

## **Community of Practice: Promotion of Social Inclusion of Women and Gender Equality in the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)**

### **CONTRIBUTIONS**

Gender inequality is first and foremost demonstrated by the fact that most women do not possess an income. Thus leaving women dependent on the household income their husbands bring in and manage. Even if women engage in small scale trading to supplement the household income, husbands who will decide what to do with the additional income may confiscate this sum. Most often, situations such as these tend to affect women with little or no education.

In terms of social exclusion, women are mostly denied access to education. For example, if a family has a low income and its budget for education fees is trained, the boys will be favoured over the girls. This is on top of those who believe that girls do not need a formal education as they are meant to take care of the household.

Thank you,

Mrs. Rose Ryanyeninka  
Advisor Ministry of Planning, Development and National Reconstruction  
Bujumbura, Burundi

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Hello everyone,

This is in response to Mrs. Rose Ryanyeninka contribution by which I was highly impressed as it is rare to see women who occupy senior government level positions debate grassroots matters. This proves that “elite women” support the work done by us activists.

As for gender inequality, I believe that its primary cause is rooted in traditions though; lack of education has compounded its effects, particularly in the context of a Nation-State.

Mauritania is a multicultural country, in which, for example, women of Arabic-Beber descent enjoy a status that grants them respect as well as subtle powers that allow them to maintain their maiden names, their own properties, the right to divorce and custody of their children.

In fact, I believe we are the only society in the world who respects and values divorced women, as they have the right to remarry up to seven times without fear being rejected by

society, or loosing its respect. (For additional information please visit: <http://www.maurifemme.mr/Statuts/Traditions/DIVORC~1.HTM>)

Unfortunately, upon independence and the creation of the Nation-State, additional criteria were imposed as to who could participate in building this new state. Education being one of these, women were sidelined as colonial education was unavailable to them.

This has resulted in the unequal participation of men and women in the economic and political arenas that we see today. Today, women have lost most of their powers and social status, as they are living in a situation wherein men –the father, the brother, the husband, the cousin and so on) cannot provide for their needs and those of their children as is expected in Moorish culture.

Nowadays, women can be found in markets, factories and other work environments, as they need to earn a living and meet their own needs. Even remarrying is no longer easy as the economic situation has made providing for a divorced woman and her children difficult. Thus, women who in past times used to leave their marriage for the simplest of reasons, now think twice before making such a rash decision.

Women are also beginning to see the value of an education, of possessing skills and of being employed. They have realised that, in order to be autonomous and continue living independently, they will have join the working forces and entirely provide for themselves so as not remain dependent, and thus become submissive.

As we all know, though both are mutually dependent, ignorance is the cause of poverty. As a case in point, women in Mauritania constitute 29% of the working population while over 67% of us still remain illiterate.

Thank you,

Mrs. Fatma Mint Elkory  
NTIC et Citoyenneté  
Nouakchott, Mauritanie  
Website: <http://www.maurifemme.mr>

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Hello,

While I agree, that illiteracy is one of the root causes of inequalities, gender inequalities in Africa are first and foremost rooted in the family, wherein male superiority over women is though from a young age.

When there are children of both sexes in a family, the parents, and the father in particular teach their sons that they are superior to their sisters. Girls are denied many opportunities, including that of going to school. In some ethnic groups, girls are viewed as a source of income with parents denying their daughters an education as these will be married off at a

very young age. The wedding is arranged without the knowledge of the bride, and the parents will receive a bride price for the girl.

Once married, the husband commands the wife as per his wishes, forcing her to herd the cattle, tend to the fields and so on.

Thus, gender inequalities in Chad grow. And while educated and capable women holding positions in government institutions exist, to what extent they are listened to or taken seriously is to be questioned. However highly educated, many local expressions demonstrate that women's opinions are not taken seriously.

Positive changes within women have begun to emerge. For instance many girls now attend school as is it seen as added value for the family. In fact, girls are starting to outnumber boys in Chadian schools. This is mostly due to the tireless work of NGOs and the Government's education plan. Still, some parents, in rural areas, may at any moment withdraw their daughters from school and marry them off, particularly if the groom is wealthy and can afford an expensive bride price.

In short, gender inequality begins within the nuclear family.

Mr. Theodore Mbainaissem  
Environment and Community Development Advisor  
Ministry of Social Action and Family  
N'Djamena, Chad

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Hello everyone,

My name is Sylvie SIYAM and I am the coordinator of a Cameroonian association called PROTEGE QV.

I agree with all of the points of views forwarded so far, and I think that the solution lies in solving the problem at its roots.

It seems to me that all of this begins with a combination of the basic education provide by the family unit and that provided in the first years of primary school. As of this period, education forms the little girl into the adult she will become. As much as parents try and limit little girls' horizon, they encourage little boys to explore. Within families, if errands that require leaving the households are required, boys are sent out. For example, in our country, little girls are not allowed to climb trees while little boys are allowed a greater view of the horizon.

I believe that mothers should be informed enough to motivate their little girls to be more adventurous and to seek leadership roles.

Sylvie Siyam,

Coordinator  
Protégé QV  
Cameroon

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Hello everyone,

I would like to thank those who have already contributed for sharing their experiences.

Though many similarities exist, each country has its specific experiences that are unique to it. I would like to look at the question of gender inequality within the context of Madagascar.

We cannot discuss gender equality as long as women do not possess the same freedoms as men do.

As Malagasy society is organized according to hierarchies based on sex and on age, gender equality can manifest itself in many ways. In spite of legal, regulatory and administrative advances, women continue to be dominated. This is particularly true in rural areas where traditions survive unscathed and where  $\frac{3}{4}$  of the population lives. Though advances have been made in urban areas, mainly due to the globalization process, inequalities still persist.

