



Institute of  
Development Studies

**Evidence for Action on Gender Equality and the  
MDGs – Transforming Women’s Lives**  
*Presentation to the OECD DAC Gendernet*

**Professor Naila Kabeer**

**18 June 2010**

## Millennium Declaration: intrinsic rationale for gender equality

- *Men and women have the right to live their lives and raise their children in dignity, free from hunger and from the fear of violence, oppression or injustice. Democratic and participatory governance based on the will of people best assures these rights.*
- *We will spare no effort to free our fellow men, women and children from the abject and dehumanizing conditions of extreme poverty, to which more than a billion of them are currently subjected. We are committed to making the right to development a reality for everyone and to freeing the entire human race from want...*

## Intrinsic rationale continued....

- *We resolve ....to combat all forms of violence against women and to implement the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women'*
- **AND THE INSTRUMENTAL RATIONALE**
- *We also resolve ...to promote gender equality and the empowerment of women as effective ways to combat poverty, hunger and disease and to stimulate development that is truly sustainable.*

## Theory of change: interactions between structure and agency

- Individual gender inequalities are surface manifestations of underlying structural inequalities :
- Gender specific constraints
- Gender intensified constraints
- Imposed gender constraints

## Agency.....

- Agency refers to people's capacity to exercise control over their lives and to participate in the collective decisions that matter to them
- Depends on access to material, human and social resources and the possibilities for change embodied in such access

## **We will be looking at MDG 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 and 8**

- To find out the pace of progress or lack therefore
- What impeded progress and what promoted it
- How do these barriers and accelerators relate to the gendered structures of constraint?
- How do they relate to the promotion of women's agency

## Gender equality and economic growth: is there a win-win

- General consensus that gender equality in post primary education and women's share of labour force, particularly formal employment, contribute to economic growth: strong instrumental case for supporting gender equality
- Weak or no evidence that economic growth has promoted gender equality whether measured by literacy, educational attainment, share of labour force, wages, political participation, life expectancy or share of managerial posts.

## **There is no evidence of trickle down from economic growth on women's wellbeing and agency**

- Is there a need to re-think current patterns of growth?
- What does appear to promote gender equality are key resources that might promote women's agency and bargaining power :
- Women's share of employment, particularly formal employment
- Women's post primary education
- Thus potential for strong win-win between gender equality and key MDGs, including poverty reduction and human development

## **This is supported by micro-level data which points to a wider range of resources:**

- Paid work, particularly outside the home and in formal/semi formal status
- Education but also transformative training of various kinds
- Access to credit backed by group organisation and business and life skills
- Access to land and housing on a secure joint or individual basis
- Access to organisational resources across a range of spheres of life (natural resources management, women's organisations, trade unions, co-operatives)

## Strategic policy options

Three sets of strategic policy options hold out the greatest promise for transforming structural gender inequalities

### 1. **Support women's unpaid care responsibilities**

- These are 'public goods' - a collective responsibility rather than a private one
- Essential for healthy functioning of the economic system
- Need measures to reduce and redistribute unpaid care
- Will promote women's ability to participate in the market, to engage in political activity, to take part in community affairs and even have some leisure!

## Strategic policy options

### 2. Promote women's organisational capacity

- Women's activism is a major factor in progress on made on gender equality, in relation to MDGs and wider goals
- Many forms – unions, movements, co-operatives, political parties, NGOs, women's rights activists, water user groups...
- Driving force in: improving returns on labour and conditions of work; promoting women's political participation; protesting injustices such as violence against women; sharing knowledge about health-promoting behaviour; improving maternal mortality rates; lobbying for better policies, for better childcare, for better access to clean water
- Increase funding including through women's funds at the national level

*Generally helping to change the world.....*

## Strategic policy options

### 3. Promote women's access to life-long learning opportunities that expand their human capital *and* capabilities

- Education, particularly post-primary education, has emerged as another powerful driver of change (including on maternal mortality, transmission of HIV)
- Build on achievement at primary level but pay greater attention to the *quality* and *content* of education
- Improvements in vocational and extension services can help improve productivity of women's work
- Adult training and education initiatives that incorporate attention to issues of *rights*, *accountability* and *social justice* have proved effective in empowering women to take collective action

## Other strategic options

4. **Promote the economic empowerment of women**
  - Access to , and control over productive assets
  - strengthen women's organisational capacity around economic and social rights
  - beyond microfinance, build inclusive financial systems
  - expand access to education, training and extension services and improve quality
  - gender-aware reform of property rights legislation
  - Labour regulations that recognise and promote decent work

## Other strategic policy options

### **5. Support national and local civil society initiatives which are trying to expand policy space on vital but controversial issues:**

- need for sex education for both boys and girls in schools and informal institutions
- need for available and affordable contraception for the married and unmarried alike
- need for safe, accessible abortion services
- need for action on social and gender inequalities particularly why poor and marginalised women maternal health outcomes are so much worse

## Other strategic policy options

### **6. Support rights-based approaches that are demonstrably improving the enabling environment for maternal health**

- health services matter – the maternal mortality ratio is a measure of the status of the health systems
- support particularly civil society initiatives that are creating “voice” for greater accountability of services, systems and local and national duty bearers
- going beyond normative constructions of rights to support building of stakeholder coalitions
- invest in research to identify what works, where, in reducing maternal mortality

## Other strategic policy options

### **7. Encourage broader participation and voice of women from all sorts of background and experiences in economic policy decision-making**

- This includes budgetary processes, trade consultations, etc

### **8. Improve sex-disaggregated statistics**

- We still cannot document and monitor gender-specific differences with regard to poverty and hunger (MDG1) since poverty is still measured and reported by households, not individuals

## Other strategic policy options

9. **Support efforts to increase women's political participation, their effectiveness and accountability**
  - Support introduction of quotas, that are backed by sanctions, but we need to go beyond numbers....
  - Provide financial support to women's organisations for the strengthening of women's candidature, including as gender advocates, through:
    - training and mentoring
    - supporting women's caucuses in legislative assemblies
    - 'feminist schools' bringing together would-be candidates at the grassroots and women representatives within political institutions

## Other strategic options

### **10. Promote gender-aware social protection**

- This is essential to help women and their families cope with the shocks and stresses, and to provide an escape from poverty traps. It can also help to strength the social contract between the state and some of its most marginalised citizens
- The increased focus on rights and guarantees in the formulation of social protection strengthens its contractual basis and promotes citizen action

## **To conclude: promoting women's participation in the development process ...**

- - has been shown to accelerate progress on all the key aspects of development
- and it brings to bear a broader range of values and voices to collective processes of decision-making