

2010 Development Cooperation Forum – Helsinki High-level symposium (3-4 June 2010)

The impact of development cooperation in reaching the MDGs on gender equality: challenges and solutions, Friday 4 June, 11h00 – 13h00

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As the representative of the bilateral donor community on this panel, my presentation is going to focus on those areas where we all (governments, donors and NGOs) need to intensify investments to achieve not only MDG3 – but all the MDGs. I firmly believe that if we do not make a great leap forward towards achieving greater equality between women and men and increased empowerment of women and girls, none of the MDGs will be achieved.

I have been working in the development business for over 30 years – and although we are very good at “saying the right things” on gender equality, we have a poor record of consistently “doing the right things.” We simply don’t back up our political promises with the investments and resources needed to do the job. This year I sense, however, a growing momentum globally to focus on women in the leadup to the 2010 summit. Certainly both Helen Clark at UNDP and US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton are speaking up forcefully about the powerful impact of investing in women and girls. Helen Clark has called it the *breakthrough strategy for achieving the MDGs*¹.

The challenge for us all is to identify **how and where donor money can fuel that breakthrough strategy**. It seems to me that there are four key areas where increased investments and attention could have catalytic and multiplier impacts on the lives of women and girls – and of future generations:

- Keep girls in school
- Urgently improve reproductive health, including access to family planning services
- Increase women’s control over productive and financial assets (not just microcredit), and
- Identify and support women leaders at all levels.

Keep girls in school

We all know that women with even a few years of primary education have better economic prospects, have fewer and healthier children, and are more likely to ensure that their own children go to school. We could certainly speed up development if we kept girls in school to complete a quality secondary education.

¹ High level meeting on MDG3 and employment, hosted by the Government of Denmark, 25 March 2010.

Education of girls is one of the most powerful tools for women's empowerment, but still discrimination keeps girls out of school. UN reports tell us that:

- In 2007, only 53 of the 171 countries with available data had achieved gender parity in both primary and secondary education².

That means that girls are missing out – particularly when they live in rural areas and in poor households.

Adolescence is a critical turning point for girls. If their education continues to secondary level, they will be better equipped to make informed choices about their lives. Cultural attitudes and practices that promote early marriage, encourage the seclusion of young girls or attach greater value to educating boys rather than girls create formidable barriers for girls' education. Too often, girls are married young, or they are taken out of school to care for their brothers and sisters or to work to support themselves and their families.

Removing school fees and providing financial incentives for girls to attend school have both proven to be effective. At the same time we need to build schools closer to remote communities, ensure that they have adequate sanitary facilities, quality teachers and that they are safe places for girls.

The four areas which I am suggesting for increased investment are all interlinked and mutually reinforcing – perhaps none more so, than the link between adolescent girls' education and their sexual and reproductive health needs. The facts are stark:

- One girl in seven marries before the age of 15; and almost, 10 per cent of girls become mothers by the age of 16, with the highest rates in sub-Saharan Africa and Asia.
- Pregnancy and child birth is the biggest cause of death among adolescent girls; and, girls from poor households are three times more likely than better-off girls to give birth during adolescence.
- Nearly half of sexual assaults worldwide are against girls under 15.
- Among 15 to 24 year-olds in sub-Saharan Africa, three females are infected with HIV for every male.

Urgently improve reproductive health, including access to family planning services

Meeting a woman's need for sexual and reproductive health services increases her chances of finishing her education, and breaking out of poverty. Laws and practices which affect a woman's ability to control her sexual and reproductive health severely compromise her autonomy, equality, and health – as well as her children's health.

² United Nations (2009). The Millennium Development Goals Report, 2009.

And yet MDG 5 – *improving maternal health* – is the MDG that we are furthest from achieving. The toll on women’s lives is appalling – with just 23 countries on track to meeting the target of reducing maternal mortality by three quarters by 2015³. Seventy five percent of the births that occur without medical assistance are in fragile states.