Relations between men and women are built on this existing status, which perpetuates values, stereotypes and taboos, thus shaping the various roles taken by women within the family, the community and the society.

## SOCIAL AND CULTURAL STEREOTYPES

Malagasies view their children as a sign of wealth: while small, the children provide free labour, as adults they earn their living as well as provide a social protection net for the parents.

► Gender inequality is visible throughout a life cycle. At birth, male babies are preferred over female ones as he is considered as a future heir, as an upholder of traditions, as a head of household, as insurance that the family lies continues and as responsible member of the community. Contrary to this, female babies are expected to fulfil household duties, to marry and bear children. From a very young age, children of both sexes internalise these roles based on how they are treated at all levels (family, community, society) and in all circumstances.

► Gender inequality also appears in the formation as well as the functioning of a couple. As most marriages are arranged, the woman is exchange in return for bride prices. In addition, age, financial dependency, whether the couple establishes itself in the groom's house are factors that put women in an inferior position.

Based on a traditional division of labour, women are bound to the function of reproduction as well as domestic chores while the men lead the household, take all decisions, including financial ones and represent their families in the wider community.

Amongst many cultural groups, widows cannot inherit from their deceased husbands, as it is the surviving sons that can benefit from inheritance. In fact the widow only manages the inheritance until the inheritors become legal adults.

► Within the nuclear family, the wife is treated similar to the children, particularly when the age gap between husband and wife is very wide.

It is common that socio-cultural practices that discriminate against women are taken without any consideration to the latter: women can only participate in decision making discussion only with the consent of their husbands; women are subjected to many types of abuses by their husbands (emotional, verbal and physical); all this in addition to the household chores that she is responsible for, with or without her children's help.

#### STEREOTYPES IN EDUCATION, POLITICS, AND THE ECONOMY

► Although girls and boys legally receive equal access to education, girls are more likely to drop out of school. Factors external to the educational system are:

- Excessive domestic chores, including transporting water and firewood across long distances;
- Economic poverty of families which forces girls to work as hired help in other households, or in the sex trade;
- Lack of a birth certificate which disqualifies girls from sitting in official examinations; thus denying them adequate schooling and increasing female illiteracy;
- Malnutrition, which causes fatigue, illnesses and slows down growth and development;
- Need to walk long distances to reach the nearest school.

► Due to cultural norms, girls do not receive a sexual education and are left to their own wits at puberty, thus increasing their risks of contracting STDs, unwanted pregnancies and early marriage.

► All these lead to a low level of education amongst girls / women thus continuing the cycle of dependency and poverty:

- Lack of knowledge in sexuality and the reproductive system, of healthy living and nutrition, of hygienic practices ad so on.
- Lack of adequate qualifications leading to limited employment opportunities.
- Lack of access to development opportunities.
- A vicious cycle of poverty.
- Inability to redress the situation.

De facto, women participate in upholding the stereotype men have of women.

► With regards to equal access to education, men benefit from additional advantages derived from their superior social position, which allows them the authority to make all decisions. A second-class citizen, women can wield power over their children, work in the fields and manage domestic consumption.

It is important to note that women's contributions, particular those of rural areas, are not taken into account at national levels. This is rendered visible by the increase in women involved in the informal sector for mere survival.

► The situation is somewhat different in urban areas where the larger the urban centre, the more emancipated women are. Even though, inequalities persist:

- Employment: even with equal qualifications, women face difficulties in being hired, in being treated equally and in receiving equal pay;
- The private sector: senior positions remain exclusively male dominated;
- Weak female participation in institutions: very few women in the parliament, the government;
- Government budget allocated to promote gender equality is insignificant;
- Weak female participation in labour and trade union associations;
- In spite of the rise in women involved in associations and politics, women still are not involved in significant numbers in political parties.

## HEALTH AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH

► It is common knowledge that the level of control men have over a women, determines the general and reproductive health of women. This is further exaggerated by the difficulty in accessing social and health service facilities.

The lesser knowledge women have of their reproductive functions, the less they control of their fecundity, thus further endangering the health women. This has lead Madagascar to have a high rate of maternal death as well as a high population growth rate.

► It is important to note that women living with disabilities are further disadvantaged. This is compounded by the difficulties they face in accessing health facilities as well as well as existing social taboos, particularly in rural areas.

► Elderly women are also facing many problems. As their health deteriorates, they face growing health needs, while they abilities to meet their needs lessen. In addition the levels of social security and protection they receive are insufficient. With the loss of their incomes that is if they ever had any, elderly women find themselves increasingly dependent and marginalized.

Mrs Brigitte Lalasoa Randrianasolo  
General Advisor / Research Assistant  
Population, Gender and Development Research and Training Laboratory  
Economy Department

Hello everyone,

I am pleased to be a member of this community and would like to greet all of the participants.

I also share the viewpoints of our previous contributors and would like to add the opinions of a sensible man to the gender debate. While economic and financial hardship effectively remain at the root of inequalities between men and women, one should not fail to mention that cultural pressures within our societies as well as women's lack of self-confidence and their feeble level of participation in decision making are to blame as well.

Comoros has an annual per capita income of \$500. Sex disaggregated analysis of per capita income reveals a wide gap in favour of men, which is essentially explained by the fact that not many women have an income. According to a 2003 survey, only 25% of women were economically active as opposed to 46% of men. Of these, only 15% of women and 37% were employed.

As per annual UN data, Comoros' rank in the Human Development Index (HDI) has improved in recent years with its value going up from 0.480 to 0.540 from 1980 to date. Comoros has a Gender-related Development Index (GDI) value similar to its HDI value registered at 0,541 and 0,547 respectively for 2003.

A gender-based analysis of the economy reveals a high rate of economically inactive women (75%) of which 22% are housewives. These women classified as economically inactive in the national accounting system provide services that do not generate income but that should have been converted in monetary value.

