



**Owning Development**  
**Promoting Gender Equality in**  
**New Aid Modalities and Partnerships**  
9–11 November 2005, Brussels, Belgium

**Centralizing the MDGs in National Development Planning**

9 November, 14.30–15.00

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I welcome this invitation which comes at a time when the new aid architecture raises questions about accountability and implementation in relation to gender rights.

In theory, at least, the link between the Millennium Development Goals and Gender Equality could not be simpler. If we do not achieve the Millennium Development Goals, we will not achieve gender equality. If we do not achieve gender equality, we will not achieve the Millennium Development Goals. Reaching that goal underpins success in all the others.

In this year's Human Development Report, the Millennium Development Goals are described as being "for all people regardless of their income, their gender or their location". The reality is that famine and AIDS - 2 simultaneous catastrophes - are eroding the skills, experience and networks that, through women, keep communities going.

The costs of gender discrimination are higher for lower income countries and within countries for the poor. Ours is an ethical obligation and a collective responsibility to ensure that there is respect for human rights, human dignity and personal security.

The MDGs should be seen as central to our efforts to develop a rights' based approach to development partnerships.

There is in fact no set formula for this but it does involve working with communities, and putting in place the appropriate legislative and administrative tools. It means policy planning, law enforcement, resource allocation and education. And governments must prioritise their resources in accordance with clearly stated principles and obligations through their macroeconomic policies and their budgets.

Traditional approaches largely ignore the economic contribution of women, partly because the data is genuinely not disaggregated by sex and fails to account for their unpaid labour

We should ensure that national development plans and our development cooperation starts with a fundamental commitment to enabling women to enjoy their full human rights. The steps needed in order to realise the potential of the MDGs are clearly spelled out in international conventions and agreements.

The Beijing Platform for Action, in particular, provides us with a clear, politically driven agreement to act to end discrimination, to assert and define rights, to effectively challenge patriarchal institutions and to bring some coherence to our political, economic and social policies. We must fight to maintain its central role

and focus in securing progress on the MDGs. We do this now in the knowledge that women and underage girls are married against their will, violence against girls and women is tolerated, rapists are exonerated and women are denied their equal rights within the family and marriage. 99% of maternal deaths are in developing countries. For me, the fundamental measure of equity is access to reproductive health. NO other arm of health so clearly demonstrates the impact of gender equality on women's lives.

Too often women are still being left out of the considerations on how we beat poverty - this by governments that often applaud themselves for their gender sensitivity! Any policies which fail to balance the relationship and influence between women and men have is in many ways fatally flawed from the outset. Even the Commission for Africa, which was so bold, fails to recognise that women have a definitive role in every single aspect of social, economic, political, civil and cultural life. They are key players in peace keeping, in agriculture, in trade and in dealing with AIDS.

Again, I note that the G8 - 18 pages, 6,000 words long, but makes only 5 references to women - two in the context of "women and children" and another reference to "pregnant women and babies", one in conjunction with youth employment and, hooray, one reference to "gender equality".

That is not to say that governments in Africa do that well in the protection of women's rights. Progress has been uneven and the gap between policy and practice remains wide. The Human Development Report produces a gender-related development index, which rates most of the countries of the world according to a number of economic and social indices, taking into account, in particular, performance on overall status of women. Of the bottom 30 countries, classified as "low human development" countries, all but two are African. Last week, the African Protocol on the Rights of Women entered into force when Togo was the 15th country to ratify. 38 Member States of the Union have therefore not yet become part of the Protocol.

The primary responsibility for promoting and protecting human rights rests and must rest with national governments.

Yet, under the current system, many governments have little control over their national development planning.

Firstly, donors and the international financial institutions are being allowed to exert too much influence, not only on national policy priorities, but also on the budget process. Donor budget meetings and IMF negotiations take place very early in the budget cycle, before the budget is approved by Cabinet and presented to Parliament for 'discussion' and 'ratification' and therefore before it enters the public domain.

Secondly, some governments are simply unable to affect change because they lack the economic resources needed to meet the basic human rights of their poor and poorest citizens. Access to food, safe water, education, shelter, health care and political participation cannot be guaranteed in countries grappling with pervasive poverty. And for so many countries, debt remains an obstacle for progress.

Capacity as always is a problem and governments will need support if they are to protect human rights and to defend the interests of their citizens. As donors, we could do more to support, for instance, training for paralegals, lawyers and the police, and transforming traditional mediation structures.

As on MDG 8, and the targets for Overseas Development Aid, I would like to see the EU setting the international example in the fight for gender equality. We must acknowledge that we are failing to embrace gender equality. And in some parts of the world, gender inequality and AIDS is a preordained equation of death.

