



Turning the Tide:
The Next Wave of Action for Gender Equality and
Women's Empowerment

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Check against Delivery

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Mr. Chairperson, Distinguished Delegates, Colleagues, and Friends,

I would like to congratulate you, Mr. Chairperson, and other members of the bureau on your election to this committee.

I thank you for this opportunity to present the [Secretary-General's report on the activities of the United Nations Development Fund for Women](#) (UNIFEM) and to update you on the results we have achieved and the challenges we face in advancing gender equality and women's empowerment.

As the report before you (A/61/292) illustrates, the vision of a world in which all people can live free of want and free of fear, lies at the heart of UNIFEM's work. The report highlights practical actions and achievements in each of the areas in which UNIFEM works — reducing feminized poverty and exclusion; promoting gender equality in democratic governance and post-conflict reconstruction; ending violence against women; and halting and reversing the spread of HIV/AIDS — bringing together governments and civil society with UN and private sector partners to form effective partnerships and become agents for change.

In all of this work, UNIFEM takes a *holistic approach* — linking normative and legal frameworks with institutional reform to bring concrete change to women on the ground. This approach brings together efforts to: (1) formulate and implement laws and policies to promote gender equality and women's human rights; (2) build institutional capacity to allocate resources and establish accountability mechanisms to ensure implementation; (3) strengthen gender equality advocates to monitor and track progress and mobilize constituencies to bring about change; and (4) end harmful practices and attitudes that perpetuate gender inequality around the world.

In working to **reduce feminized poverty and strengthen women's economic security**, the Fund concentrated on linking economic decision-making more closely to economic and social development, incorporating gender into poverty reduction strategies in 18 countries, mainly through gender-responsive budget initiatives. These programmes, which apply gender analysis to government budgets to highlight the impact of tax policy and revenue allocations on women and men, show how UNIFEM has brought the power of partnerships, resources and ideas to make a difference — building technical capacity and mobilizing knowledge networks to ensure allocation of adequate financial resources for gender equality and women's empowerment. In 2001, we co-organized a High Level Conference which brought together governments, civil society and gender budget experts to launch a campaign for gender responsive budget initiatives to be undertaken in 45 countries by 2015. Today, we can track results through programmes we have supported in 30 countries.

The power of mobilizing new partnerships for change can also be seen in our work with the private sector to increase women's access to new employment and livelihood opportunities in the global economy. In 2005 we expanded a partnership with Cisco Systems in Arab States to enhance women's knowledge of and access to ICTs — including the creation of e-villages in rural areas — and established a new partnership with Macy's Department Stores to open up new global markets for women weavers in post-conflict Rwanda. In Asia Pacific, our support to governments and women's groups working to improve conditions for women migrant workers resulted in the adoption of a Code of Ethical Conduct for service recruitment agencies in South and Southeast Asia that protects the rights of women who migrate for work in the Arab region.

UNIFEM's work on **gender equality in democratic governance and post-conflict reconstruction** focuses on building partnerships that can operate as change agents at different levels to promote women's rights and strengthen their participation as voters, candidates and decision-makers. In 2005, we built partnerships with women's groups, civil society, international donors, regional organizations and the media to focus on women's inclusion in all aspects of political participation, peacebuilding and governance. Drawing on our experience in over 20 countries, supported by the Government of the United Kingdom, UNIFEM has developed an approach that consistently yields results for women in post-conflict countries.

In Sudan, for example, we partnered with the Government of Norway to create opportunities for women from the North and South to come together to identify priorities and develop a common agenda for women's rights in post-conflict reconstruction, and present this to the donors' conference in Oslo. This helped to highlight their perspectives and effectively position them to take part in shaping interim constitutions. Article 15 of the interim national constitution prohibits forced marriage and mandates the State to "emancipate women from injustice, promote gender equality and encourage the role of women in family and public life." For the next step, turning these principles into enforceable rights, UNIFEM is partnering with the African Union and the Inter-Governmental Authority on Development (IGAD) to support national machineries in the North and the South to undertake a comprehensive gender analysis of their interim constitutions as a basis for legal reform and its implementation. Countries emerging from conflict offer a unique opportunity to put in place a **gender justice agenda** that addresses the implementation of women's human rights by revising laws that discriminate against women, such as inheritance law, personal status law, labour law, and empowering women to access rule of law and economic and social justice institutions.