In spite of the fact that there are more women than men in the working age group (71,7% and 70% respectively), the level of economic activity of among women is very low compared with that of men (17,9%, and 32,8% respectively).

Traditionally, men are legally responsible for the household and have to meet all of the households' financial needs. The men (husbands, maternal uncle or any male members of the family), have to work in order to provide the income that would cover all household expenses. Until recently, women were limited to working as household servants or as labourers in the family fields,

Recent times has seen the emergence of dynamic private sector initiatives led by women. Research in this field have shown that existing gender inequalities can be explained by the country's socio-cultural environment, which makes it difficult for women to access necessary start-up loans.

The majority of Comorian are women (50.4%). According to the 2003 census, women make up 60% of the inactive population; occupy a mere 2% of the decision-making positions within the government and make up 30% of all public servants.

In spite of the fact that improvements have been registered in redressing gender inequalities in education and health, Comorian girls and women remain largely marginalized.

In terms of education, inequalities that noticeably favour of boys are apparent at all levels of education. In 2003, primary school enrolment rates were shown to be of 79.6% for boys and 66.4% for girls and high school enrolment rates to be of 45,1% for boys and 38,5% for girls. This situation is mainly explained by the financial difficulties of parents and the continuing practice of enforced early marriage on girls.

Despite real and sustained efforts, multiple declarations and promises to improve gender equality in education and professional training, the results have been disappointing and many obstacles and constrains remain. Over 80% of girls never complete primary school, and less than 1% attend higher education institutions. In some regions, nearly 100% of girls and women are illiterate.

In terms of access to quality health care, gender inequalities are even more enhanced. While the geographic distribution of health facilities are up to par with international standards, most women cannot access its services due to financial hardship. Expensive medical fees and medications discourage the ailing from seeking care in health facilities. Most of which are women who financially depend on their husbands and thus seek alternative care.

It is mostly financial restraints that deny women modern and adequate health care and services. In addition, illiteracy, minimum access to information, socio-cultural prejudice also add to the situation.

Various studies have revealed the complexity of the legal framework under which gender equality is protected in Comoros. This framework draws from Islamic laws, customary law and inherited colonial law. The 2006 national report on human development and gender development reveals to different extents, all three laws stated above possess elements that contain gender disparity, that maintain gender inequality and consequently denies women equal footing with men in spite of efforts in reforming the legal system.

A comparative study conducted with UNDP support of the Comorian legal system and the Convention for the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), reveals that Comorian laws abide with CEDAW guidelines except in some aspects of family law, for which changes protecting the rights of women need to be brought forth.

Analysis of Comorian legislation reveals that legal discrimination towards women is practically insignificant. Nevertheless, Comorian women still hold a socially inferior status, resulting from local mentalities, customs, and an inadequate understanding of

religious precepts. Accordingly, the National Human Development Report (NHDR) has valued female participation 0.303 in 2003.

However, there exists a high level of participation from women both in electoral campaigns as well as among the voting population, as demonstrated in many past elections. They are extremely active, they know how to mobilise a crowd and cooperate with each other in order to support a candidate. And yet, they do not reap political benefits.

Meanwhile, there are very few women that run for office in the various elections. The Election Observation Office has noted that there was a decrease in the amount of women who ran in the parliamentary elections of 2004.

At the administration level, only 28% of decision-making and senior positions are filled by women as opposed to 72% that are filled by men. Similarly, in middle management and technical positions, women fill 29% of posts as opposed to 71% by men.

In addition, women's participation level in the political development of the country and in the planning of development programmes is very low and hardly sought after. Generally speaking, women contribute very little to decision-making at the community level as well as at the national level. While organizing a large wedding enables men to climb up the social ladder, allows them to publicly speak and provides them with decision-making authority, it only allows women to participate in some cultural ceremonies and uncover their faces.

Frameworks established to promote gender equality face many difficulties when put in practice. They are weakened by a shortage of expertise as well as human and financial. The lack of cooperation between national and regional frameworks nullifies progresses made towards gender equality. At the administrative level, gender issues are seen as an isolated matter and are treated in a manner that fails to address its multidimensionality, which cuts across all sectors.

Due to cultural resistance towards gender equality, those in charge of implementing gender policies within the political process perceive it as a nuisance and believe they are doing women a favour instead of recognizing the moral foundation for such a policy and the fundamental rights women should have.

Local NGOs have not yet understood the value of gender and have so far failed to take action in this respect. Profound misunderstandings and lack of knowledge on the importance of gender issues are commonplace within these organizations, including amongst those that are considered to be at the forefront of the battle to promote gender equality.

While many such organizations seem to taken on the gender cause and promote the rights of women, further analysis reveals that in reality, internally, these organizations have changed neither their policies nor their procedures to take gender into account. Hence,

most gender-based organizations need trainings that would sensitize them to gender issues and provide them with greater understanding of gender mainstreaming and gender equality.

Mr. Mohamed Ahmed Assoumani  
Secretary General  
Ministry of Women's Affairs  
Moroni, Comoros

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In Senegal, as in many other African countries, women are victims of sexist stereotypes that favour men. Cultural rules that guide society recognize female submission to males as a norm, forcing women to suffer discrimination within their families and their societies, simply because they are women.

The effects of these constraints can be felt in all fields, limiting possibilities available to women to improve their socio-economic situation, to benefit from equal access to available resources and to equally participate in the development process.

