

High-Level Task Force for ICPD

RIGHTS, DIGNITY & HEALTH FOR ALL

Policy Brief & Recommendations

Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) Open Working Group (OWG)

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Promoting Equality, including Social Equity, Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment

KEY MESSAGES

The sustainable development agenda must be rooted in principles of human rights, human security, equality and social justice so that nobody is left behind. Sustainable development will not be achieved unless the needs and rights of all people are fulfilled, especially those living in poverty or otherwise discriminated against. Priority must be placed on ending gender inequality as the most pervasive form of inequality¹ and on advancing the rights of women, adolescents and youth as the largest groups facing systematic inequality worldwide.

Beyond the harm and injustice caused to individuals and communities, inequalities—especially as faced by women, adolescents and youth—perpetuate poverty, stall development progress, reduce economic efficiency, hinder growth, threaten social cohesion and stability, and undermine human capital accumulation.²

In addition to addressing its symptoms and consequences, the SDGs must tackle the root causes of inequality, by addressing and reforming discriminatory laws, policies, institutions and practices based on gender, age, race, class, ethnicity, disability, HIV or migrant status, sexual orientation and gender identity, or any other factor. This also means that especially marginalized or vulnerable groups must be 'counted' and the 'data revolution' supported to that end. These groups include adolescent girls, communities living in conflict-affected settings and environmentally-fragile areas, slum dwellers, rural populations, indigenous communities, migrants, older persons, people living with HIV and disabilities, those in high-risk occupations, domestic work and other parts of the informal sector, among others.

Investments in gender equality and the human rights of women and girls have high payoffs for the well-being of children and families, poverty reduction, economic growth, environmental stewardship and inclusive governance, with multiplier and inter-generational effects across development objectives.

Gender equality and the human rights and empowerment of women and girls must be a stand-alone goal as well as mainstreamed across all other goals, targets and indicators. A major lesson learned from the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) is the shortcomings of a fragmented approach to advancing gender equality. To be effective, a gender equality goal should encompass commitments and targets across the range of social, economic, cultural, civil and political rights, including to: end gender-based violence and harmful practices, including child, early and forced marriage, and ensure universal access to critical services for all survivors; fulfill sexual and reproductive health and rights; secure equal economic opportunities and access to productive resources, including land, inheritance and property rights, financial services and agricultural supports; equal social protection; and increase women's leadership and participation in public and private decision-making.

Investments in adolescents and youth should be prioritized, with a focus on adolescent girls, including targets on school completion through at least secondary education and gender parity at all levels of education; universal access to comprehensive sexuality education for all young people, both in and out of school; youth-friendly sexual and reproductive health information and services; and decent work with decent wages.

Policy Recommendations

1. **Guarantee equality before the law and non-discrimination for all people in the exercise of their human rights and fundamental freedoms**, across the range of social, cultural, economic, civil and political rights, including in accessing social benefits, health services, educational and employment opportunities, in forming a family, in fulfilling their right to self-expression, to seek and impart information, to freedom of organization and assembly, and to freedom from violence and harassment, regardless of sex, age, race, ethnicity, income, occupation, marital, HIV, disability or migrant status, sexual orientation and gender identity, or on any other grounds.
2. **In relation to a stand-alone goal on gender equality and the human rights and empowerment of women and girls, and mainstreaming gender across the new development framework:**
 - ✓ *Enact and revise legislation and policies to protect the human rights of women and girls and revoke all discriminatory legislation³ to eliminate gender- and age-discriminatory provisions;*
 - ✓ *Respect, protect and fulfill the sexual and reproductive health and rights of women and adolescent girls through legal, policy and regulatory provisions, including to prohibit violations of these rights, such as spousal and parental consent requirements; prohibitions on contraceptive methods; forced sterilization and forced abortion on any grounds, and mandatory testing for pregnancy or HIV;*
 - ✓ *Enact and enforce legislation and adopt adequately-resourced national multi-sectoral plans of action and programmes to end gender-based violence, involving the police, housing, health, education, social service, labour and immigration sectors, including to address domestic and sexual violence, marital rape, trafficking, sexual harassment and traditional harmful practices; modify laws and practices that exonerate perpetrators from punishment (such as for marrying the victim); and eliminate sexual violence from amnesty provisions in post-conflict settings;*
 - ✓ *Ensure universal access to critical services for all victims/survivors of gender-based violence, that are comprehensive, accessible and coordinated across sectors, and that include, at a minimum: 24-hour hotlines; psychosocial and mental health support and counselling; health services, including for treatment of injuries and sexual and reproductive health; post-rape care, including emergency contraception, post-exposure prophylaxis for HIV prevention and access to safe abortion services in all cases of violence, rape and incest; police protection, safe housing and shelter; documentation of cases, forensic services, legal aid and access to justice; and referrals and longer-term support for women and their children, including for housing, education, employment and income-earning opportunities;*
 - ✓ *Strengthen legal measures and community mobilization to end child, early and forced marriage and female genital mutilation;*
 - ✓ *Increase women's leadership in decision-making, including through temporary special measures for political participation at local and national levels of government, in parliament, in multinationals, the private sector, the media, science, research and technology;*
 - ✓ *Ensure the participation of women in conflict resolution, peace-building negotiations and post-conflict policy-making, and investments in gender equality and the integration of gender perspectives across national plans and programmes, including in humanitarian situations;*
 - ✓ *Enact environmental and climate change policies that ensure women's participation in decision-making, management and governance of natural resources, and ensure climate change prevention and adaptation policies consider the specific needs of women and girls;*
 - ✓ *Enable the role of women's human rights defenders and protect them from intimidation and violence.*

