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**ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMISSION FOR WESTERN ASIA (ESCWA)**

**LITERATURE REVIEW ON ENGENDERING THE MILLENNIUM  
DEVELOPMENT GOALS AND IDENTIFYING BARRIERS TO  
GENDER EQUALITY IN THE ESCWA REGION**

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## Introduction

This literature review is intended to feed into the Development Account Project entitled “Interregional cooperation to strengthen social inclusion, gender equality and health promotion in the Millennium Development Goal process”.<sup>1</sup> This review gathers existing national, regional and international material on how to engender the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). As such, it seeks to facilitate a subsequent process of in-depth qualitative analysis of the gender disempowering mechanisms in the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) region.

This review has made use of material and data from various sources, including as follows: (a) several United Nations entities, including the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM); (b) reports within the framework of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), including concluding observations of the CEDAW Committee; (c) Government web sites; and (d) non-governmental organizations, academic institutions and gender research centres.

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<sup>1</sup> Economic and Social Commissions for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP), *Interregional cooperation to strengthen social inclusion, gender equality and health promotion in the Millennium Development Goal process*, tranche 5: 06/07B. Available at: <http://www.un.org.esa/devaccount/projects%20by%20region.html>.

## I. LITERATURE REVIEW

### A. NATIONAL AND REGIONAL LITERATURE

#### 1. *The Millennium Development Goals in the Arab region 2005*<sup>2</sup>

This summary provides an overview of progress in the Arab region in terms of achieving MDGs by 2015, and highlights key challenges and issues. Arab countries were clustered according to geographical proximity, similarity in resource endowment and level of development. Progress towards MDGs is presented by each individual Goal, while noting sharp regional and intra-national discrepancies. The report concludes that high-income countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) are relatively well placed to achieving MDGs. The majority of middle-income countries in the Mashreq and Maghreb subregions vary in their potential for reaching each Goal as a result of their national specificities; and Iraq and Palestine will be unable to reach MDGs. The report summary calls on the resource-rich countries of the region to devote resources to those countries and territories.

The report provides a bleak picture regarding the ability of the Arab region as a whole to succeed in eradicating poverty and hunger, especially in the least developed countries (LDCs).

Moreover, while the report makes specific mention of the general improvement in gender equality in terms of enrolment across all levels of education, it points out that this has not translated into economic and political empowerment for women in the region. Indeed, the report duly reminds that the economic and political participation of women in the Arab region is among the lowest in the world.

However, the review of progress against each individual MDG remains gender-blind given that most statistics are not gender disaggregated, including, for example, data on net enrolment in primary education, child mortality, prevalence of HIV/AIDS and other diseases, and environment-related data and indicators.

While the report identifies the “gender gap” as one of the four key challenges of the region, it fails to analyse the root causes and, consequently, fails to address how the gender gap needs to be addressed in each MDG.

#### 2. *Gender related indicators in the Arab States*<sup>3</sup>

This report provides an overview of achievements related to Goal 3 in the Arab region and continues to look at two gender-specific indicators, namely, maternal mortality and universal primary education, which are embedded in other MDGs.

Within that context, the report compiles and presents secondary data on advances made in women’s educational enrolment and points out the remaining rural-urban divide, gaps between countries and disparities at the level of educational attainment. As such, the report indicates that gender inequality in the higher levels of education is most probably “affecting the ability of women not only to pursue higher levels of education, but also to be effectively productive members in the social, economic, and legislative life of their societies”.<sup>4</sup>

In terms of women’s empowerment in the Arab region, the report uses various data to indicate that women suffer from poor representation in the “political, legal and business arena”. The report then moves to

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<sup>2</sup> Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA), *The Millennium Development Goals in the Arab region 2005* (E/ESCWA/SCU/2005/3/Rev.1).

<sup>3</sup> United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), Sub-Regional Resource Facility for Arab States (SURF-AS), *The Millennium Development Goals: gender related indicators in the Arab States* (UNDP, June 2003).

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

looking at gender equality in other MDGs and focuses on maternal mortality and achieving universal primary education.

In the case of maternal mortality, the report indicates that “despite stagnation on the aggregate level, improvements are detected on the country levels yet with vast discrepancies among Arab States”. In the case of achieving universal primary education, the report points out the gender gap in literacy rate and the discrepancy between countries in primary school enrolment.<sup>5</sup>

Finally, the report concludes that while the Arab region has been “advancing in relation to some gender indicators as is the case in eliminating gender disparities in primary and secondary education”, that may not be enough for achieving gender equality by 2015.<sup>6</sup>

## B. INTERNATIONAL LITERATURE

### 1. *En route to equality: A gender review of national MDG reports*<sup>7</sup>

This report argues that gender equality and the empowerment of women, MDG 3, is at the core of all MDGs, from improving health and fighting disease to reducing poverty and mitigating hunger, expanding education and lowering child mortality, increasing access to safe water and ensuring environmental sustainability. The document quotes the report by the Task Force on Education and Gender Equality, which provides evidence and argumentation on the ways in which gender equality is necessary for achieving each MDG.<sup>8</sup>

Moreover, the report suggests that the MDG reporting process needs to become gender-aware, and indicates that “restricting gender concerns for Goal 3 would amount to presenting a distorted picture of reality”.<sup>9</sup> Such gender-aware reporting on MDGs is expected to contribute to making policy-making and programming gender-responsive, thereby optimizing an allocation of resources that is more gender-sensitive. Such a process could serve as a tool for public advocacy on gender equality and contribute towards creating a platform for engagement between Governments and civil society stakeholders concerned with gender equality.

