

**Expert Group Meeting on “Developing supplementary targets  
and indicators to strengthen social inclusion, gender equality and  
health promotion in the Millennium Development Goals”**

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**UNCC,**

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**OPENING STATEMENT**

**By**

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**Distinguished participants,  
Representatives from other UN institutions,  
Colleagues from other ECA divisions and sub regional offices  
Ladies and gentlemen,**

It is my honor and great pleasure to welcome you all to this expert group meeting on *Developing supplementary targets and indicators to strengthen social inclusion, gender equality and health promotion in the Millennium Development Goals*.

This meeting is being held as part of an interregional Development Account project entitled “Interregional cooperation to strengthen social inclusion, gender equality and health promotion in the MDG process” in collaboration with the other regional commissions in Asia, South America and Europe. The objective of the project is to enhance the capacity of member States in these regions to design and implement development policies and programmes in a manner that substantially contributes to social inclusion and achievement of gender equality and health promotion through development of contextualized targets and indicators in the MDGs.

**Ladies and Gentlemen**

Whilst many African countries have made progress towards achieving some of the targets of the MDGs such as the MDG 2 on education, the progress on the other goals has been slow. Recent reviews of the progress made towards achieving the MDGs have also highlighted that the existing MDG targets and indicators may not fully reflect the progress being made towards the inclusion of the socially excluded and marginalized groups in mainstream development.

Some social groups on this continent are wholly or partially excluded from the society in which they live, in terms of participating in the economic, social and political life of the community, resulting not only in diminished material and non-material quality of life, but also in tempered life chances, choices and reduced citizenship. Some of the groups that are at risk from exclusion in Africa include: women, older persons, persons with disabilities, the youth, people living with HIV/AIDS (PLWHA), the poor, street children, refugees and internally displaced people, some ethnic groups and indigenous people.

**Distinguished participants,**

The Nobel Prize winner Amartya Sen in his book *Development as Freedom* argues that millions of people living in developing countries are not free. “Even if they are not technically slaves, they are denied elementary freedoms and remain imprisoned in one way or another by economic poverty, social deprivation, political tyranny or cultural authoritarianism”. He further argues that it is important for governments to enhance individual freedom by promoting socially inclusive policies. It is therefore a major task of governments and the international community to promote a development agenda that is inclusive of all individuals.

**Ladies and Gentlemen,**

Meeting the MDGs requires addressing social exclusion through deliberate policies and interventions that address social exclusion and attempt to construct more socially cohesive societies. It also requires close monitoring of indicators that can track the progress made on social inclusion, gender equality and health equity for effective policy development.

However, as I noted earlier, the current MDG targets and indicators might not be measuring the progress in a way that truly represent the inclusion of vulnerable groups, the promotion of gender equality, and promotion of equity in health.

How then can we strengthen the MDG targets and indicators so as to improve the capacity of African countries to measure progress towards inclusion of vulnerable groups, promote gender equality and address health inequities?

**Distinguished participants,**

We have invited you, as experts, to assist us in addressing this question. ECA has prepared a draft report on *Strengthening social inclusion, gender equality and health promotion in the Millennium Development Goals in Africa* that was developed from synthesis of existing secondary information on social exclusion in African situations and from consultations with some selected member States. Specifically, I wish to make a special appeal that you do three things:

1. Critically review the draft report and make suggestions to improve the draft document;
2. Identify key issues, in the selected thematic areas of social exclusion and suggest, prioritize and recommend supplementary MDG targets and indicators that can help foster the monitoring of the inclusion of the marginalized groups, gender equality and health equity into mainstream development; and
3. Identify constraints and opportunities faced by countries in adopting these suggested additional indicators.

**Distinguished participants,  
Ladies and gentlemen,**

Experts in this house today have been drawn from different disciplines so as to enrich the discussions and contribute to the building up of a complete picture of the situation on the ground. May I therefore appeal to the distinguished participants to openly discuss the issues and share information so that we can come up with the best possible indicators and guidance for our governments to promote the social inclusion of vulnerable groups, address gender equality concerns and promote health equity in their national development agenda. This is a challenge that I know and believe that you will not fail at.

With these remarks, I wish you all fruitful deliberations and look forward to the outcome of your meeting.

I thank you for your kind attention.