

# INVESTING IN WOMEN AND GIRLS

## THE BREAKTHROUGH STRATEGY FOR ACHIEVING ALL THE MDGS

Based on a speech by Jon Lomoy, Director of the OECD's Development Co-operation Directorate, at the Helsinki High-level Symposium, United Nations 2010 Development Co-operation Forum, 4 June 2010

**W**ithout 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. It is time to back up political promises with the investments and resources needed to do the job. Investing in women and girls has a powerful impact. It will make the world a better place for all – both women and men. Helen Clark has called it the **breakthrough strategy for achieving the MDGs**.

*I believe that investing in women and girls in itself constitutes a breakthrough strategy for achieving the MDGs, and that almost any investment we make in women and girls will have multiplier effects across the Goals*

—Helen Clark, UNDP Administrator, 25 March 2010.

The challenge is to identify how and where donor money can fuel that breakthrough strategy. 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 to complete a quality secondary education
- 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

Studies have shown 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. Development would be accelerated if girls were kept in school to complete a quality secondary education.

Education of girls is one of the most powerful tools for women's empowerment, but discrimination continues to keep girls out of school.

- In 2007, only 53 of the 171 countries with available data had achieved gender parity in both primary and secondary education<sup>1</sup>.
- Secondary school enrolment is very low in sub-Saharan Africa (24 percent of girls and 33 percent of boys).

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

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

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

**Adolescence is a critical turning point for girls.** If girls' education continues to secondary level, they will be better equipped to make informed choices about their lives. Too often, girls are married young, or are taken out of school to care for their brothers and sisters or to work to support themselves and their families.

At an individual level, women typically gain larger increases in wages for an additional year's schooling than men, and this effect appears particularly strong if girls complete secondary education. In Cambodia and Bangladesh, there are examples of families focussing resources on educating girls because of the income benefits they will receive from educated girls entering into employment in the textiles sector<sup>2</sup>.

**The four areas for increased investment are all interlinked and mutually reinforcing.** The most compelling is the link between adolescent girls' education and their sexual and reproductive health needs. Educated women, as well as those in employment, are more likely to use maternal health care and antenatal health care services, thus reducing child mortality rates.

- One girl in seven marries before the age of 15. 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 are the biggest causes of death among adolescent girls. 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 limit 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.

MDG 5 – *improving maternal health* – is the MDG that is most “off-track.” The toll on women's lives is appalling. Only 23 countries are expected to meet the target of reducing maternal mortality by three quarters by 2015. The gap between rich and poor countries is alarmingly high. For example, for every 100,000 live births in West Africa, 629 mothers die, compared to 7 mothers in Western Europe<sup>3</sup>. Children whose mothers die in childbirth are much less likely to survive themselves.

*“Now is the time to step up our efforts, in partnership with other multilateral and bilateral institutions, to address the issue of women's health, gender and human rights, in order to achieve a rapid and tangible impact in Africa”*

– H.E. Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, President of the Republic of Liberia<sup>4</sup>

Access to sexual and reproductive health information and services:

- helps prevent maternal mortality
- allows women to plan their families
- enables women and girls to delay or space childbearing to increase their educational, training and employment opportunities, and
- helps reduce vulnerability to HIV and AIDS.

Health services are not working for women in the poorest countries. Tanzania's efforts to reduce maternal mortality have received international publicity. Tanzania faces shortages of health workers, drugs, equipment and infrastructure<sup>5</sup>. 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 strengthen the emergency obstetric care available at health centres and at district hospital level.

2. Chatham House and Vivid Economics (2010). Evidence for action – gender equality and economic growth. Draft.

3. Hogan, M.K. and others (2010). *Maternal mortality for 181 countries, 1980–2008: a systematic analysis of progress towards Millennium Development Goal 5*. The Lancet 375 (9726): pp. 1609-23.