In the area of **ending violence against women**, UNIFEM recognizes that addressing the multiple forms of violence that women face, both during conflict and in times of peace, is a long and difficult process. It requires strategies to engage men in transforming power relationships and coordinated strategies at multiple levels and across sectors to address the social and economic causes of gender violence and the links between violence, poverty and HIV/AIDS. In Latin America and the Caribbean, within the highly visible 16 Days of Activism Campaign, UNIFEM leads an annual coordinated UN Interagency Campaign against Violence against Women, bringing together governments, women's rights and civil society activists and the media to bring coordinated attention and response to this issue as human rights violation and public health crisis. We are also working in three Latin American cities on a Safe Cities for Women Project to address problems of women on the ground with regard to security and ensure they are included in urban security decision-making processes.

The **United Nations Trust Fund to Eliminate Violence against Women**, established in UNIFEM by General Assembly resolution 50/166, now focuses consistently on securing on-the-ground implementation of the laws and policies to address this issue that are now in place in 89 countries. Trust Fund strategies include campaigns to raise awareness of existing laws and to bring these into conformity with human rights principles; the analysis of budgets and allocations needed to support integrated efforts to implement laws; capacity building for judicial, law enforcement, health and other officials to comply with laws and policies; creation of women friendly law enforcement systems that enable women to claim

their rights; and creation of data collection systems and indicators to help monitor the extent to which laws and policies are being implemented to reduce violence against women. In a new partnership with the Global Coalition on Women and AIDS, the Trust Fund is specifically addressing the links between gender violence and HIV/AIDS — for which it has secured, for the first time, private sector support of nearly \$1 million with the expectation of another \$1.4 million if performance matches its expected potential.

UNIFEM also works to **combat the spread of HIV/AIDS** through increased attention to the gender dimensions of this pandemic, partnering with national AIDS councils, UNCTs, gender equality advocates and women living with HIV/AIDS to press for legislative reform related to gender inequality and HIV/AIDS policies, and with national and local institutions to adopt gender-responsive policies and practices to make a positive difference in women's lives. In India, for example, our partnership with the National AIDS Control Organization (NACO) builds their capacity to use analysis and information to break through stigma and silence to make the links between gender-based violence and HIV/AIDS.

UNIFEM's work on **CEDAW implementation** illustrates the importance of building sustainable partnerships at national and local levels to use this powerful instrument to bring about change — through stronger legal and policy frameworks for gender equality and stronger mechanisms for implementation, monitoring and reporting. With support from the Government of Canada, UNIFEM works with government institutions and women's groups in over 20 countries to implement CEDAW, including through regional programmes in Southeast Asia, Arab States and Pacific Islands.

The examples I have highlighted show that to deliver on gender equality, the issue is not lack of good practices even lack of know-how. We know how change happens. The issue is how to implement strategies and practices on a scale that is large enough to turn the tide for gender equality and women's rights.

We are at a crossroads in our work on gender equality. We have worked hard to secure commitments and mechanisms, even models for change. We can continue on this road or take the more challenging road of investing in what has delivered for women and changing what we know is not working. Today, in the context of UN reform, renewed commitment to achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), and the rollout of the new aid effectiveness agenda, there is an unprecedented opportunity to expand effective strategies and practices that have worked to assist countries to deliver on gender equality and women's empowerment and achieve the MDGs.

In line with harmonized efforts to reach the target for Goal 1, halving the number of people living in poverty by 2015, for example, UNIFEM is implementing an innovative initiatives component of the World Bank's Gender Innovation Fund, so that innovative approaches to enhancing women's economic security can be scaled up into mainstream macroeconomic policy. UNIFEM is also working closely with the Bank to develop an approach to evaluating community-based programmes supported by the Trust Fund that will enable the Bank to build its internal case for addressing the need to end violence against women in its grant and loan operations.

However, despite the global consensus that gender equality and women's empowerment are essential to achieving the MDGs, there are as yet no strengthened institutional structures, increased resources or effective accountability and monitoring

mechanisms to assist countries to advance gender equality. The sole MDG target for 2005, gender parity in primary and secondary education, has already been missed. Women are paying the costs of this institutional neglect in lives and lost opportunities.