The added value of the report is in its presentation of a gender analysis for each MDG. Specifically, it underlines the ways in which the subordinate position of women within the social relations of gender contributes to their vulnerability to poverty. In doing so, the report goes beyond a common definition of poverty in relation to poverty lines and economic growth to addressing it as an issue related to capabilities, opportunities, access and empowerment.

Additionally, the report outlines concrete ways for engendering reporting on MDGs, including, for example, by providing gender disaggregated poverty data; and notes critical gaps in MDG reporting, including the missing link between women’s poverty and HIV/AIDS. The report concludes with a set of recommendations for engendering the MDG reporting process, including introducing an engendered approach to the range and scope of reporting, namely, disaggregating data and using qualitative data; establishing linkages across MDGs; and strengthening ownership among the various stakeholders.

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> UNDP, Bureau of Development Policy, *En route to equality: a gender review of national MDG reports 2005* (2005).

<sup>8</sup> UNDP, United Nations Millennium Project 2005, Task Force on Education and Gender Equality. *Taking action: achieving gender equality and empowering women* (London, Earthscan, 2005).

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

## 2. *Gender equality and the Millennium Development Goals*<sup>10</sup>

This publication is divided into the following six sections: (a) linking gender equality to MDGs; (b) gender equality and MDG on poverty; (c) gender equality and MDG on education; (d) gender equality and MDGs on health and nutrition; (e) gender equality and MDG on environment; and (f) conclusions.

This report argues that “gender issues are highly relevant for achieving all the MDGs”; and, moreover, that “MDGs are mutually reinforcing”, whereby progress towards one Goal “affects progress towards the others”.<sup>11</sup>

Furthermore, MDG on gender equality is not exclusively associated with eliminating gender disparities in primary and secondary education; rather it encompasses three additional gender equality indicators, namely, literacy rates, women’s share of non-agricultural jobs and the proportion of parliamentary seats held by women.

Exposing and analysing the pervasive gender inequalities worldwide, the report uses examples of the gender gap in political representation, access to education and educational attainment, and participation in the wage sector. Equally, the report addresses gender equality in four MDGs. These are set forth below.

### (a) *MDG on poverty*

In identifying the link between gender equality and the Goal on poverty, the report focuses on the linkage between gender equality and growth as follows:

- (i) Investing in human capital, especially the education and health of girls and women, thereby raising productivity;
- (ii) Increasing women’s access to productive assets, thereby equally raising productivity;
- (iii) Time poverty, which is an issue that is particularly faced by women and which is created by poor infrastructure that reduces productivity;
- (iv) Information and communications technologies (ICTs), which can enable greater participation of poor women and men in the global economy.

Consequently, the report suggests multi-dimensional and gender-sensitive approaches to poverty reduction that take into account all dimensions of poverty, including economic growth, opportunity, capacity, security and empowerment.

### (b) *MDG on education*

When addressing the link between gender equality and the Goal on education, the report suggests that meeting that MDG requires addressing the specific obstacles that girls and boys face in accessing education. An example of a gender-specific obstacle to educational enrolment is the significant contribution to household and agricultural work of girls, in addition to concerns about their safety and modesty. Gender-sensitive approaches are therefore necessary for achieving universal primary education, which includes an analysis and recognition of the nature of the gender gap in schooling.

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<sup>10</sup> The World Bank, Gender and Development Group, *Gender equality and the Millennium Development Goals* (Washington, D.C., 4 April 2003). Available at: <http://www.worldbank.org/gender>.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

(c) *MDGs on health and nutrition*

In the section regarding gender equality and the Goals on health and nutrition, the report focuses on the linkages between gender equality and reducing child mortality, given that the latter is directly affected by the mother's income power, gender norms and customs, schooling and illiteracy.

Furthermore, the report indicates that, despite worldwide improvement in general health indicators, maternal mortality rates have shown little change. That is directly linked to gender inequality in the control of a household's economic resources, mobility and decision-making. Further evidence is provided regarding the linkage between gender equality and HIV/AIDS in terms of vulnerability, proportion of affected population, ability to take decisions regarding bodily integrity, and access to health care. Similarly, the report suggests gender-sensitive approaches to meet the health-related goals, which include an analysis and recognition of social and cultural factors that affect health.

Finally, the report concludes by reiterating that "attempting to meet the MDGs without promoting gender equality will both increase the cost and minimize the likelihood of attaining the Goals".<sup>12</sup>

3. *Achieving the Millennium Development Goals: Population and reproductive health as critical determinants*<sup>13</sup>

After a historical overview and a brief presentation of MDGs and the indicators for each, this report provides a global population overview, while focusing on key indicators, including population size, population growth, ageing patterns and geographical distribution.

The report argues for the need to address population dynamics and structure, reproductive health, women's empowerment and gender equality in order to eradicate poverty and hunger, MDG 1. Within the context of MDG 2, the report indicates that education for both boys and girls is a key determinant of poverty reduction and for making choices and opportunities available. While primary school enrolment is on the increase, the target for MDG 2 is the least likely to be met by 2015.

Additionally, the report indicates that education for girls leads to better population and reproductive health outcomes. Within the context of MDG 3, the report indicates that gender equity, equality and women's empowerment are essential for achieving economic, social and political development for all. The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) predicts that it will be equally unlikely to reach the 2015 target for MDG 4, especially in poor countries. In the case of MDG 5, the report points out the key indicators related to maternal mortality, including poor access to family planning or to professional birth attendants. Similarly, the report makes the case that those issues are mostly suffered by women in poor countries.

Overall, the report succeeds in making a strong case for population and reproductive rights as being key determinants for the successful achievement of MDGs.