4. At the launch of the Women's Health Commission for the African Region, Monrovia City Hall, 14 April 2010.

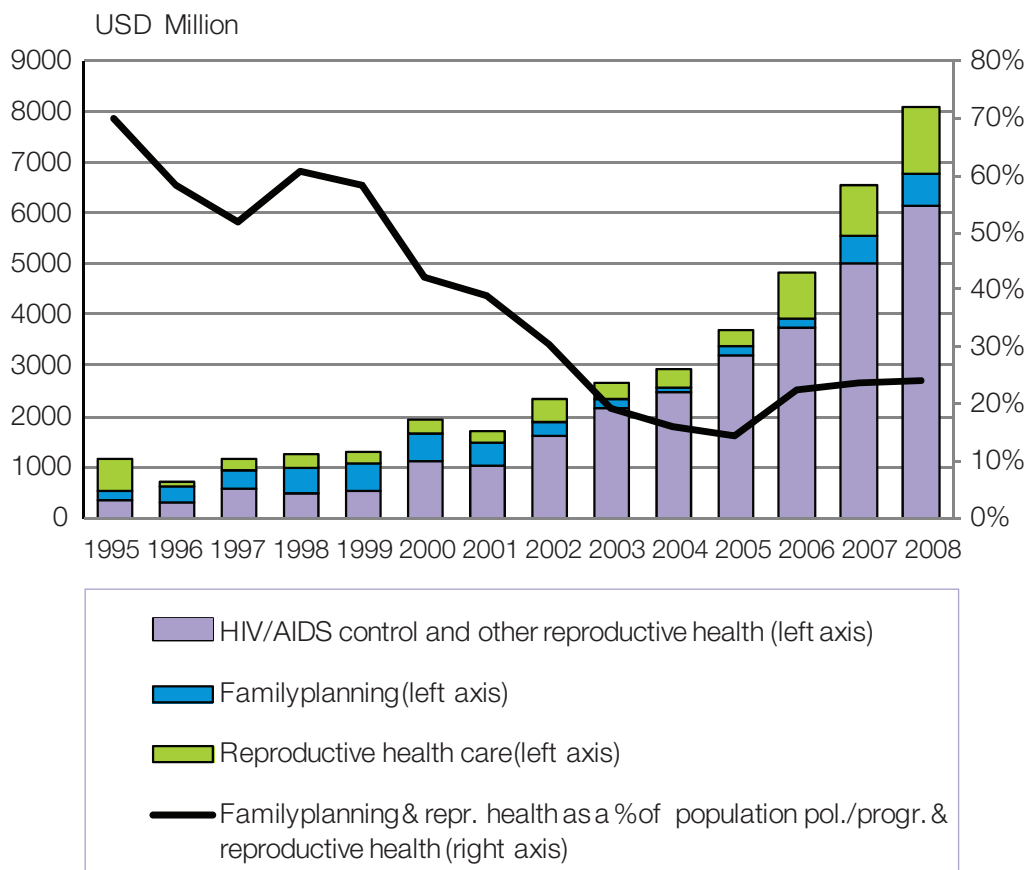
5. New York Times, 28 May 2009.

Despite income restraints, several countries, including Sri Lanka, Honduras, Vietnam, and Bangladesh – have made incredible progress in lowering maternal deaths and offer valuable lessons for other countries. Although 75% of the births that occur without medical assistance are in fragile states, even in these countries, progress is possible. A recent headline (26 April 2010) announced free healthcare for pregnant women and children in Sierra Leone.

*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 is time to put voluntary 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 stalled<sup>6</sup>. Strengthening and expanding programmes which provide contraceptive services could make a major contribution to improvements in maternal and child health, but this requires adequate funding and access to supplies.

**CHART 1. BILATERAL ODA TO POPULATION POLICIES/PROGRAMMES AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH, 1995-2008<sup>7</sup>**  
Commitments, USD million, constant 2008 prices