To harness the power of women change agents and begin to turn the tide on gender equality and women's rights, let me highlight three priorities:

1. *Strengthening gender equality in national development strategies.* Over the last ten years there have been enormous improvements in the normative environment for gender equality. Action plans for gender equality are in place in over 120 countries, laws and action plans to end violence against women have been passed in 89 countries. What is lagging is implementation. Governments are now coming to UNIFEM for assistance in next steps. One of the responses we have made is to provide technical support to national partners to adopt harmonized gender equality indicators for monitoring implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), and strategies for achieving the MDGs. We are working to strengthen capacity among stakeholders to incorporate harmonized indicators and sex-disaggregated data into national development planning and poverty reduction strategies. In the context of the aid effectiveness agenda, together with the European Union, we have mobilized a critical mass of change agents committed to the vision of a gender-equitable society. They include leaders at all levels of government who control critical levers for change and financial resources as well as international and regional organizations that provide support to both national governments and civil society organizations. In so doing, we are working to ensure that national ownership means bringing women's voices and perspectives into the development process, that gender equality principles and strategies are incorporated into all coordination mechanisms, including PRSPs and sector-support strategies, and that national plans of action for gender equality as well as action plans to end violence against women are integrated into national development planning and strategies.

2. *Strengthening a coherent and integrated approach across the UN system.* A more vigorous effort is needed to ensure that gender equality is addressed in a coherent way throughout the UN system, especially in its operational activities on the ground, where it matters most. The UNDG Task Team on Gender Equality, which UNIFEM chairs, coordinates action among its 16 member agencies in mainstreaming gender equality and women's empowerment and ensuring these are incorporated into the tools and guidance the UNDG gives to UN country teams. The Task Team has recommended bringing together good practices in each organization to "raise the bar" on accountability for gender equality across the UN system. It proposes two actions, endorsed by the UNDG Principals, to support UNCTs to move from improved analysis to more coherent implementation and accountability: (1) an "Accounting for Gender Equality" scorecard that sets minimum standards for UNCTs to assess their performance and identify gaps and progress across the system; and (2) an "Action Learning" process with a number of UNCTs to generate strategies to undertake rights-based, change-oriented programming that supports government and civil society to move forward on gender equality and women's empowerment.

3. *Strengthening monitoring and accountability by women on the ground.* Accountability means different things to different people, depending on where they are

located *vis á vis* the power to bring about change. For gender equality and social justice advocates, accountability means ensuring sufficient resources for implementation as well as expanding community-level participation in defining targets and tracking progress towards them. This not only supports greater inclusion in national planning but also supports organizing by grass-roots and women's organizations to exercise a watchdog function to ensure national resources are allocated all the way to the ground, and bring realities from the ground to inform policy direction. In so doing, it works to bring underrepresented and excluded groups, such as HIV positive women, women informal workers, indigenous women, and rural poor women, into the development process.

In the context of UN reform, there is general agreement that the "gender equality architecture" must be strengthened — at both the global and the country level. We know so much more now than we did even ten years ago about supporting gender equality and women's empowerment. What we need is the courage to build on what we know to bring about the radical changes needed to enable the UN system as a whole to respond to the new opportunities for — and current threats to — gender equality and women's rights, providing the kind of policy advice and technical expertise that will help countries to deliver on these goals.

However, a consolidated gender entity that mainly issues "policy advice" or offers catalytic examples will not enable us to fully respond to the opportunities for — or the current threats to — greater gender equality. This entity can only make the much-needed difference if it can inspire and mobilize partnerships and agents for change and if it has sufficient presence, authority and resources at the UN Country Team table. To make this kind of difference it must be connected to a constituency at the country level that can ensure that the system is responsive to the actual lived realities of women, particularly poor and excluded women. Finally, it must operate as a driver that can stay ahead of the curve to take on emerging issues and push the system to take them on.

If the UN is to remain a legitimate development player in the 21st century, it must stay at the forefront to assist countries to deliver on gender equality and women's empowerment. UN reform holds the potential to make this happen.

We thank you for your partnership and support.