4. *Women's empowerment, gender equality and the Millennium Development Goals*<sup>14</sup>

This information and action guide by the Women's Environment and Development Organization (WEDO) provides insight into the ways in which women across the world have responded to MDGs. While MDGs represent by and large a global acknowledgement of women's empowerment and gender equality as issues of human rights and social justice, WEDO indicates that MDGs do not represent the full vision of gender equity, equality and women's empowerment, or poverty eradication and social transformation as stipulated in other key international instruments and documents, including the Beijing Platform for Action. WEDO points out a major gap in terms of including reproductive rights, peace and human rights in MDGs.

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> UNFPA, *Achieving the Millennium Development Goals: population and reproductive health as critical determinants, Population and Development Strategies No. 10* (UNFPA, September 2003).

<sup>14</sup> WEDO, *Women's empowerment, gender equality and the Millennium Development Goals: a WEDO information and action guide* (New York, 2004). Available at: <http://www.wedo.org>.

Within that context, WEDO and other like-minded organizations argue that no major achievements can be reached if the approach to the implementation of MDGs is gender-blind, appropriate resources are not allocated and changes in global economic policies are not forthcoming. The report also expresses concerns that gender equality and women's empowerment are reduced to a single MDG.

On the other hand, WEDO underscores that MDGs nevertheless include time-bound targets to which Governments and international institutions are to be held accountable. As such, MDGs can be used as instruments aimed at monitoring the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action by presenting three key challenges, namely: (a) the need to ensure that gender-sensitive approaches are used in implementing MDGs; (b) the need to demand adequate resources and adequate global economic policies; and (c) the need to link MDGs with other national processes.

The report reiterates that gender is an essential ingredient for the successful achievement of all MDGs. As such, the report provides a gender analysis of each MDG and highlights the need to make available adequate resources at all levels; and to address inequitable global economic policies, as well as gaps between rich and poor countries.

The report concludes with practical recommendations addressed to various stakeholders, including engendering targets and indicators and monitoring Government processes.

#### *5. Gender, poverty and the Millennium Development Goals<sup>15</sup>*

This paper, which was presented at the InterAction Forum 2003, underscores two main points, namely, that gender equality is central to development strategy in general; and that is not just a goal in its own right, rather it is central to achieving all other goals. Providing an overview of economic and population growth over the past decades, the presentation argues that MDGs cannot be achieved without challenging the global paradigms of economic growth as a strategy to address poverty.

The author introduces the issue of individual human capabilities, especially for poor people, and the need to address their definition to include employment-generating economic growth; equitable asset distribution; investment in health and education; and collective voice and collective action by poor people.

After a similar analysis for remaining MDGs, the author concludes that "gender equality is central to achieving the great transformation in developing countries, in a way that it was not to the transformation in the now industrialized countries".<sup>16</sup> The author argues that unless "the Washington Consensus" begins to recognize that growth alone is not the means to poverty reduction, and that what happens to income distribution during the growth process is central to reducing poverty, no amount of posturing about MDGs is going to make the slightest difference to the poor, let alone to poor women.

#### *6. Transforming the MDGs as a tool for rights, equality, sustainable development and peace: a view from labour<sup>17</sup>*

This review commends the set targets of MDGs, particularly in terms of promoting gender equality, empowering women, halving poverty and hunger by 2015, reducing maternal mortality and HIV/AIDS, and ensuring that girls have access to primary education. However, the author expresses scepticism as to whether MDGs bear hope for improving the situation of poor women in rural Asia or women involved in the informal economy in Latin America.

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<sup>15</sup> Santosh Mehrotra, "Gender, poverty and the Millennium Development Goals", presented at *Washington Week & InterAction Forum 2003* (Washington, D.C., 12-16 May 2003).

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Gemma Adaba, "Transforming the MDGs as a tool for rights, equality, sustainable development and peace: a view from labor", *Seeking accountability on women's human rights: women debate the Millennium Development Goals* (New York, Women's International Coalition for Economic Justice (WICEJ), January 2004).

The report focuses extensively on MDG 8 and argues for its prioritization. Specifically, it suggests that the energies of women's movements across the world, especially within women's unions, could be focused to attain that MDG. Moreover, the report is concerned that, unlike other MDGs, that Goal is not time-bound; and suggests redefining MDG 8 in order to encompass an analysis of the global system of governance of trade and finance. As such, the report suggests that MDG 8 can only be realized if there are established mechanisms aimed at ensuring the provision of public goods and a fair distribution of wealth and resources within the global economy.<sup>18</sup>

The report then analyses constraints to achieving Goals 1 to 7 and attributes those to the policies, prescriptions and agreements enforced by international financial institutions and the World Trade Organization (WTO). For example, the Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property (TRIPS) is the major obstacle to the provision of affordable generic medicines for HIV/AIDS.

Furthermore, the report analyses the burden of failed development on women, including privatization of services and clustering of women in low-paid, unskilled jobs. Overcoming those major obstacles and empowering women have become the main challenges faced by international trade unions and, moreover, given the overall disabling economic environment, focusing on attempts to engender MDG 1 to 7 may not yield significant results in terms of ensuring gender equality. While MDG monitoring is recommended, the report suggests using the MDG paradigm in more innovative ways, including as for initiating multi-stakeholder dialogue on the persisting feminization of poverty.

#### *7. Empowering women: the key to achieving the Millennium Development Goals<sup>19</sup>*

This paper emphasizes the United Nations commitment to realizing gender equality and uses the efficiency argument whereby economic growth is better realized with gender equality. Pointing out the advances made since the Fourth World Conference on Women, held in Beijing in 1995, it indicates that those changes have been slow and uneven, given that women still bear the burden of poverty and that gender inequalities persist, notably in access to education.

Moreover, the paper discusses the centrality of gender equality for achieving democratic governance and poverty reduction, addressing energy and environment issues, and combating HIV/AIDS, and argues for mainstreaming gender in each of the seven MDGs.