3. In the area of Health:

- ✓ *Ensure women's equitable access to quality, affordable health care throughout the life-cycle, including to address priority needs related to newborn and child health, sexual and reproductive health, non-communicable diseases including breast and cervical cancers, malaria, tuberculosis and HIV and AIDS-related prevention and services, mental health and depression treatment, and gender-based violence-related services and supports, including for post-rape care;*
- ✓ *Accelerate implementation of universal access to quality, integrated and affordable sexual and reproductive health information, education and services throughout the life-cycle, with emphasis on women and adolescent girls, as a priority of the health sector and in universal health coverage schemes.*

4. In the area of Education:

- ✓ *Improve access to quality education, with particular attention to girls' retention and completion rates at all levels of education, and the elimination of female illiteracy;*
- ✓ *Provide universal access to comprehensive sexuality education for all young people, both in and out of school, linked to youth-friendly sexual and reproductive health services, with particular attention to adolescent girls;*
- ✓ *Prohibit the expulsion of girls from school due to pregnancy, motherhood or marital status, and provide special supports for pregnant girls and young mothers to enable them to complete their education and balance education and family responsibilities;*
- ✓ *Eliminate gender stereotypes and biases in curricula and teaching practices, and in the transmission of occupational aspirations;*
- ✓ *Make schools safe spaces for girls, free of sexual harassment, sexual violence and bullying.*

5. In the area of Employment, Decent Work and Livelihoods:

- ✓ *Protect human and labour rights and eliminate exploitation in all its forms, with particular attention to women, girls, low-income workers and migrants, including domestic workers;*
- ✓ *Secure women's equal access to economic, employment and livelihood opportunities, including through legal and policy provisions, for decent work and equal pay with men; social protection, including for informal sector workers and with special attention to vulnerable groups, such as female-headed households, including girl-headed households; equal land, property and inheritance rights; access to farming supports, productive assets, banking and financial services, technologies and ICTs, and the ability to start and register a business; and creation of employment opportunities for older women, especially important in countries without strong social security systems;*
- ✓ *Ensure that policies for full, productive and decent employment and livelihood opportunities for youth have a special focus on young women's equal opportunities;*
- ✓ *Prohibit employment discrimination against women based on pregnancy or motherhood;*
- ✓ *Redress the disproportionate burden of unpaid care work on women and girls and inefficient time-use related to their gender and reproductive roles, including through family-friendly policies for affordable child care, support for care of the elderly, ill and disabled, maternity and paternity leave employment policies, as well as access to time- and energy-saving technologies (e.g. for water, cooking fuel, electricity, etc.);*
- ✓ *Undertake public education on the importance of gender equality and shared rights and responsibilities with men and boys, including in household management, sexual and reproductive health and rights, and childrearing.*

