Introduction

Over a decade ago at the Fourth World Conference on Women, the 189 Member States of the United Nations adopted the *Beijing Declaration* and *Platform for Action*. The *Declaration* was a statement of the political commitment by governments to work toward equality between men and women and toward women's empowerment. The *Platform for Action* outlined strategic objectives and actions in twelve "critical areas of concern."

Equality between women and men was also an important theme of the other development conferences of the 1990s – Education for All (1990), Environment and Development (1992), Human Rights (1993) Population and Development (1994), and Social Development (1995). These discussions and agreements progressively built a consensus on development priorities that formed the basis for the Millennium Declaration adopted by the world community in 2000.

Subsequently, a subset of the goals established in the United Nations conferences in the 1990s was developed as the eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Gender equality and women's empowerment is critical to the achievement of the MDGs. It is the focus of one goal (MDG 3) and of MDG5 on maternal

and governments meeting at the World Summit later that same year also called for action, stating that they were "convinced that progress for women is progress for all."[4]

This document has been prepared to stimulate thinking by national governments, the United Nations entities and other stakeholders about ways to accelerate progress on implementation of the *Platform for Action*. It draws on the ten-year review and appraisal of the implementation of the *Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action* and the wealth of other analyses and recommendations by United Nations bodies and agencies. Other important sources were the work of the Task Forces established by the United Nations Millennium Project[5] and research by activist organisations and networks.[6] The objective was not to provide a comprehensive analysis of each topic, but rather to provide highlights of progress and remaining gaps or challenges as a background to a discussion of possible strategies in key areas. The range of strategies suggested under each of the critical areas of concern show that there are many practical steps that can be taken.

In identifying strategies, the focus is on the national level and on actions by national governments. Even though there are other important non-state actors – including private sector employers, media, trade unions, women's organisations – national governments have a particularly important role in providing the framework and momentum for implementation through policies, legislation, and programmes. Governments can learn from initiatives undertaken by civil society organisations and implement promising practices on a wider scale. Governments can also lead through example as well as by encouraging or facilitating efforts by non-state actors.

The *Platform for Action* addresses a wide range of issues, reflecting the complexity of overcoming gender inequality. The twelve critical areas are inter-related, and thus it is important to aim for and monitor progress in all areas. At the same time, approaches that include the establishment of priorities and interim targets may make the challenge more manageable. Some guidance in priority setting is offered by the UN Millennium Project's Task Force report on MDG 3 (gender equality and the empowerment of women). The Task Force identified seven strategic priorities, set out in the box below. They note that these are a subset of the priorities in the Beijing *Platform for Action* and other international agreements, and that all of these commitments remain important. However, the Task Force's seven strategic priorities are "areas requiring immediate action if Goal 3 is to be met by 2015."

Acronyms used in the report

CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women
CRC	Convention on the Rights of the Child
CSO	Civil society organisation
CSW	Commission on the Status of Women (United Nations)
DAW	Division for the Advancement of Women (United Nations)
DPA	Department of Political Affairs (United Nations)
DPKO	Department of Peacekeeping Operations (United Nations)
ECOSOC	Economic and Social Council (United Nations)

ESCAP

STDs	Sexually transmitted diseases
TB	tuberculosis
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNEP	United Nations Environment Programme
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNFPA	United Nations Fund for Population Activities

UNICEF