

## Introduction

Over a decade ago at the Fourth World Conference on Women, the 189 Member States of the United Nations adopted the *Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action*. The *Declaration* was a statement of the political commitment by governments to work toward equality between men and women and toward women's empowerment. The *Platform for Action* outlined strategic objectives and actions in twelve "critical areas of concern."

Equality between women and men was also an important theme of the other development conferences of the 1990s – Education for All (1990), Environment and Development (1992), Human Rights (1993) Population and Development (1994), and Social Development (1995). These discussions and agreements progressively built a consensus on development priorities that formed the basis for the Millennium Declaration adopted by the world community in 2000.

Subsequently, a subset of the goals established in the United Nations conferences in the 1990s was developed as the eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Gender equality and women's empowerment is critical to the achievement of the MDGs. It is the focus of one goal (MDG 3) and of MDG5 on maternal mortality, and is closely related to all the other goals. The MDGs have focused the international agenda by setting specific targets to be met by 2015 and by the high-profile annual monitoring process at the national and international levels.<sup>1</sup>

The identification of gender equality and women's empowerment as one of the eight MDGs reflects the consensus on their importance. It also highlights the distance yet to go in implementing the many commitments made on equality, development and peace.

In 2005, the ten-year review and appraisal of the implementation of the *Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action* again signalled the need to renew efforts.<sup>2</sup> Responses from Governments to the questionnaire on progress showed that there were gains in each of the *Platform for Action*'s critical areas of concern. There were, however, major gaps and shortcomings in both efforts and results in all areas.

Continuing problems in all regions include the low representation of women in decision-making in both the public and private sectors, inequality in employment and economic opportunities, and unequal access to social and economic resources including education, health care, and productive assets. Gender equality dimensions of environmental crises continue to be marginalised. Violence against women, including domestic violence, remains a major challenge. Poverty levels are disproportionately high for women in some regions, and may be even higher for women who face additional forms of disadvantage due to factors such as ethnicity, disability, or age. Issues such as the exploitation of child labourers, sexual violence in conflict zones, and trafficking in women and girls were identified as critical in 1995 and remain pressing problems. New challenges include the high rates of HIV/AIDS infection among women and girls and increasingly frequent natural disasters with gender-specific impacts.

The large gap between policy and implementation, and the persistence of discriminatory attitudes and practices contribute to the slow pace of change. In addition, only limited progress had been made in implementing the commitment to mainstreaming gender perspectives into policy decision-making in all sectors.

In 2005, taking stock of progress to date and the distance yet to go, the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) reaffirmed the *Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action* and called for "further action to ensure their full and accelerated implementation."<sup>3</sup> Heads of State

and governments meeting at the World Summit later that same year also called for action, stating that they were “convinced that progress for women is progress for all.”<sup>4</sup>

This document has been prepared to stimulate thinking by national governments, the United Nations entities and other stakeholders about ways to accelerate progress on implementation of the *Platform for Action*. It draws on the ten-year review and appraisal of the implementation of the *Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action* and the wealth of other analyses and recommendations by United Nations bodies and agencies. Other important sources were the work of the Task Forces established by the United Nations Millennium Project<sup>5</sup> and research by activist organisations and networks.<sup>6</sup> The objective was not to provide a comprehensive analysis of each topic, but rather to provide highlights of progress and remaining gaps or challenges as a background to a discussion of possible strategies in key areas. The range of strategies suggested under each of the critical areas of concern show that there are many practical steps that can be taken.

In identifying strategies, the focus is on the national level and on actions by national governments. Even though there are other important non-state actors – including private sector employers, media, trade unions, women’s organisations – national governments have a particularly important role in providing the framework and momentum for implementation through policies, legislation, and programmes. Governments can learn from initiatives undertaken by civil society organisations and implement promising practices on a wider scale. Governments can also lead through example as well as by encouraging or facilitating efforts by non-state actors.

The *Platform for Action* addresses a wide range of issues, reflecting the complexity of overcoming gender inequality. The twelve critical areas are inter-related, and thus it is important to aim for and monitor progress in all areas. At the same time, approaches that include the establishment of priorities and interim targets may make the challenge more manageable. Some guidance in priority setting is offered by the UN Millennium Project’s Task Force report on MDG 3 (gender equality and the empowerment of women). The Task Force identified seven strategic priorities, set out in the box below. They note that these are a subset of the priorities in the Beijing *Platform for Action* and other international agreements, and that all of these commitments remain important. However, the Task Force’s seven strategic priorities are “areas requiring immediate action if Goal 3 is to be met by 2015.”

