

World Poverty Day 2007  
**Investing in Women – Solving the Poverty Puzzle**

**Key Messages**

**1. Premise: Women are the missing piece of the poverty puzzle**

**Being deeply affected by poverty, women also hold great potential to eliminate it. Yet this potential remains largely untapped. Women remain the missing piece in solving the poverty puzzle.**

When women are afforded the equality of opportunity that is their basic human right, the potential for economic development is striking. The Economist called women “the most powerful engine” of global economic growth, estimating that over the past decade, they have contributed more to such growth than China. At the same time, opening opportunities to women is a proven strategy for tackling poverty’s many manifestations, such as hunger, illiteracy, malnutrition and disease, and maternal and infant death.

In 2000, world leaders pledged to cut poverty by half by 2015. Yet mid-way to the deadline, it is clear that many countries will not reach this goal — unless they do something radically different.

**2. The Challenge: Women are missing – and missing out**

**For women, poverty means more than having little or no income. It means lacking control over their income, even in the family. It means missing opportunities because they lack power and voice. It means missing out because they are undercounted, undervalued, underserved, and underrepresented.**

Women are missing — and missing out — on many fronts. The value of women’s unpaid work is estimated to equal USD 11 trillion, or almost 50 percent of world GDP, yet this work is missing from national income accounts — leaving women missing out on social security, pension schemes and access to public services. In terms of paid employment, while more and more women are joining the workforce, they are predominantly clustered in informal work — short term, part time or contract work that leaves them missing from employment-based pension and health insurance benefits. Even in formal employment, women are paid less than men — worldwide, women’s wages are 73-77 percent of men’s wages — and lack similar promotion opportunities. In too many countries, women and girls are denied a solid education and have no access to credit or legal title to land and property — pre-conditions to overcoming poverty. Yet women are also missing from the public decision-making structures with the power to shape social and economic policies. As long as social, cultural and economic barriers exclude women from full participation in public life, the solution to the poverty puzzle will remain elusive.

### 3. The Solution: Investing in women

**Investing in women yields multiple dividends: it helps women claim their rights and realize their potential, while benefiting the economy and society as a whole.**

Investing in women means changing systems that discriminate against women and believing in women as agents of change. Equalizing opportunities for education and health, employment and participation in public life provides returns for generations. Countries that no longer limit the participation of one half of society can fully capitalize on their competitive potential in today's world economy.

### 4. Call to Action: Women's potential must be recognized and realized

On World Poverty Day, we join the Stand Up Campaign to call on world leaders to empower the women that power the global economy — we can't afford not to. Societies where women are more equal stand a greater chance of eliminating poverty, starting with reducing it by half by 2015. At this critical juncture between the promise and its realization, poverty remains a complex puzzle. We will neither solve it, nor see the big picture, until all essential pieces are in place.

#### **World leaders must:**

- Educate girls and increase women's "economic literacy" and political participation;
- Reform discriminatory ownership and inheritance laws to help women embark on asset-building;
- Remember that there is no such thing as a "gender-neutral budget" — the impact of every fiscal policy, be it relating to taxation, or resource allocation, must be assessed in terms of its impact on the lives of both men and women;
- Improve child-care options and flexibility for working mothers;
- Eliminate the gender gap in wages;
- Include unpaid household work in national income accounts and mandate maternity and paternity leave benefits;
- Give women the "credit" they deserve: facilitate women's access to credit and finance, coupled with training, as well as involving them in the development of macro-economic policy to ensure it is gender-sensitive;
- Support women's funds to support the women for whom every day is poverty day.

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***UNIFEM** is the women's fund at the United Nations. It provides financial and technical assistance to innovative programs and strategies to foster women's empowerment and gender equality. Placing the advancement of women's human rights at the centre of all of its efforts, UNIFEM focuses its activities on four strategic areas: reducing feminized poverty; ending violence against women; reversing the spread of HIV/AIDS among women and girls; and achieving gender equality in democratic governance in times of peace as well as war.*

*As a global catalyst for women's philanthropy, the **Women's Funding Network** is transforming the lives of women worldwide. By championing investment in women, we are achieving equality for women and girls and strengthening entire communities. We lead a vibrant global network of over a hundred women's foundations on six continents, offering them tools, clout and connections to develop and thrive. Our network is united by a belief in the power of bold action and ideas. We believe in harnessing women's financial power, influence and voices to create a global impact, fixing systems, not symptoms — we go beyond mere service to focus resources on programs that will create lasting change for women and girls, and the power of a network to accelerate progress by rapidly sharing ideas that work.*