#### *8. Gender mainstreaming in poverty eradication and the Millennium Development Goals<sup>20</sup>*

This comprehensive volume provides arguments, key findings and learning relevant to the achievement of MDGs from the standpoint of gender equality; and argues extensively that gender inequality is more pervasive than other forms of inequality and is a feature of social relations in most societies. Consequently, the author argues that understanding the causes and consequences of gender inequality should concern and inform all societies.

Within that context, the report analyses the manifestations of gender inequality and the ways in which those are pervasive and cut across other forms of inequality.<sup>21</sup> Additionally, the report argues that gender

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<sup>18</sup> The report indicates that current policies set by the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Trade Organization (WTO) confirm that. Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Eric Brunat, "Empowering women: the key to achieving the Millennium Development Goals", presented at the *International Legislation and Gender Equality: United Nations Millennium Declaration, Declared Goals and Ways of Implementation* (Ministry of Labour of the Russian Federation, Moscow, 7 June 2003).

<sup>20</sup> Naila Kabeer, *Gender mainstreaming in poverty eradication and the Millennium Development Goals: a handbook for policy-makers and other stakeholders* (London, Commonwealth Secretariat, 2003).

<sup>21</sup> However, those manifestations are more severe among the poor, particularly poor women, where they intersect with economic deprivation and reproduce poverty. Ibid.

inequality structures the distribution of production and reproduction work, as well as the distribution of resources, the value given to the work of women and men, and the capacity of each to exercise agency.

In this review, the author demonstrates that policy makers are still informed by mindsets that operate under the notion of “male breadwinners”, thereby failing to put in place redistributive policies. Gender inequalities in the household are further exacerbated and reinforced by inequalities within other supposedly neutral institutions, namely, the market and the State. That means that women and men experience poverty differently and unequally, and become poor through different, albeit related, processes. Poverty and gender inequalities therefore have to be tackled at the societal level, as well as through explicit interventions tailored to addressing specific forms of disadvantage.

#### 9. *Indicators for monitoring the Millennium Development Goals*<sup>22</sup>

This handbook provides guidance on the definitions, rationale, concepts and sources of the data for each indicator that is being used to monitor MDGs and their targets. Essentially of a technical nature, the handbook provides information on the definition of each indicator used, the source, method of computation and periodicity of measurement. Under “gender issues”, the handbook makes a fleeting mention of “female headed households”, which are said to be poorer than male headed households.<sup>23</sup>

While the handbook is thorough and detailed, it is essentially quantitative in nature and fails to provide much insight into the causes, manifestations and outcomes of gender inequality and on the need to redefine the monitoring of MDG implementation.

#### 10. *MDGenderNet eDiscussion*<sup>24</sup>

This document synthesizes the responses to an online dialogue on MDGs among United Nations staff and other stakeholders. The online dialogue covered various topics, including engendering MDGs, engendering national planning processes, building momentum for supporting gender equality, and advocating gender-sensitive monitoring.

In addition to presenting the full scripts and contributions of participants, the document provides further resources and links on MDGs. The discussion forum provided a wide spectrum of people with the opportunity to express different, and at times opposing, views on MDGs and their value for achieving gender equality. However, the document does not provide any indication as to how the different and opposing views were received.

#### 11. *Pathway to gender equality: CEDAW, Beijing and the MDGs*<sup>25</sup>

In this book, UNIFEM suggests ways and mechanisms in which MDGs are considered, not as a new measure, but rather as an additional vehicle for the implementation of CEDAW and the Beijing Platform of Action and, as such, presents those as three mutually supporting processes for gender equality.

At the level of national MDG reporting, the document recommends the following key steps: (a) bringing CEDAW and Beijing advocates to the table; (b) drawing on CEDAW and Beijing for carrying out situation analyses; (c) framing national indicators that respond to CEDAW and Beijing priorities; (d) improving statistical capacity on gender equality issues; and (e) identifying appropriate implementation measures.

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<sup>22</sup> United Nations Development Group, *Indicators for monitoring the Millennium Development Goals: definitions, rationale, concepts and sources* (United Nations Publications, Sales No. E.03.XVII.18, 2003).

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> UNIFEM, MDGenderNet eDiscussion consolidated response, presented at the *Workshop on Gender Equality and the Millennium Development Goals* (World Bank, Washington, D.C., 19-20 November 2003).

<sup>25</sup> UNIFEM, *Pathway to gender equality: CEDAW, Beijing and the MDGs* (UNIFEM, 2004).

Additionally, the report presents specific and useful linkages between each MDG and its attendant target with the stipulation of both CEDAW and the Beijing Platform of Action.

#### 12. *Resource guide for gender theme groups*<sup>26</sup>

This guide was developed by the Task Force on Gender Mainstreaming in order to strengthen collective responses to bring about gender equality within various processes, including MDGs. As such, the resource guide provides technical and practical guidance to strengthening coordination mechanisms, including linkages among existing processes.

In the case of mainstreaming gender in MDGs, the guide proposes a number of readings and background material for the members of the Task Force, and provides practical hints for engendering, implementing and monitoring the MDG reports.

#### 13. *Changing social institutions to improve the status of women in developing countries*<sup>27</sup>

This paper is essentially concerned with the role of social institutions in challenging or otherwise reproducing gender inequality. It reiterates that MDGs demand change in gender-discriminating social institutions, which, therefore, need to be added to the seven strategic priorities identified by the Task Force on Education and Gender Equality.

After a review of the concepts, causes and consequences of discrimination against women across the world, the report highlights and analyses how social institutions shape and constrain the economic role of women, both directly and indirectly. Using that analysis, the report suggests that, while seemingly difficult in poorer countries, the transformation of social institutions is key for empowering women. The report makes some notes on the role that donors can play in challenging discriminatory social institutions in developing countries.