Generally, the equality of rights, opportunities and treatment between men and women remain dependent on the following:

- The continuing resistance and pre-eminence of patriarchal structures;
- The powerful influences of socio-cultural pressures;
- The persistence of traditional harmful practices which endanger the health of mother and child;
- Weak decision-making power of women;
- Men and women's lack of knowledge of legal provisions enacted to protect;
- Unwillingness to change mentalities;
- Complex legal procedures;
- Under-representation of women in decision-making positions (executive, legislative, community level, trade-unions and professional organizations);
- Weak economic power of women;
- Continuing existence of legal provisions and laws that do not conform with CEDAW;
- Almost total absence of studies and research on women's rights;
- Absence of watchdog committees tasked with ensuring that women's fundamental rights are recognized;
- Lack of gender disaggregated data.

Ms. Aminata Diouf Ndiaye  
Technical Advisor for gender issues  
Ministry for Women Affairs, for Family Affairs and Social Development  
Dakar, Senegal

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Hello everyone,

We are very lucky to have such a well-structured, well-moderated and very simple forum. A compilation of our exchanges will constitute a formidable document that can be exploited within our networks, researches and various endeavours. Bravo to the team!

Regarding as to how our experiences, ideas and thoughts on how best the MDGs can be reinforced to address gender inequalities and the social inclusion of women, I believe that we can draw from the many deliberations that have already taken place across the continent.

Organized by SURF West and Central Africa (SURF – WCA), in partnership with the gender section of BDP and the RBA, the "**Regional Training Workshop on Needs Assessment towards Achieving the 3rd MDGs Goal**" (Dakar 20 – 22 November 2007) sought to establish an assessment of gender needs that would facilitate the reaching the MDGs in francophone countries of the sub-region. Over fifty members of civil society, African experts and officials participated in the workshop, which resulted in the proposal of key recommendations towards achieving the gender elements of the MDGs. It is important to mention these in order to save time and synchronise all our efforts.

Therefore, while I prepare my next contribution, I am attaching the final report of this workshop, a document that is inspiring and can be used for many purposes.

Mrs. Fatma Mint Elkory  
NTIC et Citoyenneté  
Nouakchott, Mauritanie  
Website: <http://www.maurifemme.mr>

**Note from the facilitator:** An English version of this document is not available.

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Hello everybody,

Thanks for the contributions; the issues are very interesting and contributions from participants are very informative.

I just like to raise one point. When discussing gender issues it is important to appreciate the variations that exist in different parts of the world/Africa. In some societies decision-making and control of resources are centralised in the hands of one individual inside the household; while in many cases this is the husband there are also instances where females wield considerable power (like in matriarchal cultures). In some countries, husbands and wives control different spheres of activities or may separately control the same type of resources; if I'm not mistaken, in some West African countries, women farm their own

land apart from their husbands. In some ethnic groups while women are not allowed to inherit land or other assets, in others they have an equal right as male members. Similar types of variations abound among different ethnic groups and cultures. These variations will have a bearing on profoundly understanding gender issues.

Thanks.

Dr Bereket Kebede  
School of Development Studies  
University of East Anglia  
<http://www1.uea.ac.uk/cm/home/schools/ssf/dev/people/academic/Kebede>

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Greetings everyone,

As a follow up to my previous message which broached the second theme of our discussion which aimed at sharing experiences, ideas and thoughts on how the MDGs can be reinforced to address gender inequalities and the social inclusion of women and in which I had recommended a report dealing with a similar issue, this is my modest contribution.

Parameters that are both simple but specific need to be considered if the MDGs are to fully contribute in the promotion of gender equality. These should include amongst others:

- 1) Promoting a culture of gender equality beginning at school, if not in the household. Developing the notion of equality within difference in order to preserve and respect the femininity of some and the masculinity of others. This should be done by mainstreaming gender equality in the modules of course given. For example, in drawing class, in interactive of electronic games, in songs and poems, in the behaviour of teachers with each other, in the distribution of students in the classroom and their seating arrangements, by actively involving and encouraging little girls to be better than the boys in their studies and their marks, by applying the principle of positive discrimination and so on.
- 2) Actively fighting violence perpetrated against girls and women and criminalizing the offences no matter the degree of severity (comments, sexist insults; harassments; physical abuse; all kinds of exploitation, particularly that of children, mistreatment of minors, rape and so on). The criminals and the victims should also go through psychotherapy in specialized centres.
- 3) Help in creating an environment in which the inclusion of girls and women is sustainable and not temporary and erratic. Although poverty is the source of many of our problems, the state and donor agencies should ensure that projects and courses of action planned or undertaken remain constant and continuous. Any feet-dragging to this end should be denounced and dealt with legal severity

Impunity has caused enough damage to our people. We have a wealthy continent, so why do we see so much poverty, such misery, suffering and disease?! How ashamed I sometimes feel when I say that I am an African!

Mrs. Fatma Mint Elkory  
NTIC et Citoyenneté  
Nouakchott, Mauritanie  
Website: <http://www.maurifemme.mr>

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In Rwanda UNDP and SNV Rwanda are jointly operating an MDG project on engendering the EDPRS (*Economic Development and Poverty Reduction Strategy*) at district level. This project proposal aims at strengthening the capacities of local governments to integrate gender in EDPRS planning and implementation at district level in line with the EDPRS, the National Development Strategy for Rwanda that will cover 2007-2011 and is based on Rwanda's Vision 2020 and the MDGs. The Government of Rwanda, in collaboration with the Development Partners and Civil Society Organizations is currently elaborating the EDPRS. UNDP and SNV are engaged in supporting the national gender machinery to mainstream gender into the EDPRS, with participation at national and decentralized levels. This project will work toward strengthening the national women councils and local leaders in gender based planning and budgeting.