FAST FACTS: Gender Equality, the MDGs, and Sustainable Development

- **Only two out of 130 countries with available data have reached gender parity in all levels of education.**⁴ An extra year of primary school can increase women's eventual wages by 10-20%,⁵ and an extra year of secondary school increases them by 15-25%.⁶ Improvements in women's educational achievement lead to healthier, smaller, better educated families and better outcomes for their children.⁷
- **If women had the same access to land, productive assets and farming inputs as men, farm yields could increase by 20-30%,** and raise total agricultural output in developing countries by 2.5-4%. This could in turn **reduce the number of hungry people in the world by 12-17% and the number of undernourished by as many as 100 to 150 million.**⁸
- The **gender gap in unemployment widened** between 2007 and 2012, and women lost 13 million jobs.⁹ Expanding women's participation in the workforce can contribute to **substantial increases in GDP, with country estimates ranging from 5 to 34%.**¹⁰
- **Women earn on average 23% less than men,**¹¹ and often do not have equal control over household finances. But **when women have a say in family spending, income is more likely to be spent on children's nutrition, health care and education.**¹²
- Only **21% of seats in national parliaments around the world are held by women,**¹³ undermining opportunities for improved, inclusive governance. For example, a study in India showed that increased women's political participation led to improved services and less corruption.¹⁴
- **Sexual and reproductive health problems impose huge costs and burdens on individuals, families, societies, public budgets, productivity and economies.** Maternal mortality and morbidity leads to reduced labor supply and lost wages.¹⁵ In Sub-Saharan Africa alone, families spend USD\$200 million a year out of their own pockets to treat complications from unsafe abortion, with losses to societies as a whole on the order of nearly USD\$1 billion in foregone income from death and disability.¹⁶
- Good sexual and reproductive health is associated with **increased female workforce participation and higher productivity,**¹⁷ as well as with smaller, healthier and better educated children and families that are also **more resilient to crises, displacement or environmental challenges.**¹⁸
- **Nearly 1 in 5 girls in developing countries gives birth before the age of 18.**¹⁹ Complications related to pregnancy and childbirth are a **leading cause of adolescent death in developing countries, taking the lives of 70,000 adolescent girls each year.**²⁰
- Studies from Kenya, Brazil, and India show that **delaying adolescent childbearing could have increased economic productivity** by \$3.4, \$3.5, and \$7.7 billion dollars, respectively.²¹
- **Every day, 37,000 girls under 18 are married and 1 out of 9 girls in developing countries will be married before their 15th birthday.**²² Child, early and forced marriage is the leading cause of adolescent pregnancy, increases girls' experiences of gender-based violence, limits their education opportunities and perpetuates poverty.
- At least **35% of women worldwide suffer physical/and or sexual violence**²³ in their lifetime; up to **one-third report their first sexual experience was forced.**²⁴ In some regions, **women and girls who experience gender-based violence are 1.5 times as likely to be infected with HIV.**²⁵

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- ¹ UN OWG TST (2013) *Issues Brief: Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment*.
- ² UN OWG TST (2013) *Issues Brief: Promoting Equality, including Social Equity*.
- ³ Beijing Declaration Platform for Action (1995), Paragraph 232(d); and Beijing 'plus 5' review of the UN Special Session of the General Assembly (2000), paragraph 68b, which called for removal of all gender-discriminatory provisions by 2005.
- ⁴ United Nations (2013) *The Millennium Development Goals Report*.
- ⁵ United Nations, Inter-agency Task Force on Rural Women, *Fact Sheet: Rural Women and the Millennium Development Goals*.
- ⁶ UNICEF (2011) *UNICEF says education for women and girls a lifeline to development*. See also Ruth Levine, et al. (2008). *Girls Count: A Global Investment & Action Agenda*. (Center for Global Development: Washington, D.C.)
- ⁷ World Bank (2012) *World Development Report, Gender Equality and Development*.
- ⁸ Food and Agriculture Organization (2011) *The State of Food and Agriculture 2010-2011: Women in Agriculture, Closing the gender gap for development*.
- ⁹ ILO (2012) *Global employment trends for women*.
- ¹⁰ IMF (2013) *Women, Work and the Economy: Macroeconomic Gains from Gender Equity*. Based on studies that include the United States, Japan, the United Arab Emirates and Egypt.
- ¹¹ United Nations (2012) *The Millennium Development Goals Report Gender Chart*.
- ¹² World Bank (2012) *World Development Report, Gender Equality and Development*.
- ¹³ Inter-parliamentary Union (2013) *Women in National Parliaments: Situation as of 1st November 2013*.
- ¹⁴ World Bank (2012) *World Development Report, Gender Equality and Development*.
- ¹⁵ World Bank (2012) *Investing in Women's Reproductive Health: Closing the deadline gap between what we know and what we do*.
- ¹⁶ World Health Organization (2012) *Safe abortion: Technical and policy guidance for health systems*.
- ¹⁷ World Bank (2012) *Investing in Women's Reproductive Health: Closing the deadline gap between what we know and what we do*.
- ¹⁸ UNFPA (2013) *Empowering People to Ensure a Sustainable Future for All*.
- ¹⁹ WHO (2012) *Adolescent Pregnancy Fact Sheet 364*.
- ²⁰ UNFPA (2013) *State of World Population: Motherhood in Childhood – Facing the challenge of adolescent pregnancy*.
- ²¹ *Ibid.*
- ²² UNFPA (2012), *Marrying Too Young: End Child Marriage*.
- ²³ WHO (2013) *Global and regional estimates of violence against women: prevalence and health effects of intimate partner violence and non-partner sexual violence*.
- ²⁴ UN Women (2010) *Violence against women and the Millennium Development Goals*.
- ²⁵ WHO (2013) *Global and regional estimates of violence against women: prevalence and health effects of intimate partner violence and non-partner sexual violence*.