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PANEL II

**Addressing the linkages between the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action
and the outcome document of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly
and the internationally agreed development goals,
including those contained in the Millennium Declaration:
Progress, gaps and challenges**

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* The paper has been reproduced as submitted.

From 7 to 10 Feb of this year, the Division for the Advancement of Women (DAW) convened a meeting of experts from different sections of civil society concerned with gender equality and women's rights and from different regions of the world to review progress on the Beijing Platform for Action and to consider its linkages with the Millennium Declaration and the Millennium Development Goals MDGs. The meeting was hosted by the State Committee for Women's Issues of the Government of Azerbaijan. The group observed that the Beijing Platform had represented a holistic vision for the achievement of gender equality, one which embodied the commitment to women's rights spelt out by CEDAW and reaffirmed by the ICPD. It noted the active engagement of civil society in the lead up to the Beijing conference, during the conference itself and in the follow up to it. The Beijing Platform represented a broad consensus document with high level commitment from both government and civil society. However, the group also recognized that the absence of concrete, time bound indicators had made it difficult to monitor progress on the priority areas of the Beijing Platform. It was also noted that unclear mandates, contradictory demands and inadequate resourcing had made it difficult for the national machineries responsible for taking the Beijing Platform forward to carry out their mandate.

We were encouraged by the reaffirmation of the international community's commitment to the equality of rights between women and men through their endorsement of the Millennium Declaration, but concerned by the restrictive interpretation of MDG 3 on gender equality and women's empowerment, as well as by the uneven integration of gender equality perspectives into the other goals. There is a discernible disjuncture between the challenges identified by review of the Beijing Platform, which point to the structural nature of the power relationships that led to gender inequality as well as to cultural barriers to its elimination. We were concerned also at the absence of civil society engagement in the process of formulating the MDGs, a marked contrast to the active and enthusiastic participation that characterized the international conferences of the 1990s, including Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing. This top-down process has made it difficult for many sections of civil society, those with most at stake in the achievement of the MDGs, to feel a sense of engagement with this agenda.

However, we also recognized that there were persuasive reasons why women's organisations concerned with equality issues needed to become actively involved in the MDG process. First of all, it commands a high level of commitment at the international level and appeals to a broader range of stakeholders than the Beijing Platform. The MDGs therefore offer a strategic opportunity to integrate the concerns of the Beijing Platform into a wider agenda and to build on the mutual synergies between the goals of the two policy frameworks. This more integrated vision could also help to challenge the narrow economic paradigm embodied in the MDGs and realign them more closely with the vision of the Millennium Declaration.

We also felt that mobilization by civil society actors and women's groups to promote the integration of gender equality goals across the MDGs would bring them into closer dialogue with a wider range of ministries and stakeholders and help to realise more effectively the cross-cutting nature of gender concerns. The fact that the MDGs specified concrete and time-bound targets and indicators provided the possibility of monitoring progress on gender equality and women's empowerment in a way that the Beijing Platform had not. However, given the narrow ranges of targets and indicators embodied in the MDGs, we strongly welcomed the work and

recommendations of MDG Task Force 3 for addressing critical gaps in the MDGs, particularly sexual and reproductive rights and health, violence against women and women's access to economic rights and opportunities. We commended also the excellent work carried out by Task Force 4, its analysis of the power relations and health systems as key elements for addressing women's health and well-being.

The challenge we set ourselves as a group was to spell out some of the ways in which the mutual linkages between the Beijing Platform and the MDGs could be operationalized. The Group made recommendations under four key areas of concern: the human rights framework, the macro-economic framework and poverty reduction strategies, making resources work for women, and the critical importance of civil society engagement.

The human rights framework

We agreed as a group that a rights-based framework provided an important conceptual link between the Beijing Platform and the Millennium Declaration and hence required that the MDGs are reconceptualized and implemented from a human rights perspective, with special attention to the rights of women and girls. Countries that have committed themselves to the Beijing Platform and the MDGs have also ratified key human rights conventions, including CEDAW. Their Governments consequently have an obligation to work towards the progressive realization of these rights. A rights-based approach to the MDGs would contribute to the ability of Governments to discharge their obligations. It would also strengthen the implementation of the Beijing Platform, since it would require identification of different actors responsible for upholding these rights, allocate the resources necessary for their progressive realization and set up mechanisms of accountability to ensure progress was made. CEDAW offers a useful tool for tackling the root causes of gender equality as well as providing a model for setting up accountability processes.

We highlighted three critical issues in relation to the formulation and implementation of the MDGs from a women's rights perspective.

- Action must be concrete, deliberate and targeted: all States, no matter how poor, must take immediate concrete measures to advance gender equality in relation to the MDGs.
- Budget allocations are relevant to human rights: allocations and deficits will determine progress.
- Some interventions may need to take priorities over others. Not all interventions are equally important, not all can be taken simultaneously. When fundamental rights are at stake, particularly in historical contexts of neglect, these will have to take priority.

Recommendations were:

1. Use CEDAW and the Beijing Platform as frameworks, instruments and mechanisms to ensure a rights-based approach to the implementation of the MDGs. CEDAW and BPFA monitoring and review processes would be used to hold Governments accountable for the gender-sensitive implementation of the MDGs and MDG-based poverty reduction strategies.

2. Implement the following priority ‘quick win’ interventions as recommended by the Report of the Millennium Project for large scale progress and vital gains in setting countries on the path to achieving the MDGs:

a) guarantee universal access to sexual and reproductive health and rights for girls and women as a priority;

b) address as first priority the needs of the most socially excluded women, including women living with HIV/AIDS, slum dwellers, displaced and refugee women, young women, and those who suffer additional discrimination on the basis of race, ethnicity and caste

3. Develop gender equality indicators at the national level for all the MDGs. Governments and the UN system are urged to improve the quality and frequency of data disaggregated by sex, ethnicity, minority and other forms of socially excluded groups.

