

# INVESTING IN WOMEN AND GIRLS: THE BREAKTHROUGH STRATEGY FOR ACHIEVING THE MDGS

None of the MDGs will be achieved unless there is greater equality between women and men and increased empowerment of women and girls. It is time to back political promises with the investments and resources needed. Increased investments in four key areas will have catalytic and multiplier effects.



## ACTIONS THAT WILL MAKE THE DIFFERENCE

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

- Make public financial management systems work for women.
- Confront and overcome the cultural and social norms that hold back women and girls.
- Put voluntary family planning back on the development agenda.
- Gather evidence about what works.
- Collect and use sex-disaggregated data.
- Accurately track the proportion and coverage of aid focused on achieving gender equality and women's empowerment.

## 1. ENSURE THAT FINANCIAL ASSETS ARE IN THE HANDS OF WOMEN

Women's economic participation and their ownership and control of productive assets speeds up development, helps overcome poverty, reduces inequalities and improves children's nutrition, health, and school attendance. Women typically invest a higher proportion of their earnings in their families and communities than men. But they 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.

## 2. KEEP GIRLS IN SCHOOL

With even a few years of primary education, women have better economic prospects, fewer and healthier children, and better chances of sending their own children to school. If girls' education continues to secondary level, they will be better equipped to make informed choices about their lives.

## 3. IMPROVE REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH, ACCESS TO FAMILY PLANNING

Funding for family planning has been declining since the mid-1990s and progress on maternal health has stalled (*see chart on back*).<sup>1</sup> Today, one girl in seven 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 among adolescent girls, and poor girls are three times more likely than better-off girls to give birth during adolescence. In sub-Saharan Africa, three females 15 to 24 years old are infected with HIV for every one male.

The potential benefits of funding for family planning are enormous:

- Satisfying the unmet need for contraceptive services in developing countries would avoid 52 million unintended pregnancies annually.
- For every dollar spent on providing modern contraceptives, USD1.40 would be saved in medical care costs.<sup>2</sup>
- As many as 9 per cent of under 5 deaths in developing countries could be avoided by increasing the spacing between births.
- Lower fertility rates reduce poverty.

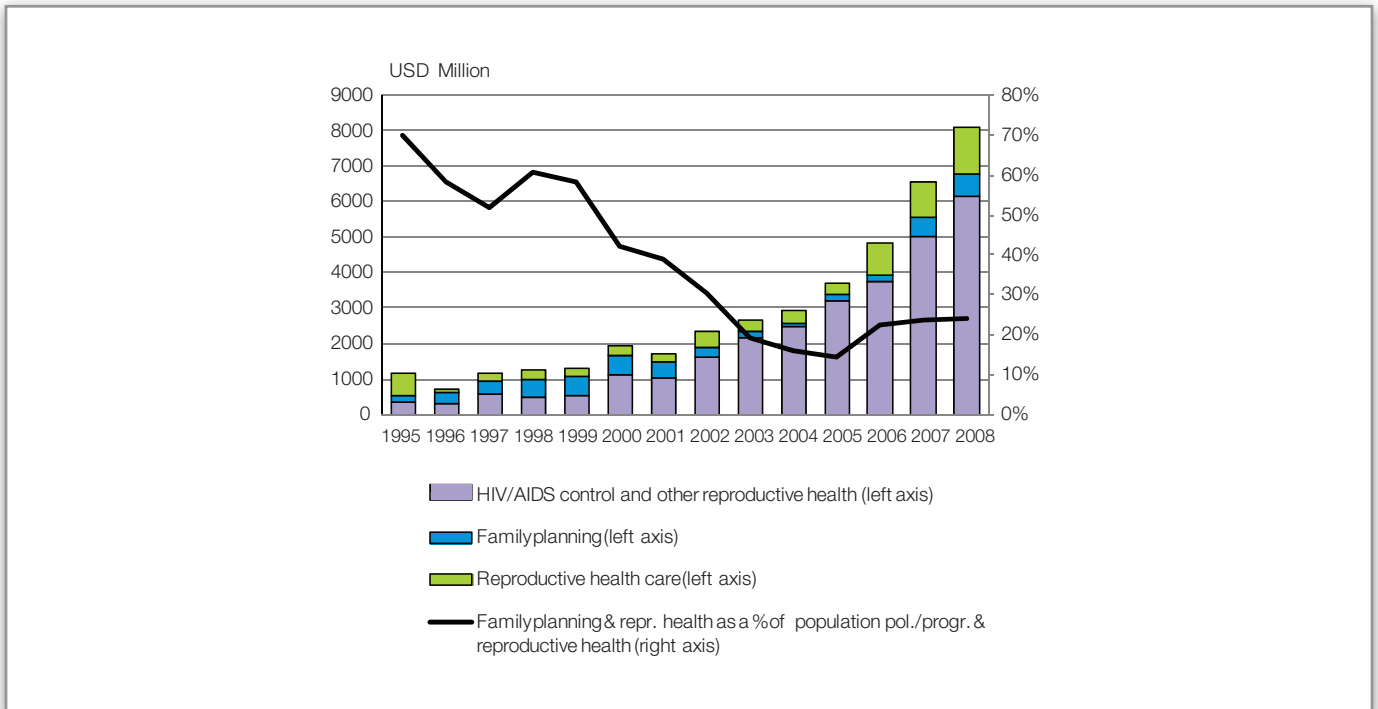
## 4. SUPPORT WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP

Women are agents of change in their families, communities and countries. Increasing the voice and participation of women in politics is essential for advancing issues of importance to women on national agendas, with benefits for both women and men.

## CONTACT INFORMATION

For more information contact: Patti O'Neill ([patti.oneill@oecd.org](mailto:patti.oneill@oecd.org))

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



1. United Nations (2009). The Millennium Development Goals Report 2009.  
 2. Chatham House and Vivid Economics (2010). Evidence for action – gender equality and economic growth. Draft.