

## **TOWARD 2015: MIXED PROGRESS ON WOMEN AND DEVELOPMENT** *Strides in Girls' Education, Women's Political Participation; Lags in Women's Employment, Reproductive Health*

September 2008 marks the midpoint for achieving the goal of gender equality and women's empowerment, part of 189 countries' commitment to end poverty and inequality by 2015. The results so far have been mixed.

Goal 3 of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) – to promote gender equality and empower women – often is referred to as the “heart” of the MDGs because its success is vital to achieving the other seven goals.<sup>1</sup>

Recognizing this fact, from 2002 to 2005, ICRW led a high-level collaborative process to devise a seven-point strategy to achieve Goal 3.\* The strategy focused on investing in and strengthening women's capabilities, opportunities and security through (1) post-primary education, (2) guaranteed sexual and reproductive health, (3) infrastructure to ease women's time burdens, (4) property and inheritance rights, (5) decent work, (6) greater political participation locally and nationally, and (7) reduced violence against women and girls.

Progress to date has been mixed. Strides have been made in girls' education and women's political participation. But in the crucial areas of women's employment and reproductive health, progress has lagged. Worse yet, other priorities cannot be measured due to limited or nonexistent data, so it is difficult to assess whether progress is being made, and if so, to what extent.

As the improvements in education and political participation attest, a global focus and commitment can lead to significant improvements for women. The charge now is for the global community to maintain its progress while raising the profile of and commitment to the five remaining strategic points of Goal 3, including data collection.

### **Toward Achieving Millennium Development Goal 3 – Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment**

#### **(1) STRENGTHEN OPPORTUNITIES FOR GIRLS' POST-PRIMARY EDUCATION**

##### **Midpoint Mark: Good Progress**

*Indicators: Enrollment ratios; completion ratios for primary, secondary and tertiary education*

Gender disparities in primary enrollment and completion ratios have been substantially reduced, especially among low- and low middle-income countries in sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia. Most countries also had achieved gender parity in secondary education enrollment for 2005.

Still, more work is needed. Low female-male primary enrollment ratios remain in some low-income countries in sub-Saharan Africa. Moreover, low primary completion rates for both boys and girls exist in low- and lower middle-income countries in South Asia, lower middle-income countries in sub-Saharan Africa, and upper- and lower middle-income countries in the Middle East and North Africa.

**Next steps:** Policies that increase girls' access to primary and secondary schooling, such as scholarships for girls, cash transfers and fee waivers, should continue. Retention and educational quality also must be addressed.

## **(2) GUARANTEE SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH AND RIGHTS**

### **Midpoint Mark: Slow Progress**

*Indicators: Adolescent fertility rate; proportion of contraceptive demand satisfied*

Adolescent birth rates have decreased globally over the past decade. In low- and low middle-income countries, however, adolescent birth rates remain high when compared to developed countries, where the birth rate hovers at 12.08 per 1,000 women.

Data show that demand for contraception is not being satisfied.<sup>1</sup> In all low and low middle-income countries, the proportion of contraceptive demand satisfied is low at .85 or below.<sup>2</sup> The lowest rates are in low-income countries in the Middle East and North Africa, followed closely by low-income countries in sub-Saharan Africa and low- and low middle-income countries in Latin America and the Caribbean.

**Next steps:** Provision of adolescent-friendly reproductive health services and age-appropriate sexuality education should be scaled up to help reduce adolescent births. Priority must be given to assuring availability and affordability of contraceptive supplies.

## **(3) INVEST IN INFRASTRUCTURE TO REDUCE WOMEN'S AND GIRLS' TIME BURDENS**

### **Midpoint Mark: Insufficient Data**

*Indicator: Hours per day (or year) women and men spend fetching water, collecting fuel*

Many countries have invested in large-scale infrastructure projects – such as energy, roads, and water and sanitation systems – since the MDGs were adopted. However, few countries have collected the data to track how those investments affect women's and men's time use in chores such as water or firewood collection.