**Strategic priorities identified by the UN Millennium Project's Task Force 3 Report:  
*Taking action: achieving gender equality and empowering women*<sup>7</sup>**

The Task Force identified seven strategic priorities that required immediate action if Goal 3 was to be met by the MDG target date of 2015. The Task Force stated that these seven interdependent priorities were "the minimum necessary to empower women and alter the historical legacy of female disadvantage that remains in most societies of the world."

- 1) Strengthen opportunities for post-primary education for girls while simultaneously meeting commitments to universal primary education.
- 2) Guarantee sexual and reproductive health and rights.
- 3) Invest in infrastructure to reduce women's and girls' time burdens.
- 4) Guarantee women's and girls' property and inheritance rights.
- 5) Eliminate gender inequality in employment by decreasing women's reliance on informal employment, closing gender gaps in earnings, and reducing occupational segregation.
- 6) Increase women's share of seats in national parliaments and local governmental bodies.
- 7) Combat violence against girls and women.

The formulation of national MDG policy frameworks or implementation strategies provides new opportunities to refocus attention on the *Platform for Action* commitments and to generate momentum for implementation. Many countries are elaborating local targets under each MDG. Some governments have used this process to set out a more comprehensive approach to MDG 3 and to incorporate a gender equality perspective in the targets or indicators for the other goals.<sup>8</sup> Annual progress monitoring on all MDGs and the pressure to meet the 2015 deadline also provide opportunities to accelerate action on gender equality commitments.

A number of themes recur in the chapters on the critical areas of concern. These themes are highlighted here for further emphasis.

**The need to improve the availability, quality and use of sex-disaggregated data and gender statistics<sup>9</sup>**

Although action to improve statistics has been advocated since the first United Nations World Conference in 1975, much remains to be done. Recent reviews show that data remains poor on basic indicators such as maternal mortality. Sex-disaggregated data is not always available on other basic indicators, such as infant mortality, adult morbidity, school enrolment, and economic activity.

In many countries, these data shortcomings are part of a larger problem of inadequate statistical capacity as well as slow progress in incorporating a gender perspective into statistical systems. Important areas for attention include efforts to strengthen the statistical capacity of national statistical offices and line ministries, together with systematic attention to gender equality issues at all stages of development of statistics, including concepts and methods for data collection through to data presentation.

Strategies to improve statistics should consider the demand side as well as the supply of data. Given the differences between women and men in economic activity and in access to resources such as education, health care, capital and time, routine disaggregation of data and analysis should be considered an important element of good practice by policy analysts and

planners. However, this has clearly not yet been achieved. Increased awareness among data-users of the need for, and value of, sex-disaggregated data, and increased demand from users for such data, would increase momentum for change. Initiatives to strengthen skills in using sex-disaggregated data in policy and programme analysis are also important elements of an effective strategy.

### **The importance of increased efforts to involve of men and boys<sup>10</sup>**

The role of men and boys in progress toward equality has received increasing attention since 1995. The increased attention reflects a better understanding of gender relations and related structural inequalities - that is, greater recognition that gender inequality is not only a women's problem, but is an issue of social relations in the family and wider society that maintain inequality. At the same time, it is increasingly recognized that overcoming inequality between women and men is critical to progress in poverty eradication and to achieving other development goals in health, education, economic justice and democratic governance – that the costs of continued gender inequality are born by society as a whole, and by men as well as women.

The *Platform for Action* emphasized the principle of equality and shared responsibilities between women and men in all spheres (the family, the workplace and the community), and Governments made a commitment to encourage men to participate fully in all actions toward equality. The importance of increasing the involvement of men and boys was noted in the discussions in 2000 on implementation of the *Platform for Action* and the issue was a focus of the Commission on the Status of Women at its 48<sup>th</sup> session in 2004. The CSW agreed conclusions highlighted the role of government in encouraging men and boys to foster gender equality and in increasing their capacity to act as agents of change.