However, the report appears to place the onus almost exclusively on social institutions in the global south and, consequently, misses the analysis made by many regarding the role of international institutions and policies in undermining the achievement of MDGs, particularly in terms of gender equality.

#### 14. *Advance Social Watch report 2005*<sup>28</sup>

This report by Social Watch is essentially a critique of the MDG promise to halve extreme poverty by 2015. The report was compiled by a team of social scientists who reviewed available national and international information on the state of poverty in more than 60 countries. Specifically, the report indicates that the 2015 promise will not be met without timely, radical and substantial changes. Using the data it compiled, verified and analysed, the report states that whether in health, nutrition, education or provision of essential services, including sanitation, very modest progress has been made.

Additionally, the report indicates that in the case of both rich and poor countries, progress towards gender equity is slow. It notes that measurable progress in health, education, sanitation and promotion of women slowed down immediately after the end of the cold war. In fact, when analysing the linkages between gender and poverty, the report expresses concerns regarding the fact that conventional poverty measurement methodologies do not allow gender inequality to be reflected in official statistics or in ensuing poverty reduction strategies.

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<sup>26</sup> UNIFEM, *Resource guide for gender theme groups* (January 2005).

<sup>27</sup> Johannes Jütting and Christian Morrisson, "Changing social institutions to improve the status of women in developing countries", *OECD Development Centre Policy Brief No. 27* (OECD, 2005).

<sup>28</sup> Roberto Bissio, ed., *Advance Social Watch Report 2005: unkept promises* (Montevideo, Social Watch/Instituto del Tercer Mundo, 2005).

Within that context, the report makes two major contributions to the debate on engendering MDGs, namely: (a) it highlights the methodological problems of poverty measurements that conceal the issues of gender and gender inequality; and (b) it provides concrete illustrations of the above drawn from national Social Watch reports.

The report urges the adoption of a gender approach to the study of poverty, given that it can unmask both public and private discrimination by analysing intra-household dynamics and power relations, as well as the unequal distribution of resources within both the private and public spheres. That heralds the need of an in-depth discussion of the definition of poverty and the identification of indicators to be used for its measurement, as well as the types of policies needed to overcome it.

#### 15. *International Workshop on Gender Equality and the Millennium Development Goals*<sup>29</sup>

The opening address by the director of the Division for the Advancement of Women presented during the International Workshop on Gender Equality and the Millennium Development Goals, held in Washington, D.C. in 2003, focused on the objectives of the event, namely, to provide an opportunity for “reflecting on how the goal of gender equality can be an integral part of implementation and monitoring of the MDGs”, which requires attention “to accountability for identifying and addressing gender perspectives in relation to all goals, and accurately measuring and reporting on progress, as well as ensuring adequate links to other goals, targets and indicators for gender equality, within the broader development framework of the outcomes of the global conferences”.<sup>30</sup>

In doing so, and similarly to UNIFEM, the speaker makes the case for the need to link MDGs with other instruments and processes, including CEDAW and the Beijing Platform for Action, in order to achieve gender equality.

#### 16. *Types and aims of the Millennium Development Goals*<sup>31</sup>

In this joint publication, UNDP, UNIFEM, UNFPA, UNICEF and the International Labour Organization (ILO) refer to the need to engender all MDGs and address challenges to gender equality in order to achieve the set targets. In doing so, the report identifies key challenges at the level of the suggested MDG indicators that do not provide appropriate measurements for gender equality.

The main contribution of the report is in terms of the organizational recommendations it makes, aimed at optimizing inter-agency collaboration for monitoring and reporting on the MDG progress from a gender perspective. The report also provides a list of suggested gender-sensitive objectives for each MDG.

#### 17. *The MDGs: Gendered pathways/dimensions*<sup>32</sup>

This background paper, which was prepared for the 2002 World Bank Workshop on Poverty and Gender in Washington, D.C., presents a review and historical overview of MDGs and maintains that while MDG 3 reflects the “push in the 1990s at the international level for gender equality”, “the gender dimensions of other MDGs were not made explicit” and gender was not prominent in the set targets and indicators.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Carolyn Hannan, Director, Division for the Advancement of Women, opening address to the *International Workshop on Gender Equality and the Millennium Development Goals* (World Bank, Washington, D.C., 19-20 November 2003).

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> UNDP and others, *Le genre et les Objectifs du Millenaire pour le Developpement* (February 2003).

<sup>32</sup> Kristen Timothy, “The Millennium Development Goals: gendered pathways/dimensions”, prepared for the *World Bank Workshop on Poverty and Gender: New Perspectives* (World Bank, Sixth Meeting: External Gender Consultative Group, Washington, D.C., 6-9 May 2002).

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

Within that context, the paper examines MDGs and related targets and indicators from a gender perspective and, in so doing, groups MDGs into three categories, namely: (a) Goals with spillover effects/positive externalities (Goals 2, 3 and 5); (b) Goals where gender is an instrument (Goals 4 and 6); and (c) Goals where gender is both an instrument and a basis for targeting (Goals 1 and 7).

The report provides a brief review of the status of global progress in relation to each Goal, with a focus on gender gaps in relation to achievement of MDGs. A gendered pathway for achieving each Goal is then postulated and evidence to support the pathway is cited from available research. However, the report falls short of undertaking a similar exercise for MDG 8, which has been criticized as the least time-bound and the most challenging in view of its importance in shaping enabling global policies for the achievement of MDGs and of gender equality.