**Next steps:** Mechanisms need to be put in place to collect time use data regularly and in many more countries.

## **(4) GUARANTEE WOMEN'S PROPERTY AND INHERITANCE RIGHTS**

### **Midpoint Mark: Insufficient Data**

*Indicators: Land ownership; housing title by male, female or jointly held*

The lack of data on women's ownership of land and housing hampers efforts to track progress on this indicator. Data collected in the last 10 years shows that women in many countries are far

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<sup>1</sup> Proportion of contraceptive demand satisfied is measured by taking the contraceptive prevalence rate as a proportion of the sum of the contraceptive prevalence rate and the unmet need for family planning.

less likely than men to have ownership or control of key productive assets such as land and housing.

**Next steps:** A U.N. agency should develop and lead a global effort to standardize individual level data collection on asset ownership. Individual asset ownership data also can be collected through other means, such as the Living Standard of Measurement Study surveys conducted by the World Bank and country governments.

## **(5) REDUCE GENDER INEQUALITY IN EMPLOYMENT**

### **Midpoint Mark: Slow Progress**

*Indicators: Gender differences in structure of employment; gender gaps in wages*

More women participate in employment now than ever before, reflecting the growth in economic opportunities available to them. Between 2000 and 2006, women's share of non-agricultural employment has stayed the same or risen in all world regions. However, cross-sectional data show that most women continue to be employed in the informal sector, which is not fully represented in the reported data. Informal work tends to offer women much lower wages and often is unstable.

Did women receive more equal pay for their work? According to data from the International Labor Organization (ILO) and various household surveys, gender wage gaps rose in some parts of the world and fell in others. Many forces underlie the changes in gender wage gaps, from globalization to labor market shifts to direct and indirect discrimination and differences in female education. Nonetheless, research shows that gender gaps remained even after controlling for education, age and labor market experience.

**Next steps:** Gaps in data impede efforts to track progress on women's overall status in employment. In the next five years, donors and countries should contribute resources that can help develop this data.

## **(6) INCREASE WOMEN'S REPRESENTATION IN POLITICAL BODIES**

### **Midpoint Mark: Some Progress**

*Indicators: Percentage of seats held by women in national parliament, local government bodies*

Overall, the number of women represented in national parliaments has increased in most countries. The adoption of quotas and increased global pressure largely are responsible for the increase in women's representation.

Women also are gaining political power at the local level. For the first time, data are available to estimate their participation as elected representatives at the local level. For example, Costa Rica has the largest representation; women there hold 73 percent of all local government seats.

**Next steps:** Progress has been idiosyncratic, with success varying greatly from country to country. More should be done to ensure women are represented in national and local governments across settings.

## **(7) COMBAT VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN**

### **Midpoint Mark: Insufficient Data**

*Indicator: Prevalence of domestic violence*

Too few countries regularly collect data on the prevalence of violence against women to assess progress on this strategic priority. That said, the data available show that levels of domestic violence are unconscionably high worldwide.

The developed countries also report high prevalence rates, ranging from 8 percent in Canada to about 22 percent in the United States, Netherlands and Germany, and up to 30 percent in New Zealand, Australia and Finland.

**Next steps:** Increase efforts to collect national data using standard definitions and methodologies.

The full report on progress to date related to MDG 3 is available in the forthcoming ICRW report, "Seven Priorities, Seven Years to Go: Progress on Achieving Gender Equality."

\* Between 2002 and 2005, ICRW co-chaired the U.N. Millennium Project's Task Force on Promoting Gender Equality and Empowering Women, comprised of leading experts from around the world, which devised a strategy to achieve the goal of gender equality and women's empowerment. The Task Force's recommendations, published in *Taking Action: Achieving Gender Equality and Empowering Women* in 2005 consist of seven strategic priorities for education, health, infrastructure, employment, property ownership, political participation, and reductions in violence.

Though formally adopted, these strategic priorities were never fully integrated into the U.N. agenda for MDG 3. As such, they are not reflected in official U.N. reports on the MDGs being released this week.

**ABOUT ICRW:** *The International Center for Research on Women (ICRW) is a leading Washington, D.C.-based international research organization with offices in India and Uganda that works to advance gender equality and human rights, fight poverty, and promote sustainable economic and social development for all.*

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