Areas for attention include information campaigns and other programmes targeted to men to increase their awareness and respect for women's rights, to encourage them to adopt safe and responsible sexual behaviour, to take responsibility for preventing violence against women, and to take a greater share in the care of children and other family members. Also important is greater involvement of men and boys in efforts to reach men in all these areas, and in providing leadership to other men in fostering gender equality. This includes, for example, supporting men to take a leadership role in combating violence against women and promoting safe sexual behaviour, and in using their networks, peer programmes, information campaigns and other methods to reach and influence other men. Governments can also seek to increase the representation of men in jobs and agencies with responsibilities for gender equality and as trainers on gender equality issues. Since men continue to dominate policy decision-making in most sectors, effort to increase their capacity to support gender equality is another important area for attention.

### **The potential for effective collaboration between governments and women's organisations and activists**

Women's organisations and gender equality activists have played an important role in spurring action in many of the *Platform for Action's* critical areas of concern, including for example, campaigns to counter violence and assist victims, mobilizing women to participate in conflict resolution, promoting change in media portrayal of women and equality issues toward more balanced approaches. They have also been important in advocacy for equality and service

delivery to women in areas such as health, HIV/AIDS education, and entrepreneurial development, among others.

While the *Platform for Action* sets out a leadership role for governments in working toward the strategic objectives, it also outlines important roles for civil society, including women's civil society organisations. Governments can benefit from the experience and insights of women's organisations when identifying priorities and strategies, both in relation to comprehensive initiatives such as poverty reduction strategies, or in considering options in particular areas such as improving reproductive health services or meeting the needs of refugees. There are encouraging examples in a number of countries of collaboration between governments and women's organisations on different critical areas of concern that had fruitful outcomes. Also encouraging is that many Governments responding to the questionnaire for the ten-year review and appraisal of implementation of the *Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action* recognized the critical role of women's organisations and called for increased collaboration.

### **The need to recognize and act on the specific needs of particular groups of women**

The *Platform for Action* provides many reminders of diversity among women in situation and needs. Generalisations about "all women" can be misleading and inaccurate. The *Platform for Action* includes a separate chapter on the girl-child, recognizing the need for specific action to protect girls and address discrimination at the earliest stage of their lives. The ten-year review and appraisal of implementation of the *Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action* included a review of achievements and challenges in relation to indigenous women, reflecting the commitments made to addressing their needs in relation to poverty, health, education, decision-making and the environment, among others.

Age, race, ethnicity, culture, disability are among the factors that result in different barriers to enjoying human rights and to equitable participation in development. Women who are heads of household, refugees, migrants, HIV-positive, or widows may face particular economic and social challenges.

Part of the challenge in accelerating progress in implementation of the *Platform for Action* commitments is an approach to gender mainstreaming that brings gender perspectives into policy decision-making while ensuring that women are not considered a homogenous group.

#### **Organisation of the report**

Each chapter of the document includes five sections.

1. *Global commitments*: the strategic objectives of the *Platform for Action* and related commitments made by national governments in other UN forums and in international conventions.
2. *Progress at the national level*: a brief overview of notable changes since the Beijing Conference, with an emphasis on changes in gender relations and the situation of women at the national level.
3. *Gaps and challenges*: a brief overview of areas that remain particularly problematic due to shortcomings in actions taken or the challenges of achieving substantive change.
4. *Strategies to accelerate implementation*: suggestions about possible strategies, focusing on a limited number of particular strategies in areas on which there seems to be some consensus that more needs to be done, with specific examples where possible.
5. *Resources*: an annotated selection of key resources to support action in the areas covered, including websites and specific tools or reports available on-line. (Additional resources can be identified through the footnotes.)