Access to sexual and reproductive health information and services helps prevent maternal mortality. It allows women to plan their families, enables women and girls to delay or space childbearing so that they are able to expand their educational, training and employment opportunities, and helps reduce vulnerability to HIV and AIDS.

The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) has calculated that funding which provides modern contraceptive services in developing countries (\$7.1 billion in 2003) prevents 187 million unintended pregnancies, 60 million unplanned births, 105 million induced abortions, 22 million spontaneous abortions, and 215,000 pregnancy-related deaths each year.

It’s time to put family planning back on the development agenda – for both governments and donors. Donor funding for family planning has been declining since the mid-1990s, at the same time as progress on maternal health has stalled⁴. The strengthening and expansion of programmes could make a major contribution to improvements in maternal and child health, but this requires adequate funding and access to supplies.

Despite increases in contraceptive use in all regions, the unmet need for family planning - that is, the gap between women’s desire to delay or avoid having children and their use of contraception – remains moderate to high in most of them. It has been calculated that satisfying the unmet need for contraceptive services in developing countries would avoid 52 million unintended pregnancies annually. Among the 17 least developed countries with the lowest levels of modern contraceptive use, all except one are in sub-Saharan Africa.

Health services are not working for women in the poorest countries. Until very recently I was Norway’s Ambassador to Tanzania. Last year Tanzania’s efforts to address the increasing rate of maternal mortality were in the international spotlight. Tanzania faces shortages of health workers, drugs, equipment and infrastructure⁵. The Government is attempting to train more assistants and midwives, build more clinics and nursing schools, offer housing to attract health workers to rural areas and provide places for pregnant women to stay closer to hospitals. These types of initiatives are designed to strengthen the emergency obstetric care available at health centres and district hospital level.

³ See The Lancet, *Maternal mortality for 181 countries, 1980–2008: a systematic analysis of progress towards Millennium Development Goal 5*, Early Online Publication, 12 April 2010, available at [http://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736\(10\)60518-1/abstract](http://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736(10)60518-1/abstract)

⁴ United Nations (2009). The Millennium Development Goals Report 2009.

⁵ New York Times, 28 May 2009.

Several countries – despite income constraints – including Sri Lanka, Honduras, Vietnam, and Bangladesh – have made incredible progress in lowering maternal deaths and offer valuable lessons for other countries. Even in fragile states progress is possible. A recent headline (26 April 2010) announced free healthcare for pregnant women and children in Sierra Leone.

Put productive and financial assets in the hands of women (not just microcredit)

Several bilateral and multilateral donors are investing heavily in women's economic empowerment. Facilitating women's role in the economy is an essential response to the financial and economic crises and crucial to economic resilience and growth. Increasing women's economic participation and their ownership and control over productive assets benefits their families, their communities and their countries. Several studies show that putting earnings in women's hands speeds up development, helps overcome poverty and reduce inequalities. Children's nutrition, health, and school attendance improve more when income is in women's hands. A study in Brazil showed that the likelihood of a child's survival increased by 20% when the mother controlled household income⁶. Women usually invest a higher portion of their earnings in their families and communities than men.

Globally there have been many innovative initiatives to secure women's property rights and land tenure. Land is not only a productive asset, it is also important as collateral for securing financial and credit services.

Although the success of microcredit schemes has received international praise, women need access to the full range of credit, banking and financial services and facilities essential to more fully developing their productive assets, their land and their businesses. In many countries serious legal, cultural and social barriers persist.

Some donors, such as USAID, are supporting women to scale-up from micro-level activities. In Ethiopia, the Development Credit Authority tool, designed to stimulate lending through the use of partial credit guarantees to commercial banks, has a particular focus on women business owners.

Identify and support women leaders at all levels

Too often we talk about the vulnerability of women. We need to put much more emphasis on women as leaders – as agents of change in their communities and countries. Look at all that President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf is achieving in Liberia – and what inspirational leaders are achieving at grassroots level every day.