#### 18. *Background paper of the Task Force on Education and Gender Equality*<sup>34</sup>

This paper is the first background paper to guide and inform the Task Force on Education and Gender Equality. It reviews progress made so far and presents propositions to hasten that progress. Within that context, the paper seeks to convey four essential messages, namely:

(a) The current MDG gender equality target and indicators do not capture all the essential gender equality components. Consequently, the paper proposes the inclusion of three key domains of gender equality, namely, capability, opportunity and agency;

(b) Each of the domains listed in (a) is amenable to relevant policy interventions;

(c) Current international initiatives, including “Education for All”, such conventions as CEDAW, and mechanisms, including the ILO Decent Work Agenda, provide reasonable frameworks for achieving gender equality;

(d) The absolute need to increase the availability and quality of sex disaggregated data, increase financial resources of organizations engaged in promoting the status of women, and enhance political commitment to gender equality at the highest level.

#### 19. *Population and poverty: achieving equity, equality and sustainability*<sup>35</sup>

This publication addresses the wide range of issues related to achieving equity, equality and sustainability in the process of reducing poverty. It provides the global context by identifying the key issues at the macro and micro levels, thereby exploring the opportunities and implications of economic growth and development. Moreover, key population issues are addressed in various regions in order to highlight the diversity and variability of the problems at hand. Finally, this publication develops a conceptual framework for responding to major challenges and establishing a rational basis for developing strategies to address the identified key challenges.

#### 20. *Population, reproductive health and the Millennium Development Goals*<sup>36</sup>

This publication provides a thorough comparison and subsequent linkage between MDGs and the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) and ICPD+5 agendas. After a concise overview of the provision of each of the mechanisms, the publication analyses the ways in which all three objectives and agendas can be achieved, drawing on the rational linkages and intersections.

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<sup>34</sup> Caren Grown, Geeta Rao Gupta and Zahia Khan, “Promises to keep: achieving gender equality and the empowerment of women”, background paper of the Task Force on Education and Gender Equality (Millennium Project, 18 April 2003).

<sup>35</sup> UNFPA, Population and poverty: achieving equity, equality and sustainability, *Population and development strategies No. 8* (UNFPA, June 2003).

<sup>36</sup> UNFPA, *Population, reproductive health and the Millennium Development Goals: how the ICPD Programme of Action promotes poverty alleviation and human rights* (UNFPA, 2003).

In so doing, this UNFPA publication provides concrete and well argued population and reproductive health specific targets and indicators for each of the eight MDGs.

#### 21. *Progress of the world's women 2005*<sup>37</sup>

This report by UNIFEM focuses on women, work and poverty. It essentially makes the case that strengthening the economic security of women is critical for efforts aimed at reducing poverty and promoting gender equality. The report emphasizes that decent work is key to economic security.

The report substantiates its arguments with data revealing the following: (a) the proportion of women in informal employment is generally greater than men; (b) women are concentrated in more precarious types of employment; and (c) average earnings from such employment are insufficient to raise households out of poverty.

As such, the report provides new and more adequate analytical tools and illustrations of positive examples, including, prominently, a framework based on the proposed employment indicator for MDG 3. That framework proposes to analyse differences by sex in types of employment and earnings, rather than focusing only on the share of women in non-agricultural employment.

#### 22. *En-gendering the Millennium Development Goals on health*<sup>38</sup>

This practical publication by the World Health Organization (WHO) essentially focuses on en-gendering MDG goals 1, 4, 5, 6 and 7 on health. It proposes for each a thorough analysis and argument supported by actual “storylines” that are drawn from various parts of the world.

While the analysis is convincing and substantiates arguments made in other international literature, few hints are provided for en-gendering the targets and the indicators for measurement. Furthermore, the publication appears to be oblivious of MDG 8, which is concerned with global partnerships known to be essential for creating a global climate that is conducive and favourable for bringing about gender equality.

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<sup>37</sup> Martha Chen and others, *Progress of the world's women 2005: women, work and poverty* (UNIFEM, 2005).

<sup>38</sup> WHO, Department of Gender and Women's Health, *'En-gendering' the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) on health* (WHO, 2003).

## II. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### A. CONCLUSIONS: DISEMPOWERING MECHANISMS

The international literature reviewed does not necessarily focus on the root causes of inequality in the Arab region and does not undertake a gender analysis of disempowering factors.

In fact, where public documents make mention of women's empowerment, or the lack thereof, in the Arab region, very few unpack or even define the concept of empowerment. Consequently, identifying the various "disempowering" mechanisms at the legal, structural and attitudinal levels behind gender inequality in the Arab region requires a broader review of the literature on empowerment, as well as of the literature that analyses the root causes of gender inequality in the region.

Within that context, the Social Research Center (SRC) in Egypt is conducting a research project on women's empowerment in the Arab region, which focuses on methodological issues concerned with measuring female empowerment and its definition in the regional context. It aims at assessing what is actually being measured in different survey tools, and tries to identify where the knowledge gaps lie and how to reduce such gaps.

Moreover, Zuhur argues that empowerment, just like the term "liberation", is a complex and relative notion that implies a scale of power and a linear progression from one end of that scale to another.<sup>39</sup> Empowerment is often seen alongside, or in combination with, other phenomena, and the study of gender has in many ways revolutionized the study of other power constellations in society.

Despite relative clarity over what constitutes some of the components of empowerment, the term has yet to be unpacked within the context of the Arab region.<sup>40</sup>

Gender activists and scholars view gender relations as power relations and as an arena where collaboration and completion, support and coercion are mutually exercised. Indeed, many schools of feminism view power and empowerment as the right to determine choice in life and the right to influence the direction of social change. Several scholars have challenged the view that women tend to be powerless and, therefore, analyse the subtle ways in which women, particularly poor women, bargain with otherwise highly powerful and rigid patriarchal structures and institutions.