This project is part of a campaign is to bring the MDGs close to the people by conducting a nation-wide campaign in Rwanda which will address each of the 8 goals. The expected results are increased awareness and participation by citizens and civil society. This will increase their focus on systematically monitoring achievements of MDGs against local MDG targets and indicators. Activities will entail taking stock of Rwanda's status on the MDGs and creating a consensus on the way forward among the different playing parties. The message is that MDGs are achievable if all parties play their role. Also common are gender biases in public investments and social and economic policies, maternal health, and sexual and reproductive health. This project will work toward strengthening the national women councils and local leaders in gender based planning and budgeting. Policy makers, civil society and other partners will have the opportunity to know where they are falling short as the results of the current status are shared. That is why this project is targeting policy makers, civil society, and implementers at central and decentralized levels, UN agencies and donors to be part of the MDGs national awareness campaign.

Best,

Dr Shirley Randell AM  
Senior Adviser, Education and Governance for Empowerment  
SNV Netherlands Development Organisation, East and Southern Africa Region  
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Greetings from Yaoundé

Thanks for the invitation to participate in the e-discussions on promoting additional targets and indicators to measure gender disparities and social inclusion of women. Having participated last week in the ad hoc expert group meeting in Addis Ababa on the same topic, I have not much to say. I would just underline the fact that the present indicators are not enough to measure gender disparities in all aspects of life and social exclusion of women.

Best regards

Anne Marie Bakyono  
Economic Affairs Officer  
UNECA/SRO-CA  
Yaoundé, Cameroon

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Dear Participants:

Gender equality or inequality is an outcome. Although it is associated with other things in society such as customs, it is mainly an outcome of different investments in human capital of men and women. The problem of gender inequality in Africa can be solved, to a very large extent, by following a simple rule: "invest equally in the human capital of both men and women." If this rule is followed when allocating government and household budgets, factors that work against equality between men and women will be identified and addressed.

An example: The sex ratio in an African village is probably 49% males and 51% females, with small variations across regions and countries. So, if in an elementary school in a particular village, girls constitute only 10% of the enrollment, there should be an in-built mechanism in the government system of finding out why. However, barriers to gender equality can be identified, but resources or the will to tackle them could be lacking. For example, female teachers to serve as role models might be in short supply, or the political will to enact legislation establishing bursaries for girls might be lacking. The problem of resource or skill constraints can be overcome if national leaders were to work constructively with development partners. However, lack of will at the family or national level, can only be addressed locally, by social consensus among leaders and citizens that "women's human capital is at least as valuable as men's human capital." Indeed, this is not just a matter of consensus; it is a matter of getting everyone to know and act on what research in this area has already revealed. It is an obvious fact that Africa cannot achieve

MDGs when human capital of women (who constitute more than 50% of the continent's population) is underdeveloped.

Thank you,

Germano Mwabu  
School of Economics  
University of Nairobi  
Kenya.

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In Mali after preparing the plan for achieving the MDGs, we seek to operationalize the MDGs through its incorporation into national development programmes and development plans at regional and local level. Thus exercises to support development plans regional and local are underway to take into account the accelerating progress towards achieving the MDG goals, particularly in relation Advancement of Women, Maternal and child health. Concrete actions were taken by the government on free caesarean delivery, treatment of tuberculosis and free access to malaria treatment for women and children surrounded.

The challenges in Mali in the advancement of women wear the adoption and promulgation of the new family code, the fight against female circumcision in accordance with the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination and the Maputo Protocol, the adoption of laws allowing greater political representation of women.

Alassane Ba  
Economist  
UNDP  
Bamako, Mali

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Hello everyone,

We have to find a way to take into account the period during which a woman carries a child to educate her child. During this period, she is considered on the professional level as non-productive whereas she is producing quality human resources, which is essential to the proper functioning of the entire society.

The woman is thus penalised professionally, she is ridiculed and treated as a consumer by her spouse, even though the quality of the society in its entirety depends on how the work she has done during this time.

The time dedicated to this task should be taken into account as added value to human resources.

Sylvie Siyam,  
Coordinator  
Protégé QV  
Yaoundé, Cameroon

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Greetings everyone,

This is Fatma from Mauritania again, who is intervening again because I want to insist on an idea about indicators submitted by a fellow participant.

Indeed, many studies have shown that women have the undeniable ability of social transformation, and can play a catalyst role in socio-economic and development growth because they make up more than half of the continent's population and fill less than 10% decision-making and management positions.

These studies have also demonstrated without particular provisions and measures, there is a high risk of repeating in the MDGs process, the same gender inequalities that have been observed in other processes, fields and sectors like in processes to introduce innovation, to the detriment of women (ICT, decision-making, access to credit and land...).

Unfortunately, very little research work has been done that would enable researchers to methodologically lead more rigorous analysis that would clearly point out gender based differences and thus allow the provision of reliable indicators and measures, both quantitative and qualitative, which would establish in a systematic manner existing disparities between men and women.

Civil society organizations need to implicate themselves in this kinds of researches, by associating themselves with universities as well as other institutions, as it is the type of work whose militancy can only be established by such organizations.

Our West African network "[Regentic](#)" established by the international NGO ENDA-TIERS-MONDE (Senegal Office) has recently come out with a pioneer study in this field which divulged the **extent of gender based digital divide in French West Africa**:  
- [http://www.famafrique.org/regentic/indifract/africa\\_gender\\_divide.pdf](http://www.famafrique.org/regentic/indifract/africa_gender_divide.pdf)

This research is aimed at finding solutions to gender-based needs. It contains the synthesis results of a two-years long research conducted by researchers from Benin, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Mali, Mauritania and Senegal

Today, this provides a tool for decision-makers and political appointees responsible for ICT policies who want to implement inclusive policies that take into account gender-based particularities. In addition, the indicators and targets that measure the digital divide

of this pioneer work offers researchers and institutions within the IT society, the tools, the methodological support and a baseline to measure the evolution equity within society.

This is why it is necessary to encourage such work.

