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**Implementing the internationally agreed goals and commitments in  
regard to gender equality and empowerment of women**

Gender equality and poverty eradication:  
good practices and lessons learned \*

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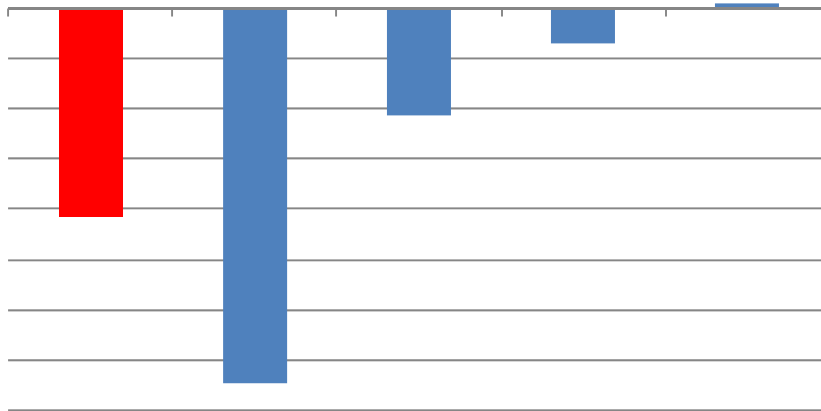
\* The views expressed in this paper are those of the author and do not necessarily represent those of the United Nations.

## **1. Introduction**

Gender equality is central to the attainment of development goals and poverty reduction. Gender issues play a prominent role in the United Nations Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), which have been commonly accepted as a framework for measuring development progress. Of the eight goals, four are directly related to gender: achieving universal primary education, promoting gender equality and the empowerment of women, reducing infant and child mortality, and improving maternal health. Gender also plays an important role in achieving gender equality and the em

rate of children under the age of five (partially reflecting the fatal synergy between inadequate dietary intake and unhealthy environments). In 2009, IFPRI researchers correlated the global hunger index with the Global Gender Gap Index developed by the World Economic Forum (Hausmann, Tyson, and Zaidi 2008), which is made up of four subindices: economic participation, educational attainment, political empowerment, and health and survival. The overall correlation shows that high levels of gender inequality are highly correlated with higher levels of global hunger (Figure 1). The strongest relationship is with the education sub-index, that is, higher levels of hunger are associated with lower literacy rates and access to education for women. It is not women's lower levels of literacy and education per se, but gender *inequalities* in education that are driving this relationship. High rates of hunger are also linked to health and survival inequalities between men and women. Women who are unable to seek health care for themselves and for their children are less able to provide for their children's food and nutrition security. Reducing gender disparities in key areas, particularly in education and health, is thus essential to reduce levels of hunger.

Figure 1. Relationship between the Global Hunger Index and the Gender Gap Index and Sub-indices



Note: In the Global Hunger Index, higher scores mean higher levels of hunger, whereas for the Gender Gap

growing), existing gender differences in human

joint holders of the land. After land certification was carried out in Tigray, female heads of households were more likely to participate in land rental markets, mostly as landlords, because tenure security increased their confidence in doing so.

Strengthening and increasing knowledge of women's property and contractual rights through legal reform in Uganda.

Change is needed in property rights laws so that women may hold individual or joint title to land. But for legal change to translate into change on the ground, women need to be aware of their rights in order to claim them. In Uganda, knowing more about legal rights to land that are guaranteed under the 1998 Land Law encourages women to invest in soil conservation, suggesting that legal literacy campaigns can increase agricultural

collected during 1991-92 from 87 villages in Bangladesh, found that welfare impacts on the household were significantly better when borrowers were women—increases in household consumption, improved nutritional status for both sons and daughters, and increased investment in nonland assets. Kabeer (1998), using participatory evaluation techniques, found that despite increased workloads due to receipts of credit, women feel empowered by it, clearly feeling more self-fulfilled and valued by other household members and the community.

Apart from the credit that women are able to access by belonging to a microfinance group, group-based approaches provide a mechanism through which outside programs and women themselves can increase women's control of assets, improve their productivity and enhance their status. In fact, the social capital that groups generate has been recognized as an important asset in itself. Women already draw upon a range of social networks for personal and family livelihoods. In development policy intervention strategies, social networks are being used as an instrument for women's participation and empowerment. Women's clubs, various forms of women's groups, kinship/kinship ties, for example, are being used to further women's empowerment through building social capital, especially trust and norms. Delivery of other development interventions—such as new agricultural technologies—through women's groups may also help women build physical capital (in addition to social capital) and reduce gender asset inequality within the household in contrast to other implementation modalities that target resources to the household—which men are more likely to control (Kumar and Quisumbing 2009).