One of the most well known empowerment frameworks has been developed by Longwe, who identified five "levels of equality" between women and men, which are hierarchical starting from a bottom line of women's material welfare, namely: (a) access to such basic resources as food supply, income and medical care; (b) access to land, labour, credit, training and marketing facilities; (c) conscientisation, hereby defined as the awareness that gender roles are cultural and can be changed; (d) participation, which is women's equal participation in the decision-making process; and (e) control, hereby understood as women's control over the decision-making process through conscientisation and mobilization, thereby achieving equality of control over the factors of production and the distribution of benefits.<sup>41</sup> According to Longwe, the more women are able to move upward in that hierarchy, the more empowered they are and the more equal they are likely to be with men.

Finally, the understanding of what women empowerment means is largely dependent on an in-depth gender analysis, as well as on the experience, challenges and achievements of local actors and stakeholders.

The summarizing of the literature on empowerment identified the following core elements of empowerment:<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Sherifa Zuhur, "Women and empowerment in the Arab world", *Arab Studies Quarterly* (22 September 2003). Available at: <http://www.emich.edu/asquarterly>.

<sup>40</sup> Adapted from Suheir Azzouni, "What prompts women entrepreneurs to take credit" (unpublished, 2001).

<sup>41</sup> Sara Hlupekile Longwe, "Towards realistic strategies for women's political empowerment in Africa", *Gender and development*, vol. 8, No. 3 (London, Routledge, November 2000) pp. 24-30.

<sup>42</sup> A review of literature has recently been compiled by BRIDGE (development - gender) as part of the 'Pathways of Women's Empowerment' research at the Institute of Development Studies, University of Sussex, Brighton, United Kingdom. See also Emily Esplen, Shirini Heerah and Chris Hunter, *Women's Empowerment: An Annotated Bibliography* (Brighton, U.K., BRIDGE, May 2006).

(a) According to the Collective for Research and Training on Development - Action (CRTD-A):<sup>43</sup> (i) having space for action; (ii) having voice; (iii) having choices; and (iv) having agency;

(b) According to Kabeer:<sup>44</sup> (i) access to and control over resources; (ii) agency and ability to act to use resources; and (iii) achievements;

(c) According to CARE:<sup>45</sup> (i) bodily integrity, a woman's control over her own body; (ii) positive images of self-worth; (iii) control and influence over strategic decisions and resources at household and public levels; and (iv) ability to do collective work.

Other elements include the following:

- (a) Changed attitudes and expectations of women;
- (b) Raised knowledge about their situation and position;
- (c) New actions to raise their position and voice;
- (d) Increased role in decision-making and participation at all levels;
- (e) Increased mobility for women;
- (f) Economic security of women;
- (g) Ability of women to make larger purchases;
- (h) Increased involvement in household decisions;
- (i) Relative freedom from family domination;
- (j) Political and legal awareness of women;
- (k) Increased participation of women in political campaigning.

With the above in mind, existing literature points to various institutional sites and levels of disempowerment mechanisms in the Arab region. These are summarized in table 1.

TABLE 1. LEVELS OF DISEMPOWERMENT MECHANISMS IN THE ARAB REGION

Legal factors	Attitudinal factors	Structural/Institutional factors
Family laws, predominately religious and patriarchal	Pervasive gender stereotypes	Budget constraints and insufficient public support for women
Civil laws remain discriminatory	Low priority given to women and girls	Lack of clear strategy for the advancement of women and girls
Very limited implementation of CEDAW, or implementation undermined by binding reservations	Advancement of girls perceived as incompatible with traditional beliefs and principles	Political instability leading to inconsistent policies
Poor accountability mechanisms	Early marriages and pregnancies	Lack of public support for women
	Role of girl/woman as a wife and mother	Inadequate elements for progress assessment and policy formulation from a gender perspective
	Skeptical attitudes towards the benefits and outcomes from investing in women and girls	Poor data collection mechanisms, particularly on women and girls
	Sexual harassment and insecurity	Poor quality of services and programmes

Source: Compiled by ESCWA.

<sup>43</sup> Collective for Research and Training on Development - Action (CRTD-A), "Women's economic empowerment conceptual framework".

<sup>44</sup> Naila Kabeer, *Gender mainstreaming in poverty eradication and the Millennium Development Goals: a handbook for policy-makers and other stakeholders* (London, Commonwealth Secretariat, 2003).

<sup>45</sup> Christian Action Research and Education, available at: <http://www.care.org>.

## B. RECOMMENDATIONS: ENGENDERING MDGS

Overall, there is abundant literature on engendering MDGs. In general, academic or activist literature that does not emanate from United Nations entities makes a significant contribution to critiquing MDGs and to pointing out gaps and areas of concerns.

Those are as follows:

- (a) The clustering of gender equality into a single MDG;
- (b) The failure to link MDGs with other instruments, mechanisms and processes;
- (c) The absence of a reproductive rights approach;
- (d) The absence of a human rights approach;
- (e) The need for adequate resources;
- (f) The absence of a gender analysis of the causes, manifestations and consequences of gender inequality;
- (g) The need to review and transform global economic policies;
- (h) The urgent need to engender MDG implementation, monitoring, and reporting mechanisms and processes;
- (i) The need for an enabling global environment and challenge current global economic policies which seem to be exacerbating social injustice and gender inequality.

Most of the literature reviewed expresses concerns as to whether countries, especially poor nations, will be able to meet the targets set for 2015.

However, much non-United Nations literature suggests various practical actions and steps to be taken in order to ensure that a gender-sensitive approach is used to implement MDGs, and the ways in which those could be used to hold Governments and international institutions accountable.

On the other hand, original literature produced by ESCWA member countries is largely modest and gender-blind.

Finally, the full implementation of MDGs depends significantly on the ability to address the gaps noted above, as well as the legal, structural and institutional barriers to empowerment. Doing so requires a systematic process of “engendering all the MDGs”, a key step of which includes engendering the MDG indicators as suggested in table 2.