Cordially,

Mrs. Fatma Mint Elkory  
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Hello again everyone,

I had just sent a contribution, when I found that of Sylvie Siyam, which I found to be very interesting and pertinent.

Indeed, it is extremely necessary to seek with the framework towards achieving the MDGs in terms of the social inclusion of women, the means to develop the “procreative” role of women. This noble role is so vital for the survival of the human race and yet that many experience negatively, because their environment minimizes its value and regards it as a disease. Indeed, amongst the Moorish people (Arabic-Berber of Mauritania) for example, an expectant mother is viewed as an “ill woman” and a woman who has just given birth is seen as “recovered woman”, this says a lot!

The entire society feels sorry for her, persecutes her, makes her feel guilty and so on, instead of supporting her, surrounding her, encouraging her, congratulating her, .... I think that this may happen in every African society.

In addition to the family, the State itself must concretely take care of expectant mothers and mothers, be they civil servants, farmers or in any other field of work.

This period has to effectively be accounted for as added value as contribution to the development process.

This is the case in some European countries where there exists properly established systems, which support and subsidize women as well as men, in their roles as fathers and mothers.

In Africa, such systems would contribute to considerably reducing all sorts of violence against women.

Cordially,

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I apologize for having not contributed in the past week.

However, my contribution with regard to social inclusion to Burundi is that here in my country, the current government has applied a policy that provides free healthcare for children of under five years and for childbirth. This policy reduced infant mortality on the one hand and maternal death on the other hand. Thus, the health children and mothers improved. In addition, the current government established free primary schooling. Thus, while the number of school children increased in general, that of the girls particularly rose as previously, parents who could not afford the school fees preferred that the girls remain at home over the boys.

Also, in Burundi the question of gender has been mainstreamed in almost all the fields: at the political level, administrative, social,... the role of the woman is always taken into account. There are women's associations, which work for the development of the role of women in Burundian society.

Thank you,

Ode Ndayisaba,  
Advisor  
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Hello everyone,

As per our interests, namely each country's experience on how best to reinforce the MDGs to better deal with gender inequality, social inclusion of women as well as our thoughts and proposals which I will approach in three steps.

**First Step:**

The problems of social inclusion of certain social groups in Congo are a sad reality which have been highlighted by several sources: a Congolese investigation on households (2005), a survey on demography and health (2005), participative consultation with the people (2006), as well as several thematic and sector-based studies carried out.

With the improvement of the reference documents as regards development, a critical diagnosis of the various manifestations of social exclusion of certain fringes of the population was established.

- For the poor, it is clear that because of insufficient incomes and precarious employment or unemployment, they cannot benefit from access to basic social infrastructures (communication, telecommunication) and the use of quality essential services (health, sanitation, education, etc...). Concerning the last point, data shows that very few girls attend higher education institution where they make up one sixth of the student population, whereas the rates are almost equal between both sexes at primary and secondary levels.

- For women and young mothers, It is noted that in spite of the adoption several laws devoted to the legal equality of men and women, and the ratification of many international norms that have the same goal, daily practice highlights the persistence of discrimination within the laws (revenue duty, criminal law, family code, social and economic rights) to which are added customary inequalities (obligation for the widow to marry her brother-in-law, widowhood rites, food taboos, male succession, gender –based violence). In practice, discriminations appear to be social rights matters (for example being refused employment due to pregnancy) or economic matters. Thus, inadequate application of enacted laws, sexual violence (rape, incest, sexual exploitation of young girls and sexual harassment) persists, becomes normal and remains unpunished.

- For older persons, the weakened family fabric, the dispersion of solidarity circles and the weaknesses of the social security system reduces the attention they deserve to receive. Older persons are exposed to abandonment, to feelings of insecurity, to malnutrition, to lack of access to hospital care and social benefits under privileged human conditions (pension) due to their social status.

- The youth, face many problems. One can quote the unemployment crisis, inadequate skill-trainings, the degradation of public service offered in the education and health sectors, the weak protection mechanisms and social inclusion and rehabilitation. All these lead to exclusion from participating in decision-making processes at the policy, economic and social levels as well as in public life;

- Albino and disabled persons, face multiple forms of prejudices. That limits the development of their capacities and prevents them from enjoying a full and satisfactory life. They face discrimination in accessing employment, administrative infrastructures, and in participating in community life. The absence of social protection mechanisms, which could have addressed their specific needs, worsens their situations.

- Persons living with HIV/AIDS (PLWHA) and Pygmies suffer from all kinds of discrimination. For example, some midwives have refused to assist deliveries of HIV-positive women, while amongst Bantus, pygmies are viewed as sub-human to the extent that they are very badly paid if at all hired. Pygmies cannot always access basic social services they require. Meanwhile, PLWHA often do not have access to health care in

spite of the fact that treatment is free. The weak social protection system exposes them to all kinds of abuses (dismissal, denigration, etc...).

**Second Step:**

The discussions that took place on the 7 to 9 May<sup>1</sup>, to my opinion, we did not adequately broach discuss the interlocking factors behind social exclusion. I am talking about the type of exclusion that combines at least two exclusion factors that are commonly acknowledged. Such issues should logically push us to take a closer look and determine at the root cause of social exclusion and take an interest in the dominant factors of social exclusion. That would help a lot in targeting recipients of social inclusion aimed public interventions.

**Third Step:**

We have defined<sup>2</sup> 68 additional indicators and 3 additional targets. In my MDGs database, I have 54 national indicators. By recognizing the interferences, which exist between these two groups of indicators, I always question the relevance work done to make them pertinent. Indeed, by taking an indicator like: “% of the women in the parliament and in local governments”. Must one prepare the ratio as:

1. Number of women in the parliament and in local government agencies / Total number of persons in the parliament and in local governments?

