs are not new; they grew out of the agreements and resolutions of world conferences organized by the United Nations during recent decades. As we strive to attain these goals we must learn from the past and remind ourselves that achieving them requires a multi-faceted approach: because the MDGs are mutually reinforcing, progress towards one goal will affect progress towards others. The PRSP process provides a good forum for adapting the MDGs to country circumstances and for integrating gender into national strategies. Bringing a gender perspective across the whole range of MDGs, and working for gender equality and women's empowerment will be crucial if the difficult challenge of attaining the Millennium Development Goals is to be achieved.

*“The MDGs provide a vision of a much improved world by 2015, where extreme poverty is cut in half, child mortality is greatly reduced, and gender disparities in primary and secondary education are eliminated.”*

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GENDER AND DEVELOPMENT GROUP  
THE WORLD BANK  
1818 H STREET N.W.  
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20433, U.S.A.  
[WWW.WORLDBANK.ORG/GENDER](http://WWW.WORLDBANK.ORG/GENDER)