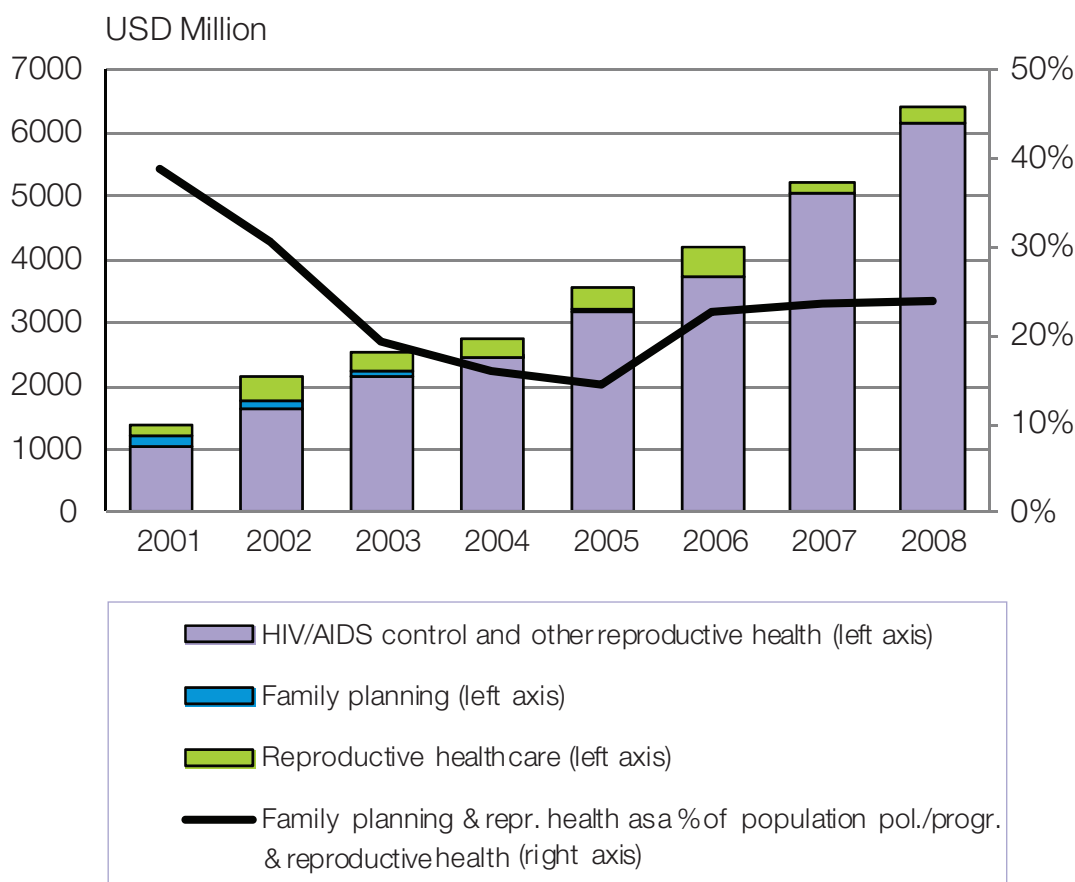
Source: DAC Statistics

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

7. Source: DAC statistics

## CHART 2. AID TO POPULATION POLICIES/PROGRAMMES AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH, MULTILATERAL AGENCIES' OUTFLOWS 2001-2008<sup>8</sup>

Commitments, USD million, constant 2008 prices



Source: DAC Statistics

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. Among the 17 least developed countries with the lowest levels of modern contraceptive use, all except one are in sub-Saharan Africa.

- It has been calculated that satisfying the unmet need for contraceptive services in developing countries would avoid 52 million unintended pregnancies annually.
- One study has estimated that for every dollar spent on providing modern contraceptives, \$1.40 would be saved in medical care costs<sup>9</sup>.
- Addressing the unmet need for family planning would also have a significant impact on child mortality. It is estimated that as many as 9 per cent of under 5 deaths in developing countries could be avoided by increasing the spacing between births.
- Some studies are unequivocal that lower fertility rates reduce poverty. A 1999 study of 59 countries estimated that if the birth rate had decreased by five per 1000 population in the 1980s, the proportion of people living in poverty would have fallen by a third<sup>10</sup>.

8. Ibid

9. Chatham House and Vivid Economics (2010). Evidence for action – gender equality and economic growth. Draft.

10. Eastwood, R and M. Lipton (1999). The impacts of changes in human fertility on poverty. *Journal of Development Studies* 36(1).

## ENSURE THAT PRODUCTIVE AND FINANCIAL ASSETS ARE IN THE HANDS OF WOMEN (NOT JUST MICROCREDIT!)

Several bilateral and multilateral donors are prioritising women's economic empowerment. Increasing the role of women in the economy is one solution to the financial and economic crises and critical for economic resilience and growth. Women's economic participation and their ownership and control over productive assets speeds up development, helps overcome poverty and reduce inequalities, and improves children's nutrition, health, and school attendance. Women usually invest a higher proportion of their earnings in their families and communities than men. A study in Brazil showed that the likelihood of a child's survival increased by 20% when the mother controlled household income<sup>11</sup>.

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 finance and credit. The recent food and fuel crises have led to renewed attention to agriculture, food security, rural development and the role of women farmers. Although women have a large role in food production in many sub-Saharan African countries, they continue to have less access to land, fertilisers, seeds, credit and extension services than men. More equitable access to these resources would make agriculture a more efficient means of promoting shared economic growth, reducing poverty and improving food security<sup>12</sup>.