Gender, along with human rights, the environment and children's rights was identified as mainstreaming issues by the Commission. But mainstreaming must be a meaningful task - so far, it does not appear to have gone beyond good intentions. It does not properly examine how gender dynamics affect decisions

taken in families and communities and indicate whether goals will be set or which women. In South Africa, however, it seems to work - mainly because the Government has a strong mandate.

May I also say that since the Commission gives budget support, there should be clarity about the need to implement gender budgeting. In Rwanda, South Africa, Mexico, Chile, Botswana and Tanzania, they have prioritised gender equality budgeting as well as guidelines for government officials and parliamentarians. On all of this, however, may I say that we must not believe that a process somehow will transform women's lives.

Gender specific priorities need to be refocused in the EC Development Policy as basic rights and part of the governance criteria applied under the Cotonou Agreement and elsewhere. The Review of the Development Policy Statement provides us with the opportunity to look at ways in which we can promote ownership and harmonisation. So far, I have been encouraged by the direction that discussions have taken. There is a clear commitment to the need to invest in women's interests and rights and to strengthening an understanding of gender equality here in Brussels, in Member States and with the governments which are our partners in the developing world. The latest draft states unequivocally: "The empowerment of women is the key to all development, and gender equality should be a core part of all policy strategies."

This expression of good will must now be consolidated with a new, specific strategy on gender equality, backed up with additional resources. How can the EU's commitment to gender equality be taken seriously when there is not even one gender specialist working in DG DEV?

Maximising the efficiency of our policies also implies a change in EC programming. The Commission increasingly understands that developing countries should have ownership of their priorities and strategies. The introduction of budget support is key to the achievement of the MDGs. Naturally donors hold recipient governments to account and need to give support to often overstretched Ministries. But EC procedures and the culture of no risk threaten our ability to implement long-term nationally owned projects and this must be addressed.

Developing countries should be assisted by the EU in their efforts to develop a national strategy designed to meet the MDGs, making sure that progress is not measured by reference to national averages. These averages can obscure deep inequalities in progress rooted in disparities based on wealth, gender, group identity and other factors. Indeed, 'technical' and 'instrumental' approaches to achieving the MDGs in the short term, such as, focusing on number of girls in primary school, number of women obtaining maternity care, should be minimised. These indicators are of course very important, but should not divert attention away from the fundamental causes of inequality between women and men in social, economic, political spheres, which are the causes of women's poverty.

The special relationship between the EU and 78 ACP countries should be made use of in order to promote enhanced political dialogue. This dialogue should be seen as an opportunity to make assessments and share ideas between partner countries on the MDGs. The Joint Parliamentary Assembly has the potential to play a unique role as it brings together parliamentarians from 78 ACP countries who debate alongside 78 MEPs.

The EU also undoubtedly has a particular role in making sure that the MDG package sufficiently addresses all health issues. We need to recognise and stress the links between Sexual and Reproductive Health Rights and HIV AIDS. The Millennium Project identifies the MDG on maternal health as the goal where we have been least successful and recognises the importance of SRHR in HIV AIDS prevention, in lowering maternal and child mortality and in all aspects of poverty reduction and development. The disproportionate number of women infected in Africa requires a similarly disproportionate access to medicines.

The approach adopted by the religious right is affecting funding for women's rights. No one here would argue that the political environment for working on sexual and reproductive health rights is getting any easier. The ABC mantra peddled by the US has indeed a lot to answer for. Latest research by the

Association for Women's Rights in Development has found that only 0.6% of money given in Overseas Development Aid has gender equality as a principle objective. 51% of women's organisations are now receiving less funding than they were five years ago in 2000.

There is clearly an obligation to support a political, social and economic environment which is conducive to the promotion and respect of women's rights. The reality is that many governments are unlikely to adopt the kind of more rigorous approach to rights which is necessary unless there is persistent pressure from their own citizens, as well as international pressure. There are too many instances of failure to positively promote, protect and fulfil human rights obligations or to punish abuses.

Finally one MDG target has already been missed. If we had met the 2005 target on education there would be 14 million more girls in primary school today. On this and other measures on gender, the conclusion reached in the 2005 Human Development Report is "that social norms, political culture and public attitudes matter as much as economic wealth and overall human development in defining opportunities for women".

We need a new focus on inequality and distributional equity. Chances of success are real if we remain optimistic.

International institutions and multinational corporations must live up to their claims that they are committed to integrating equality, justice and respect for human rights into their decision-making. Civil society – feminist and women's organisations, workers' organisations - and of course parliaments should also play a key role.

In order to globalise social justice, as Europeans, we must hold the Commission and all of our governments to account, in order to create the political will, which is essential for the successful realisation of the promise offered by the MDGs.