Or

2. Number of women in the parliament and in local government agencies / Total number of women who can be in the parliament and in local governments?

If the first ratio makes it possible to give an account of the equality of the sexes, the second ratio would translate best the efforts made in favor of women so much in their appointment to such positions (the numerator) over enabling them to occupy such positions by providing the necessary capacity-building trainings and reinforcement (denominator).

Cordially,

Etaki Wa Dzon  
Charged with Monitoring and Evaluating DPRS/MDGs  
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Hello everyone,

In spite of the fact that it may cause a calendar overlap, and it is probably a little delayed; I would like to contribute to the debates of the second and third week.

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<sup>1</sup> Facilitator’s note: *Ad Hoc Expert Group Meeting on developing supplementary targets and indicators to strengthen social inclusion, gender equality and health promotion in the Millennium Development Goals / May 7-9, 2008 / United Nations Conference Centre / Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.*

<sup>2</sup> Facilitator’s note: *During the EGM*

Having read the reactions of fellow participants on the first week's theme, it is obvious that the current MDGs targets and indicators appear to be too general and restrictive thus making it impossible to appreciate progresses made towards the promotion of gender equality. This is particularly true for MDG3, which has targets and indicators that aren't easily explicit or measurable. "Eliminating existing disparities between the sexes in primary and secondary education by 2005 and if possible at all levels of education by 2015 at the latest" does not provide an easy and concrete way towards promoting gender equality and women's empowerment.

Alternative goals that would insure proper monitoring and evaluation of progresses that take into account gender issues and the promotion of gender equality in life's cross cutting issues (social, cultural, environmental, political and economic) for each country need to be developed.

All the questions, which were raised within the framework of roundtables and those on other occasions, should be capitalized onto better understand the various aspects gender equality:

Gender equality in terms of education, training, employment, access to resources and means of production, health, nutrition, reproductive health, the fight against HIV/AIDS, social protection and integration, marriage, divorce, inheritance, safeguarding the environment.

Special treatments, and even of measures of positive discrimination that would particularly favor the empowerment of women, their participation in decision-making processes and the fight against gender-based violence should be developed.

It is rather dangerous to estimate the value of the indicators in terms of goals that have to be reached without thorough research. However, I would like to put forward some possible propositions. Each proposition includes the various categories of vulnerable groups amongst women/girls (disabled/older persons).

## EDUCATION

- Introduce the culture of gender equality and the fight against violence towards children and women in the school curriculum;
- Increase rates of primary and secondary education completion by both boys and girls;
- Increase literacy rates amongst boys and girls between the ages of 14 and 25, as well as amongst adult women;
- Significantly raise resources allocated for the education sector by insuring effective managerial decentralization.

## IMPROVEMENTS IN THE STATUS AND EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN

- Standardize international and regional provisions with regards to women's rights, as well as national legislations and regulations and insure strict measures of control when implementing;

- Increase the proportion of female entrepreneurs who are just starting out to have access to development programmes (project development, training and support, loans and financing, other assistance, social protection...);
- Increase the number of seats held by women in national decision-making institutions (president's office, parliament, government);
- Increase the number of women who hold decision-making posts within the public administration;
- Increase the rate of female representation in economic decision-making positions;
- Increase the proportion of women working in the formal sector to have access to capacity building trainings.

#### WORK / EMPLOYMENT

- Increase the rate of employment of women in the formal sector;
- Strictly regulate equality between men and women in the fields of social protection and social rights (salary, leave, pension, retirement).

#### FIGHT AGAINST POVERTY AND HUNGER

- Reduce the number of isolated regions as much as possible;
- Increase the proportion of the male/female population, living in areas that are prone to natural disasters (cyclones, floods, droughts), who have access to preventative social protection;
- Increase the proportion of women who have access to real estates and to means and techniques of production;
- Increase the proportion of women who have access to produce treatment and conservation systems.

#### HEALTH

- Increase the proportion of expectant and breastfeeding women who have access to education and nutrition programmes;
- Reduce the rate of chronic malnutrition amongst boys and girls;
- Reduce the rate of seasonal malnutrition amongst boys and girls;
- Increase the proportion of households who have access to clean water and sanitation facilities;
- Increase the proportion of women and girls who have access to health centres and quality services.

#### REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH

- Increase the access rate to contraceptive methods by women in the procreative age group;
- Increase the proportion of teenage girls and boys who have access to information as well as high quality reproductive health services.

#### HIV/AIDS

- Substantially reduce STDs prevalence rate;

- Increase the proportion of the male/female population that have access to information as well as prevention means against HIV/AIDS;
- Insure that PLWHA are taken care of;
- Integrate STDs/AIDS education in school curriculum.

#### FIGHT AGAINST VIOLENCE TOWARDS WOMEN AND GIRLS

- Eradicate social and cultural practices that are harmful towards women and girls;
- Substantially increase resources that have been allocated to the fight against violence and all kinds of discrimination toward women and girls;
- Increase incentive measures that favour civil society actors that efficiently work in the fight against violence toward women and girls.

#### ENVIRONMENT

- Increase the proportion of the male/female population that take part in activities that sustain the environment as a source of income.

