

VIII. CONTRIBUTION OF THE ICPD PROGRAMME OF ACTION TO GENDER EQUALITY AND THE EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN

*Karen Oppenheim, Ph.D.**
The World Bank

A. INTRODUCTION

The third Millennium Development Goal (MDG) is to promote gender equality and empower women. Although the target for this goal focuses on gender parity in education, the indicators for the goal go beyond education and literacy to include the labour market position of women and their political representation. Insofar as each Millennium Development Goal is intended to summarize critical areas for action identified at major UN conferences, the third MDG clearly has a broad reference. The Declaration and Platform for Action to which the UN member states agreed at the Fourth World Conference on Women (United Nations, 2001), held in Beijing in 1995, refers to 12 critical areas of concern that cover virtually every aspects of human rights, human capacity, opportunity, voice and resources.¹ According to this document, promoting gender equality and empowering women involves significantly reducing inequalities between males and females in most aspects of social, economic and political life.

This paper answers the question, will fulfilling the Programme of Action to which UN member countries agreed at the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD), held in Cairo in 1994, help to meet the third Millennium Development Goal? The paper has three sections. The first section reviews the ICPD Programme of Action and answers the question being posed; the second section discusses the impact of gender equality on the other MDGs in order to identify further MDG impacts of fulfilling the ICPD Programme of Action; and the third and final section discusses the importance of one section of the Programme of Action—actions to promote reproductive rights and reproductive health—for achieving the third Millennium Development Goal.

B. THE ICPD PROGRAMME OF ACTION AND THE THIRD MILLENNIUM DEVELOPMENT GOAL

Chapter IV of the ICPD Programme of Action is titled, Gender Equality, Equity and Empowerment of *Women*. It outlines a wide range of actions that governments, the private sector,

needs of young women as part of promoting the well-being of children and youth (Chapter VI); paying special attention to the needs of elderly women (Chapter VI); ensuring that reproductive health care systems meet the needs of women (Chapter VII); recognizing women's physical and socioeconomic vulnerability to sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV/AIDS, and giving special attention to women and girls in programs designed to prevent the spread of these diseases (Chapter VII); supporting women's role as primary custodians of family health (Chapter VIII); promoting breast feeding and ensuring safe motherhood (Chapter VIII); offering special protections to displaced women (Chapter IX); eliminating discriminatory practices against women migrants and specifically protecting women who migrate as family members from abuse or denial of their human rights (Chapter X); and providing particular support to refugee women (Chapter X).

The ICPD Programme of Action thus provides a remarkably comprehensive plan for promoting gender equality and empowering women. The short answer to the question posed in this paper is therefore, yes, fulfilling the ICPD Programme of Action will, indeed, help to meet the third Millennium Development Goal. The main unresolved issue is that of timing. Unlike the actions called for in the Programme of Action and Beijing Platform for Action, the MDGs involve time-bound targets. In the case of the gender equality goal, the target is to achieve gender parity in primary education, preferably by 2005, and gender parity at all levels of education by 2015. Recent estimates suggest that 2005 deadline for achieving gender parity in primary education is likely to be missed in many countries. Whether the target for 2015 will be met is more difficult to judge, although the prospects are not very rosy. If all of the actions recommended in the ICPD Programme of Action were implemented fully within the next 3-5 years, however, there would be appreciable movement toward meeting the third MDG, with the possibility of achieving it by 2015 in a majority of developing countries.

C. THE INDIRECT IMPACT OF THE ICPD PROGRAMME OF ACTION ON THE OTHER MDGs²

Implementing the ICPD Programme of Action will not only help to meet the third MDG, but by meeting this MDG will facilitate meeting the other MDGs as well. This section describes some of the evidence suggesting the importance of gender equality for achieving MDGs 1-2 and 4-7.

1. *Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger*

Although we do not know precisely how many of the world's women are poor, there is considerable evidence that women tend to be at greater risk of falling into or remaining in poverty than men are (World Bank, 2001a; 63-69). Explaining this greater risk of poverty are such realities as labour market discrimination, women's obligations with respect to child care and unpaid domestic work, low levels of female education, poor access to health care for women and girls, violence against women, and men's control of household assets and resources. Countries that reduce gender inequality thus stand a better chance of eradicating extreme poverty than countries that fail to educate girls, provide women with health care, reduce labour market discrimination, and the like. Promoting gender equality thus helps to eradicate poverty by reducing the number of poor women.

Gender equality also helps to reduce poverty indirectly by enhancing economic growth. Growth of the economy has been shown to be a necessary, even if not sufficient, condition for sustained poverty reduction (World Bank, 2001b; Chapter 3). Indeed, some studies have found that increases in average per capita income in a country typically raise the incomes of the poor proportionately (Kray and Dollar, 2002). Gender equality promotes economic growth through a variety of pathways. More equal investments in the human capital of girls and women improve overall levels of labour productivity and have particularly positive intergenerational effects (World Bank, 2001a; Chapter 2). Improving women's access to productive resources also tends to increase overall economic productivity. For example, studies

of farmers in several sub-Saharan African countries have found that re

fraction of those found in developing countries. In developing countries, less than two-thirds of women deliver with the assistance of a trained midwife or doctor, and only two in five gives birth in a hospital or health center (World Bank, 2003). The persistence of unacceptably high risks to women associated with pregnancy and childbirth thus reflects a lack of ade

costly to women's time (World Bank, 2001a: 20). A recent study of local governments in India showed that when these bodies were headed by a woman, they were more likely to prioritize improvements in domestic water supplies than when they were he

REFERENCES

Ahlburg, Dennis A., Allen C. Kelley and Karen Oppenheim Mason, eds. (1996). *The Impact of Population Growth on Well-being in Developing Countries*. Berlin: Springer-Verlag.

Chattopadhyay, Raghendra, and Esther Duflo (2004). Women as policy makers: evidence from a randomized policy experiment in India. *Econometrica*

United Nations (2001). Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action with the Beijing+5 Political Declaration and Outcome Document. New York: United Nations.

____ (2004). *World Contraceptive Use 2003*. Data sheet. New York: Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division. ST/ESA/SER.A/227.

United Nations Millennium Project, Task Force on Education and Gender Equality (forthcoming). *Taking Action: Achieving Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women*. New York: United Nations Millennium Project.

Willemsen, Tineke M. (2002). Gender roles in European households. *Europe-NYC* (newsletter of the New York European Consortium for European Studies) (December).

World Bank (2001a). *Engendering Development—Through Gender Equality in Rights, Resources, and Voice*. Washington, D.C.: World Bank and Oxford University Press.

____ (2001b). *World Development Report 2000/2001: Attacking Poverty*. Washington, D.C.: World Bank and Oxford University Press.

____, and Gender and Development Group (2003). *Gender Equality and the Millennium Development Goals*. Washington, D.C.: World Bank Gender and Development Group.