Engendering the macro-economy and poverty reduction strategies

We considered that the tenth anniversary of the Beijing Platform is an opportunity to underline that the MDGs cannot be achieved without a vision of global economic justice that recognises that reducing gender inequalities and empowering women requires addressing the failure of the macro-economic framework to address structural roots of both poverty and gender inequality. The current model of globalization has promoted women’s access to labour market opportunities but confined them to the worst paid and most casual forms of work. Moreover, by ignoring their unpaid work, it has led to the intensification of their workloads. We recognise the need to address the structures and mechanisms through which gender inequalities are reproduced at macro, meso, and micro levels as well as to promote policies that can help to challenge the power relations that are at the heart of global inequalities and imbalances against poor countries. Poverty reduction strategies built around the MDGs cannot and should not be in conflict with human rights and gender equality commitments but must facilitate their gradual realization.

Recommendations were:

4. Make MDG-based poverty strategies gender sensitive by drawing on the Beijing Platform and CEDAW, safeguarding women’s and girls’ rights and promoting their health, including sexual and reproductive health; education; access to and control over economic and political opportunities and resources, and freedom from violence.

5. Apply a human rights framework for assessing the gender impact of trade and macro-economic policies before and after their implementation. Assessments should focus, first of all, on the gender distribution of benefits as well as costs of adjustment associated with trade agreements and macro-economic policies in terms of livelihood systems, income employment opportunities, quality of employment. Secondly assessments should focus on the capacity of governments to fulfil their obligations for women’s economic, social and political rights and to implement the required legal, regulatory and support measures (e.g. taxation, subsidies etc).

Making resources work for women

We wished as a group to draw special attention to the issue of resources as an element of the concrete measures necessary for the achievement of gender equality and women’s rights. The international community has made promises to the women of the world but has yet to keep these

promises. It seemed to us that the MDGs, if interpreted from a gender perspective, could promote the transition from promises to implementation but that this would require the necessary material allocations. It would require a supportive policy environment and funding mechanisms at both national and international levels. We wished to underline that this will require a combination of earmarked funds for women's needs in all departments and line ministries as well as appropriate instruments and conditions for gender mainstreaming in all areas. Organisations' commitment to gender equality and women's national machineries in low income countries will need even greater and more sustained financial support.

Recommendations were:

6. Systematically scale up investments in women and girls development, starting with those whose needs are most urgent, prioritizing areas that have been overlooked and highlighting areas of persistent gender bias, by:

a) developing new financing mechanisms to increase the resources available for the reduction of poverty and the promotion of gender equality and women's empowerment

b) including explicit gender equality objectives in all key strategic areas of poverty reduction strategies, including the PRSPs, particularly the economy, governance, infrastructure and employment and allocate the necessary financial and human resources to the associated budget and monitoring mechanisms;

c) supporting gender-sensitive budget initiatives at local, national and international levels, including the UN system, and developing and applying gender-sensitive methodology to measure, assess and track the impact and effectiveness of investments in women and girls, and in reduction of inequality;

d) ensuring the achievement of gender equality in the MDGs through targeted funding by governments and donors for gender equality as an explicit development goal in its own right as well as for ensuring that gender equality results and processes are identified and supported in all other development priorities;

e) providing access, financial support and capacity building at both local and global levels for women to participate in the global partnerships, decision-making and monitoring processes of the MDG-based poverty reduction efforts. This must include support for national machineries to play a meaningful role.

Participation of women's organisations in the follow up to the Millennium Declaration and the MDGs

We would stress that civil society participation has been a key element in the formulation and follow up to the Beijing Platform. It has created an enabling environment through policy dialogue and strategic alliances that have moved forward the national and international agenda of the Beijing Platform. It has helped to channel women's needs and demands to the State and helped the State to respond to these. In this process, it has established vital links between women's rights agenda, social justice and other development goals, including poverty reduction. It has helped to give voice to marginalized women and girls within the mainstream policy dialogue and debate. Consequently, civil society organisations have gained great knowledge, credibility, experience in policy dialogue and building partnerships at national and international levels. These are key elements in deepening democratic processes within a society.

The Millennium Declaration recognizes both the importance of women's empowerment as well as the need to engage with CSOs in pursuit of this and other goals, indicating the need to work collectively for more inclusive political processes, allowing genuine participation by all citizens. However, recognition of this role has not been fully translated into formal and meaningful engagement by women's organizations in the advancement of the principles of the Millennium Declaration or the formulation and implementation of the MDGs. One result of this is that women's organizations have themselves not fully acknowledged the MDGs as a tool for advancing gender equality. It is critical to find a way of mobilizing the national and global capacities, resources and achievements resulting from the Beijing Platform commitments. Women's organizations can build political will through their local, national, regional and international networks and bring new players into the MDG process. They can help to contextualize the MDGs and bring in local and national realities through knowledge generation, advocacy, monitoring and evaluation.

We therefore underlined the importance of building sustainable partnerships between women's organizations and Government that are institutionalized with appropriate resource allocations and where necessary with capacity strengthening. The aim of this would be to link the implementation of the Beijing Platform to the achievement of the MDGs as well as to use the MDGs as a tool to advance the women's rights agenda, by:

7. a) promoting and strengthening genuine partnerships between Governments, women's organizations, the United Nations and other stakeholders to ensure the integration of a gender perspective in all MDGs processes; and by making the Millennium Campaign more responsive to civil society organisations working for gender equality and women's empowerment.
- b) developing systems for improving the accountability for engendering all MDGs processes as well as national reports by a monitoring process that could include shadow reports.