## Acronyms used in the report

CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women
CRC	Convention on the Rights of the Child
CSO	Civil society organisation
CSW	Commission on the Status of Women (United Nations)
DAW	Division for the Advancement of Women (United Nations)
DPA	Department of Political Affairs (United Nations)
DPKO	Department of Peacekeeping Operations (United Nations)
ECOSOC	Economic and Social Council (United Nations)
ESCAP	Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (United Nations)
EFA	Education for All
FGM/C	Female genital mutilation/cutting
IANWGE	Inter-Agency Network on Women and Gender Equality (United Nations)
IASC	Inter-Agency Standing Committee
ICPD	International Conference on Population and Development (Cairo, 1994)
ICT	Information and communications technologies
IFAD	International Fund for Agricultural Development
IFC	International Finance Corporation (World Bank)
ILO	International Labour Organisation
INSTRAW	United Nations International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women
MDGs	Millennium Development Goals
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
OCHA	Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Assistance (United Nations)
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
OHCHR	Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights
OSAGI	Office of the Special Adviser on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women (United Nations)
OSCE	Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe
PRSP	Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper
SGBV	Sexual and gender-based violence

STDs	Sexually transmitted diseases
TB	tuberculosis
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNEP	United Nations Environment Programme
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNFPA	United Nations Fund for Population Activities
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNIFEM	United Nations Development Fund for Women
UNRISD	United Nations Research Institute for Social Development
WFP	World Food Programme
WHO	World Health Organisation
WSIS	World Summit on the Information Society
WPS	Women, peace and security

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> See website of the UN Millennium Project: [www.un.org/millenniumgoals/index.html](http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/index.html) (accessed 12 July 2007), see also the national reports on UNDP's MDG site: [www.undp.org/mdg/](http://www.undp.org/mdg/) (accessed 12 July 2007).
- <sup>2</sup> United Nations (2005) *Review of the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action and the outcome documents of the special session of the General Assembly entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century" Report of the Secretary-General*, E/CN.6/2005/2
- <sup>3</sup> Declaration issued by the Commission on the Status of Women at its forty-ninth session (2005), E/CN.6/2005/L.1 [www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/csw/csw49/documents.html](http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/csw/csw49/documents.html) (accessed 12 July 2007).
- <sup>4</sup> 2005 World Summit Outcome, United Nations General Assembly Resolution A/RES/60/1, para. 58. [www.un.org/summit2005/documents.html](http://www.un.org/summit2005/documents.html) (accessed 12 July 2007).
- <sup>5</sup> In particular, UN Millennium Project (2005). *Taking Action: Achieving Gender Equality and Empowering Women*. Task Force on Education and Gender Equality (Task Force 3.) [www.unmillenniumproject.org/reports/tf\\_gender.htm](http://www.unmillenniumproject.org/reports/tf_gender.htm). (accessed 26 June 2007)
- <sup>6</sup> For example, a useful report that considers all regions is: WEDO (2005). *Beijing Betrayed: Women Worldwide Report that Governments Have Failed to Turn the Platform into Action*. [www.wedo.org/library.aspx?ResourceID=31](http://www.wedo.org/library.aspx?ResourceID=31) (accessed 26 June 2007).
- <sup>7</sup> UN Millennium Project 2005. *Taking Action: Achieving Gender Equality and Empowering Women*. Task Force on Education and Gender Equality (Task Force 3.) [www.unmillenniumproject.org/reports/tf\\_gender.htm](http://www.unmillenniumproject.org/reports/tf_gender.htm). (accessed 26 June 2007).
- <sup>8</sup> See UNDP (2005). *En route to Equality. A Gender Review of National MDG Reports*. New York: Bureau of Development Policy, UNDP. [www.mdgender.net/upload/monographs/en-route-to-equality\\_1.pdf](http://www.mdgender.net/upload/monographs/en-route-to-equality_1.pdf) (accessed 12 July 2007).
- <sup>9</sup> See the analysis trends and issues in the availability of national data, and recommendations for action, in United Nations, Department for Economic and Social Affairs, Statistics Division (2006). *The World's Women 2005: Progress in Statistics*. [unstats.un.org/unsd/demographic/products/indwm/wwpub.htm](http://unstats.un.org/unsd/demographic/products/indwm/wwpub.htm). (accessed 26 June 2007).

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<sup>10</sup> See papers and final report of the Expert Group Meetings on “The role of men and boys in achieving gender equality,” (organized by DAW in collaboration with UNDP, ILO and UNAIDS), Brazil, October 2003. [www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/documents/egm.htm](http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/documents/egm.htm) (choose appropriate Expert Group meeting – accessed 12 July 2007) The issue was on the agenda of the CSW’s 48<sup>th</sup> Session, see the agreed conclusions at [www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/csw/48sess.htm#conclusions](http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/csw/48sess.htm#conclusions). (accessed 12 July 2007).