

UNFINISHED BUSINESS – WOMEN AND GIRLS FRONT AND CENTRE BEYOND 2015

May 2013

“There can be no peace, no progress as long as there is discrimination and violence against women.”

– Michelle Bachelet, UN Women Executive Director, 15 March 2013

There is no chance of making poverty history without significant and rapid improvements to the lives of women and girls in all countries. Gender equality and women’s rights are essential to achieving the unfinished business of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). It is time to back up political promises with action and resources. Increased investments in five key areas will have catalytic effects on the lives of women and girls, and accelerate development progress beyond 2015.

1. KEEP GIRLS IN SCHOOL

Secondary and higher levels of education have the greatest payoff for women’s empowerment. With an additional year of schooling, women have better economic prospects, more decision-making autonomy, fewer and healthier children, and better chances of sending their own children to school. If adolescent girls are kept in school to complete a quality secondary education, they will be better equipped to reach their full potential and make informed choices about their lives.

2. IMPROVE REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH, INCLUDING ACCESS TO FAMILY PLANNING

Funding for family planning and reproductive health has declined since the mid-1990s as a share of aid to population policies and programmes. Today, one girl in nine marries before the age of 15. Almost 10% of girls become mothers by the age of 16, with the highest rates in Sub-Saharan Africa and Asia. Pregnancy and child birth are the biggest causes of death amongst adolescent girls, and poor girls are three times more likely than better-off girls to give birth during adolescence. Each minute one young woman becomes HIV positive. Young women aged 15-24 are two times more likely than young men to be infected with HIV, particularly in Sub-Saharan Africa.

The potential benefits of funding for family planning are enormous:

- Addressing the unmet need for contraceptives would prevent 54 million unintended pregnancies and 26 million abortions.
- For every dollar spent on providing modern contraception, \$1.40 would be saved in medical care costs.
- As many as 13% of under 5 deaths in developing countries could be avoided by increasing the spacing between births.
- Lower fertility rates reduce poverty.

ACTIONS THAT WILL MAKE THE DIFFERENCE

To achieve the unfinished business of the MDGs, it is essential to put women and girls front and centre and move beyond empty promises. It is time to act – not just talk – to:

- Maintain a standalone gender equality and women’s empowerment goal and address gender equality throughout the post-2015 development agenda.
- Confront and overcome the cultural and social norms that hold back women and girls.
- Gather and use the evidence about what works.
- Track government expenditures on gender equality and women’s rights; and, the proportion of all aid focussed on achieving gender equality and women’s empowerment.

3. INCREASE WOMEN’S CONTROL OVER AND OWNERSHIP OF ASSETS

Women’s economic empowerment is a driver of development that addresses poverty; reduces inequalities; and improves children’s health, nutrition, and school attendance. Compared to men, women save more and invest a higher proportion of their earnings in their families and communities. Women need access to the full range of credit, banking and financial services and facilities essential to more fully develop their assets, their land and their businesses. Making it possible for women to control capital and unleash their potential as workers, business leaders and entrepreneurs will lead to higher economic growth, sustainable development and a fairer world for all.

4. SUPPORT WOMEN’S LEADERSHIP AND INFLUENCE

Women are strong leaders and agents of change in their families, communities and countries. Women everywhere have aspirations to freedom, equality and justice. Increasing women’s “voice” at all levels of political decision-making is essential for advancing issues of importance to women on national and local agendas, with benefits for both women and men. Education, employment, and decreased risk of domestic violence are the main pathways to women’s control over their own lives.

5. STOP VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND GIRLS

Violence against women and girls is a scourge in all cultures, countries, regions and across generations. It impoverishes and harms women, their entire families and society as a whole.

- 7 in 10 women experience physical and/or sexual violence in their lifetime — mostly from their husbands, intimate partners or someone they know.
- 603 million women live in countries where domestic violence is not yet considered a crime.
- 100 to 140 million women and girls in the world have endured female genital mutilation.
- 2 million women are trafficked each year into prostitution, forced labour, slavery or servitude.
- At least 200 000 cases of sexual violence against women and girls have been documented in the Democratic Republic of Congo since 1996.

BILATERAL ODA AND MULTILATERAL OUTFLOWS TO POPULATION POLICIES/PROGRAMMES AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH, 1995-2011
Commitments, \$ billion, constant 2011 prices