TABLE 2. SUGGESTED INDICATORS TO ENGENDER MDGS

Millennium Development Goal	Suggested indicators
1. <i>Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger</i>	<p>Women’s part of the GNP as compared to men</p> <p>Proportion of women’s land ownership</p> <p>Proportion of women’s access to credit (versus men) and to other means of production, including employment</p> <p>Gender audit of national budget and proportion of national budgets allocated to social sectors and, specifically, to women</p> <p>Proportion of women accessing social services, such as health, education, drinking water, energy sources, shelter, decent work, and ICT</p> <p>Proportion of women benefiting from social security</p> <p>Proportion of women represented amongst economic policy makers</p>

TABLE 2 (continued)

Millennium Development Goal	Suggested indicators
	<p>Gender disaggregated data on employment in the public sector</p> <p>Gender disaggregated data on unemployment</p> <p>Gender disaggregated data on average salaries</p> <p>Gender disaggregated data on salaries for similar types of work</p> <p>Gender disaggregated data by categories of employment</p> <p>Income distribution within members of the same household</p> <p>Gender desegregation of national economic statistics</p> <p>Costing of women's unpaid work</p> <p>Gender desegregation of data regarding access to subsidized housing</p> <p>Integration of gender in national budgeting exercises</p>
2. <i>Achieve universal primary education</i>	<p>Enrolment ration by sex and by age</p> <p>Targets for decreasing gender gaps in enrolment rations</p> <p>Specific targets for increasing girls' enrolment rates</p> <p>Proportion of schools with female staff</p> <p>Proportion of schools with facilities for girls</p>
3. <i>Promote gender equality and empower women</i>	<p>Proportion of women who have access and control over agricultural land and benefits</p> <p>Equal access to quality health services</p> <p>Proportion of woman and girl victims of sexual and other forms of violence who have access to legal, psychological and medical assistance and services</p> <p>Women's representation in executive bodies</p> <p>Women's representation in parliament and other elected bodies</p> <p>Women's representation amongst parliamentary heads of commissions</p> <p>Women's representation in senior administrative positions</p> <p>Women's representation within the various levels of the private sector</p> <p>Women's representation in local councils</p> <p>Women's representation within political parties (especially within the party bureaus)</p> <p>Women's representation within membership and leadership of workers and professional unions and syndicates</p> <p>Number of CEDAW reports produced</p> <p>Number of CEDAW shadow reports produced</p> <p>Quality of reports produced</p> <p>Women's representation in civil society and within human rights organizations</p>

TABLE 2 (continued)

Millennium Development Goal	Suggested indicators
4. <i>Reduce child mortality</i>	<p>Specify target for reducing gender gap in infant mortality and child mortality</p> <p>Specify target for reducing gender gap in vaccination coverage</p> <p>Specify target for reducing gender gap in malnutrition</p> <p>Specify target for reducing gender gap in breastfeeding up to 6 months</p>
5. <i>Improve maternal health</i>	<p>Gender disaggregated gap in access to quality health services</p> <p>Specify target for reducing maternal mortality</p> <p>Number of prenatal/antenatal medical consultations</p> <p>Number of women with access to safe delivery</p> <p>Number of women with access to appropriate medical coverage</p> <p>Number and proportion of teenage girls with access to quality health education and health services</p> <p>Specific target for decreasing the various female genital mutilation (FGM) practices and other forms of violence against women and girls</p>
6. <i>Combat HIV/AIDS and other diseases</i>	<p>Women's access to reproductive health services and health education</p> <p>Gender gap in HIV/AIDS prevalence and vulnerability</p> <p>Women's and girls' knowledge of modes of transmission</p> <p>Women's and girls' knowledge of vulnerability factors</p> <p>Policy makers' knowledge of gender-specific vulnerability factors</p> <p>Proportion of usage of female condoms</p> <p>Level of acceptability of female condoms</p> <p>Utilization of female versus male condoms</p> <p>Availability of female condoms in community health centres</p> <p>Proportion of HIV-infected women with access to treatment</p> <p>Analysis of national budget allocation to HIV/AIDS and proportion allocated to women</p> <p>Existence of legislation and enforcement mechanism to protect women from HIV/AIDS</p> <p>Level of mainstreaming gender in politics and programmes on HIV/AIDS</p>
7. <i>Ensure environmental sustainability</i>	<p>Proportion of representation of women and men in decision-making bodies related to environment and energy</p> <p>Number of programmes targeting women</p> <p>Number and proportion of women landowners in decision-making positions with access to credit and other resource management assets</p>

TABLE 2 (continued)

Millennium Development Goal	Suggested indicators
	Gender distribution of work related to energy-conserving technologies Gender disaggregated data on access to safe water Number of irrigation projects which address differential needs of women and men Proportion of women headed households with access to resources
8. <i>Develop a global partnership for development</i>	Participation of women's organizations in elaboration of CEDAW reports Level and nature of consultation between the Government and civil society organizations, including women's groups Existence of clear framework of cooperation and collaboration between the Government and development partners, as well as the private sector, to ensure higher access to and control over resources by women

Source: Compiled by ESCWA.

Other key indicators for engendering MDGs include the following:

- (a) Existence and enforcement of gender-aware electoral and legislative reforms;
- (b) Periodical gender audit and subsequent review of national laws and policies;
- (c) Existence of operational mechanisms which support women's leadership and participation in the public sphere;
- (d) Existence of specific budget lines for alleviating women's poverty;
- (e) Existence of operational gender-specific departments within line ministries and public institutions;
- (f) Elimination of all forms of gender stereotypes;
- (g) Existence of equality clauses in all policies.

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