#### *Conditional Cash Transfers to Improve Girls Schooling in Latin America*

Conditional cash transfers (CCTs), many of them targeted to women in the household, have been used to increase investments in child schooling, health, and nutrition. Perhaps the most well-known example of CCTs is Mexico's PROGRESA, now renamed Oportunidades. In August 1997 Mexico initiated a large new countrywide program called Programa Nacional de Educación, Salud y Alimentación (PROGRESA) to fight "extreme poverty" in the country's rural areas. With a budget of US\$500 million, the program offered monetary assistance, nutritional supplements, educational grants, and a basic health package to its beneficiaries for at least three consecutive years. The program gave cash transfers to women, conditional on children's school attendance and visits to health clinics. The targeting of transfers to women was influenced by research showing the differential impacts of male and female income on household allocation outcomes. An impact evaluation (see Skoufias 2001 and studies cited therein) showed that

While CCTs are perhaps most famous in Latin America, they are now being adapted to other settings, such as in North and Sub-Saharan Africa, and are being modified to achieve other development outcomes, such as delaying marriage and preventing risky sexual behavior. The Government of India recently launched a pilot CCT program that will pay beneficiary families over 18 years, conditional on birth registration, immunization, school enrollment (with 80 percent attendance) and marriage after age 18 (American India Foundation 2008). And in Malawi, the World Bank is implementing a randomized intervention that provides incentives (in the form of school fees and cash transfers) to adolescent girls (Baird et al. 2009), to keep them in school and reduce the risk of exposure to HIV/AIDS.

#### **4. Improving the gender-responsiveness of poverty reduction programs**

A recent review of interventions that addressed women's specific needs as farmers and workers (Quisumbing and Pandolfelli 2010) has identified a number of "promising approaches" that can be adapted more generally to poverty reduction programs. These are:

*Continue strengthening women's property rights and investing in schooling.*

Control over productive assets is essential to women's productivity; control over physical assets and being better-educated also improves women's bargaining power within the home. Thus, efforts to strengthen women's property rights through legal reform and to invest in girls' schooling by reducing the cost of schooling and increasing physical access to services, improving the design of service delivery, and investing in time-saving infrastructure must continue.

*Adapt program design or service delivery to client needs.*

Successful programs are able to vary program design to adapt product or service delivery to clients' needs, whether it involves changing the terms of credit provided through microfinance institutions, providing different types of savings instruments, tailoring agricultural extension messages to client groups, designing culturally appropriate and acceptable technology, or providing culturally acceptable ways of marketing agricultural produce. Indeed, unless interventions are tailored to meet men's and women's needs, they likely will fail.

*Take gender roles into account when designing and implementing interventions.*

Interventions that explicitly took into account gender roles were more likely to succeed than those that neglected them, and interventions that neglected gender roles were also more likely to reinforce or exacerbate inequitable access to resources between men and women. While there are limitations to what individual projects can accomplish, at a minimum they should not perpetuate gender inequities, and at best, they can set in motion and support extant change processes within communities.

*Evaluate anti-poverty programs to increase effectiveness, and pay attention to gender-differentiated impacts.*

Large-scale anti-poverty interventions represent a substantial commitment of public resources. They should therefore be evaluated, with a view towards measuring impact, increasing effectiveness, and potentially scaling up effective programs. Such evaluations should pay special attention to gender-differentiated impacts. Program designers should also continue to explore alternative design and delivery mechanisms systematically. Anti-poverty programs are often modified in an ad hoc manner, without systematic evaluation. Without evaluation, it is difficult to recommend what programs can be scaled up. Likewise, it is difficult to know what design features can be modified for local conditions without adversely affecting the overall outcome of the intervention.

*Take account of women's diverse needs.*

Gender norms are complex. They change in response to shifting economic, political and cultural forces, which can create new opportunities for women and men. Yet, gender norms do not change overnight and attempts to directly challenge such norms may unintentionally result in an erosion of women's claims to resources. Thus, development planners who seek to increase women's control of resources need to consider the tradeoffs entailed in challenging or respecting local gender norms. In the gender and development literature, this is often referred to as meeting women's practical versus strategic gender needs, and a range of policy approaches, from Women in Development



