

Who Answers to Women?

GENDER & ACCOUNTABILITY

United Nations Development Fund for Women



Message from the Secretary-General of the United Nations

The high standards, trust in humanity, and hope for the future that are expressed in UN human rights instruments require sound accountability mechanisms for their realization. If those who sign agreements such as the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, or who endorse the Beijing Platform for Action, do not translate commitments into actions, and are not held to account for these actions, these texts lose credibility. Accountability is essential if the world is to realize women's rights and gender equality.

That assertion is the basis and inspiration for this report. UNIFEM's "Who Answers to Women? Gender and Accountability" appears at a critical juncture. We are just over halfway to the year 2015, set by the international community as the target for achieving Millennium Development Goals. Gender equality is a crucial determining factor for each. Yet the areas where progress has been slowest are women's empowerment and gender equality. The very sluggish rate of change in the maternal mortality rate in some regions is especially alarming. We must do more to stop these preventable deaths, which affect not only mothers and families but entire societies.

The analysis contained in this report suggests that a lack of accountability to women can in some contexts explain more about the non-achievement of gender equality commitments than can other factors such as shortages of resources. Where women are able to participate in determining the distribution of public resources, where that can contribute to the planning of public services, where they can seek and obtain justice for abuses of their rights, where there are consequences for poor performance on women's rights, better outcomes for women are achievable.

"Who Answers to Women?" identifies two indispensable elements of gender-responsive accountability. First, women must be legitimate members of any oversight or accountability process. Second, national commitments to gender equality and women's rights must be among the standards against which public decisions are assessed. But the primary litmus test of gender-responsive accountability will be the elimination of violence against women. That is why, early in my tenure, I launched the global "Unite to End Violence against Women" campaign.

The United Nations stands squarely for women's rights and for an end to the impunity that transgressors have exploited for far too long. This report is meant as a contribution to that effort, and I commend it to a wide global audience.



A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Ban Ki-moon". The signature is written in a cursive style and is positioned above a dashed vertical line that extends down to the printed name below.

BAN KI-MOON
*Secretary-General of the
United Nations*

Foreword

The past decades have seen great advances in terms of commitments to women's rights, both nationally and globally. However, these are not always matched by actions on the ground. For too many women, poverty and violence are every day facts of life as they struggle to access equal rights with men—in employment, family and property, as well as access the public resources and services.

Progress of the World's Women 2008/2009 provides examples of how women are demanding accountability for action on commitments to promote gender equality and women's rights from national governments, justice and law enforcement systems, employers and service providers, as well as international institutions. Accountability from a women's rights perspective exists when all women are able to get explanations from those in power for actions that affect them, and can set in motion corrective actions when those responsible fail to promote their rights.



Gender equality advocates have been at the forefront of efforts to democratize power relations in private and informal institutions as well as in the public sphere. Indeed, this report shows that women's efforts to expose gender-based injustice and demand redress have changed the ways in which we think of accountability.

Accountability cannot result from *demand-side* pressures alone. *Progress of the World's Women 2008/2009* demonstrates innovative examples of states and international institutions taking steps to increase the supply side of accountability. This implies gender-responsive changes in the mandates, practices, and cultures of these institutions to ensure that there are incentives and consequences for upholding their commitments to women's rights. This report presents a framework for understanding accountability from a gender perspective and applies this to different contexts in which accountability systems determine women's access to resources and power: politics, public services, labour, consumer and trade markets, justice systems, and international aid and security institutions.

Since 2000, women have had a global commitment against which to measure progress in building answerability to women: the Millennium Declaration and its Millennium Development Goals. Gender equality is central to the achievement of the MDGs. Achievement of the MDGs depends increasingly on women benefiting from development investments in education and health, being able to engage in the market on an equal basis with men, and being able to participate in public decision-making at all levels.

This report lays out the rationale for a new accountability agenda for women's rights and gender equality. It provides evidence not just of an accountability deficit, but of promising government and civil society initiatives and institutional reforms that improve accountability to women.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ines Alberdi'.

INES ALBERDI
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PROGRESS OF THE WORLD'S WOMEN 2008/2009

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