Recently I heard about the research which one African woman leader, Thelma Awori, has done on the characteristics of African rural women leaders. She found that women leaders are everywhere – but invisible. You have to be looking for them to find them – and to recognise them when you've found

⁶ Extracted from World Bank President Zoellick's speech at the MDG3 conference, Copenhagen, 25 March

them. **They have voice.** They bring change to their community, to women's lives and to their families. What they are passing on to others in their community is the **capacity to aspire.**

The challenge for the donor community is to learn to recognise these women and find innovative ways to support them and their organisations.

Increasing the voice and participation of women in politics is essential for putting women's issues on national agendas. Women comprise only 18.9 per cent of the world's legislators - far from the thirty per cent target of the 1995 Beijing Conference. At this rate it will take another forty years to reach gender parity in the world's national legislatures.

In March one House of the Indian Parliament made the landmark decision, by a huge majority, to reserve one-third of Parliament's seats for women. Initiatives at the local and community level in India are well-known. Efforts are underway in other countries, such as Papua New Guinea where a law has been proposed reserving seats for women which would lift the number of women parliamentarians from one to 22.

Democratic ownership and accountability demand that we ensure that women are able to participate in and influence the decisions and processes that affect every aspect of their lives – within their families, in their communities, at work, in local government, through Parliaments - all the way to the Presidency.

What needs to change?

- Clearly, we need to **increase investments in women and girls.** This won't be easy in the current financial environment. But if we believe that this is the breakthrough strategy for achieving the MDGs then we need to be smart about investing our money in areas which have been proven to have a catalytic impact on poverty, development, inequalities and on future generations. There is an extraordinary opportunity this year to influence the discussions on **replenishing the World Bank's IDA16 funds** – one of the most important sources of external development financing for low income countries. The key decisionmakers (IDA deputies) recently recommended that gender equality should be a special theme for IDA16. This could help to multiply resources available for women's empowerment in the poorest countries for years to come.
- Without doubt, we are in the difficult and uncomfortable area of **confronting and overcoming cultural and social norms.** Whilst women and girls continue to face discrimination and prejudice on the basis of their sex, many also face additional barriers to their development through social exclusion on such grounds as ethnicity, race and caste.
- How often over the years have we talked about **political will?** For too long we have avoided our collective responsibility to women and girls' development. What is it that we need to do now

to build the political commitment for the scale of change that is required by 2015? This is something we need to talk about today and in the coming months. Then we must act.

- We need to improve countries' capacity to collect **sex-disaggregated data**, to track and report progress, gaps and opportunities **and to act on that information**. One of the divisions of the Directorate which I head is Paris 21 which is charged with strengthening national statistical capacity. I will be encouraging them to focus more strongly on this area. At the same time, I am very aware that there is already a great deal of data available where **we have simply failed to act on what we know**.
- Let's continue to **gather the evidence about what works and what does not**. In the leadup to the Accra High Level Forum in 2008, the DAC Network on Gender Equality, UNIFEM, the European Commission and several donors gathered case studies and evidence on aid effectiveness, gender equality and women's empowerment in different countries and contexts. Recording and measuring multiplier effects is one of our operational challenges for the future. Evidence gathering is even more important as we head towards the High Level Forum in Korea next year. I invite you to provide those case studies and stories.
- **Gender responsive public financial management systems** can help us to measure and monitor whether women and girls have access to the services they need – health, education, agricultural extension, business advice or clean water; whether they have decent work and pay; whether they are getting the benefits to which they are entitled. When our systems give us that information, we can see the gaps and direct our investments to the right people, in the right places, at the right time.

This year we have a remarkable opportunity to put women front and centre and to move beyond empty promises.

I am not saying that this is easy. In our discussions today let's find the will to act. We owe it to the world's women.

Thank you