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In Senegal, significant improvements have been noted:

- Significant advances in training and education levels of women: the rate of primary school completion jumped from 59,7% in 1996 to 71,6% in 2002
- Life expectancy of women increase thanks to policies and programmes that took into consideration all health aspects of women and girls. The mortality rate dropped from 18 per thousand in 1988 to 10,88 per thousand in 2002, while life expectancy went up from 54 years in 1988 to 56.37 years in 2002
- The provision of free childbirth services including caesarean operations and treatment of fistula in medical centres
- Improved access to means of production and financial resources together with considerable reinforcement of their organizational and managerial skills
- Women are increasingly taking part in decision making, in the government, at the parliamentary level, in administration and in jurisdictions
- Reinforcing the gender skills of development actors through sensitization and trainings
- Developing methodological guides that will take into account gender issues in development projects and programs and religious arguments by the Ministry of Women's Affairs through the "Gender and Capacity Building Project".
- *Under the initiative of the President, his Excellency Maitre Abdoulaye Wade, progressive installation since 2003 of community infrastructures referred to as Centre of Support and Training for Women, in order to tackle the problems of accessing information, to promote and protect women's fundamental rights*

- Reforms are under way for the creation of a national directorate for gender equity and equality as well as a watchdog group protecting the rights of women and children
- Equality in fiscal terms, particularly with regards to salary levels
- Progressive mainstreaming of gender in the national budget
- The possibility of a woman assuming medical responsibility for her husband and children
- Possibility of joining military, paramilitary, police and customs units
- Good level of available financing for promoting women and gender equality
- Approval of the National strategy for Gender Equity and Equality bill

This bill was developed:

- In conformity with the goals of the Beijing Action Plan, the DPRS and the Millennium Declaration,
- In a participative and consultative manner with all development partners,
- Through a comparative analysis, more commonly known as gender analysis,
- Based on four identified stakes by the second action plan for women, to be used for determining the level of gender equality and equity achieved.

*These stakes are:*

- 1- *Valorization of women's social status and reinforcement of their potential,*
- 2- *Economic potential of urban and rural women,*
- 3- *Promotion of equality of women's rights at decision-making levels,*
- 4- *Improvements in the impact of interventions that favor gender equity and equality.*

This strategy tallies for the upcoming 10 to pursue the following goals:

- To clarify the vision concerning issues of gender at the state level as well as with other development actors
- To determine the new orientations and action priorities in order to accelerate equitable promotion of women and men in society
- To facilitate the taking into account of gender in policy planning and budgeting in planning and in development projects.

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 Ministry for Women Affairs, for Family Affairs and Social Development  
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Dear Colleagues,

I would like to apologize for not having been able to participate in the earlier discussions.

**Promotion of Social Inclusion of Women and Gender Equality in the MDGs**

As far as I'm concerned all the first 7 MDGs have gender dimensions and so there should not be any questions about promotion of social inclusion, women's empowerment and gender equality in the MDGs.

Social inclusion, women's empowerment and gender equality issues are central to the achievement of the MDGs.

Beginning from MDG 1 on reducing poverty and hunger, in Africa women constitute the majority of the poor and form the bulk of food crop farmers and so are responsible for food security.

Goal 2 - Achieving universal primary education can only be achieved by attaining gender parity at primary level.

Goal 3 - Promote gender equality and women's empowerment, the attainment of gender parity at secondary and tertiary levels of education and at all levels of decision making is also key to the achievement of this goal.

Goal 4 - Reduce child mortality, this target set can be achieved to a large extent by focusing on girls/women's education and their health.

Goal 5 - Improve maternal health, this needs no explanation, clearly an issue of massive investments in women's reproductive health, from health personnel, infrastructure, equipment, social support networks for pregnant women etc.

Goal 6 - Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases, women are harder hit by the spread of HIV/AIDS, as they are both victims and the primary care givers of the survivors. The evidence of the impact of malaria on pregnant women and children under five needs no explanation.

Goal 7 - Ensure environmental sustainability reversal of environmental loss, and bio diversity, access to safe water etc, the people hardest hit by environmental degradation are women and other socially excluded groups.

Goal 8 - Develop a global partnership for development, development cooperation from the developed world must also focus on addressing the first seven goals, which have explicit gender dimensions.

### **Experiences, Ideas and Thoughts of How the MDGs can be Re-enforced to Address Social Exclusion, Women and Gender Equality in the MDGs**

Regarding how the MDGs can be re-enforced to address social exclusion, women and gender equality in the MDGs. Participatory rapid assessments and gender analysis are needed to establish poverty differentials among social excluded groups and for boys and girls, women and men particularly for MDGs 1-7, before appropriate interventions can be formulated to address their needs and interests. Social impact assessments are also required when these interventions are implemented to assess the effectiveness of these on their lives. In Ghana during the implementation of the first Ghana Poverty Reduction

Strategy a Poverty Social Impact Study was undertaken to establish poverty differentials among various groups. This has led to development of a Social Protection Strategy as well as the establishment of a Livelihood Empowerment Against Poverty programme, which is targeted at providing monthly stipends for economically vulnerable women and socially excluded groups.

**Additional Indicators for the Effective Monitoring of Progress of the MDGs made to Address Social Exclusion and Women and Gender Equality in the MDGs**

Regarding the MDGs indicators, I would like to propose that there is the need to, sex disaggregate targets and indicators wherever possible. Also it is an established fact that most quantitative indicators mask qualitative issues that give rise to inequalities and therefore studies are required to unpack the issues behind the figures. This is also necessary as even though indicators are measurable they may give indications and therefore might present the true picture therefore such studies are necessary to augment the figures. For example a mother's level of education is closely related to child survival rates and therefore this might explain to a large degree under-five mortality, infant mortality rates and child immunizations levels.

**The following are proposed:**

- Ratio of women to men living below the poverty line (if possible)
- Ratio of women to men who achieve full and productive employment and decent work (if possible)
- Gender parity indexes at all levels of education
- Transition rates for both boys and girls who begin school at the same level and transit to the next level
- Ratio of girls to boys under weight (if possible)
- Ratio of women to men aged 15-24 who are HIV positive (if possible)
- Time used by both boys and girls, women and men to fetch water and fuel wood
- Livelihoods lost through loss of forest cover and biodiversity etc
- Proportion of aid or development assistance spent on socially excluded groups, women's empowerment and gender equality issues.

Thank You,

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