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.

Interventions need to vary according to countries' different development needs. In low-income countries, women's access to basic agricultural inputs and microfinance will continue to be needed, whilst in transition countries, the focus needs to be on labour market skills, access to commercial credit and women's entrepreneurship<sup>13</sup>.

## IDENTIFY AND SUPPORT WOMEN LEADERS AT ALL LEVELS

Too often women are viewed only as vulnerable victims. It is time to recognise women as leaders – as agents of change in their families, communities and countries. President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, with other women political leaders in Liberia, is rebuilding her country. At the same time, inspirational (but unsung) women leaders are changing their communities at grassroots level every day.

One African leader, Thelma Awori, has been researching 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 have found 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**<sup>14</sup>.

The challenge is to recognise these women and find innovative and sustainable ways to support them and their organisations.

Throughout history, women's activism has been a major factor in working towards gender equality. As a number of developed countries have found, increasing the voice and participation of women in politics is essential for advancing issues of importance to women on national agendas. This will benefit both women and men. Women comprise only 18.9 per cent of the world's legislators - far from the thirty per cent target of the 1995 UN's Women's Conference in Beijing. At this rate it will take another forty years to reach gender parity in the world's national legislatures.

Initiatives to increase women's participation in local and community decision-making in India are well-known. This year, one House of the Indian Parliament made the landmark decision, by a huge majority, to reserve a third of Parliament's seats for women. Similar 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.

11. Extracted from World Bank President Zoellick's speech at the MDG3 conference, Copenhagen, 25 March 2010

12. Buvinic, M., T. Lunde and N. Sinha (2010). Investing in gender equality: looking ahead. World Bank, Poverty Reduction and Economic Management Network. Economic Premise 22.

13. Ibid.

14. Gender equality and progress in societies : OECD Development Centre-UNESCO International Workshop (Paris, March 2010)

## WHAT NEEDS TO CHANGE?

- It is time to **increase targeted investments in women and girls**. In the current financial environment, investments need to focus on those areas which have proven to have a catalytic impact on poverty, development, inequalities and on future generations – girls’ education, family planning, control over productive and financial assets and women’s leadership.
- It is time to **confront and overcome the cultural and social norms** which hold back women and girls. 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.
- It is time to **act – not just talk**. The MDGs are a global compact – a collective set of political commitments. Gender equality and women’s empowerment are prerequisites for achieving all the MDGs.
- It is time for gender budgeting to become more than an advocacy tool. **Gender responsive public financial management systems** help 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 financial systems can provide the necessary information, gaps can be identified and investments directed to the right people, in the right places, at the right time.
- It is time to **gather the evidence about what works so that development becomes more effective**. This is a challenge as countries (both donors and partners) prepare for the **4th High Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness in Korea in 2011**. Recording and measuring multiplier effects is an operational challenge for the future.
- It is time to improve countries’ capacity to collect **sex-disaggregated data**, to track and report progress, gaps and opportunities and to act on that information. At the same time, it is important to act on the data which are already available. We have failed to act on what we know.
- It is time to more accurately **track the proportion and coverage of aid** which is focussed on achieving gender equality and women’s empowerment, including investments by multilateral agencies. In 2010 donor countries will decide on their financial contributions to the sixteenth replenishment of the World Bank’s International Development Association (IDA) for 2011-2014. Mainstreaming gender equality is one of the themes for IDA16. This could help to multiply resources available for women’s empowerment and the achievement of all the MDGs in the poorest countries.
- **It is time to put women and girls front and centre and to move beyond empty promises. Making the world a better place for women will make a better world for all.**

*“Investing in the potential of the world’s women and girls is one of the surest ways to achieve global economic progress, political stability, and greater prosperity for women — and men — the world over”*

– Hillary Rodham Clinton, US Secretary of State, International Women’s Day 2010

## ABOUT THE DAC

The OECD Development Assistance Committee (DAC) is a unique international forum where donor governments and multilateral organisations – such as the World Bank and the United Nations System of Organizations (UN) – come together to help partner countries reduce poverty and achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The DAC became part of the OECD by Ministerial Resolution on 23 July 1961.

The DAC has the mandate to

*...consult on the methods for making national resources available for assisting countries and areas in the process of economic development and for expanding and improving the flow of long-term funds and other development assistance to them.*

This means seeking new ways of doing business to increase not only the quantity, but also the quality of aid – in other words, to improve aid effectiveness.

## CONTACT

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