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PANEL II

**Addressing the linkages between the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action and the outcome document of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly and the internationally agreed development goals, including those contained in the Millennium Declaration:
Progress, gaps and challenges**

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Before the Millennium Summit in 2000 nearly every country had made a commitment to equal rights for women and girls by ratifying the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC).¹ Signatories are legally obligated to meet the commitments they specify. Often described as the international bill of rights for women, CEDAW provides for women's equal enjoyment with men of civil, cultural, economic, political, and social rights. It is unique in establishing legal obligations for state parties to ensure that discrimination against women does not occur in the public sphere or the private sphere.

UN member states also made important commitments to promoting gender equality and women's empowerment at many of the UN Conferences that were held in the 1990s, including the 1994 International Conference on Population and Development in Cairo and the 1995 Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing.² The declarations and agreements made at these conferences underscored the importance of women's rights and freedoms, persuaded governments to recognize the gendered consequences of population, social, and macroeconomic policies, and emphasized the importance of mainstreaming gender into all development policies and practice. The inclusion of gender equality and women's empowerment as Millennium Development Goal 3 is a reminder that many of those promises have yet to be kept while simultaneously offering a critical opportunity to implement them.

Toward reaching Goal 3, the international development community has set this year as the deadline for reaching a first milestone: eliminating gender disparity in primary and secondary education. Unfortunately, progress has been slow and this first target will be missed in 19 countries for primary education and 24 countries for secondary. But it's not too late to pick up the pace by building women's capabilities, improving their access to economic and political opportunity, and guaranteeing women's safety so that the Millennium Development Goal of gender equality and women's empowerment can be met by 2015.

Because gender inequality is deeply rooted in entrenched attitudes, societal institutions, and market forces that vary from community to community, different steps are needed in different countries. The U.N. Millennium Project's Task Force on Education and Gender Equality has outlined seven strategic priorities that require action today if Goal 3 is to be met within the next decade. These interdependent priorities can be applied in any setting, and are the minimum action necessary to alter the historical legacy of disadvantages against women. They include:

- (1) Strengthen opportunities for secondary education for girls while meeting commitments to universal primary education;
- (2) Guarantee sexual and reproductive health and rights;
- (3) Invest in infrastructure to reduce women's and girls' time burdens;
- (4) Guarantee women's and girls' property and inheritance rights;

- (5) Eliminate gender inequalities in employment by decreasing women's reliance on informal employment, closing gender gaps in earnings, and reducing occupational segregation;
- (6) Increase women's share of seats in national parliaments and local governmental bodies; and
- (7) Combat violence against girls and women.

The world community has the knowledge, technology and resources to reduce gender inequalities and empower women. Moreover, many developing country governments and communities already are taking the necessary steps to put these priorities into action. But to avoid missing the 2015 mark, political commitment at the highest international and national levels is needed to institute policies and make the investments that are necessary to achieve a world where women are healthy, safe and empowered to control their own destinies.

Strengthen Girls' Secondary Education

To date, global commitments to girls' education have focused on primary education. As a result, during the past decade girls' primary school enrollment rates have increased in most regions. This focus must continue, and international commitments to universal primary education must be met because primary education results in positive health outcomes for girls and women. However, research shows that secondary or post-primary education has the greatest payoff for women's empowerment – in the home, their communities, in labor markets, and in politics. So in addition to universal primary education, the Task Force is calling for a focus on girls' secondary education as well.

Many insights and lessons have been learned during the past two decades on how to eliminate gender disparities in education. The Task Force identifies four strategies that can be used in a variety of countries:

- Make girls' schooling more affordable by reducing fees and offering targeted scholarships;
- Build schools close to girls' homes and allow for flexible class schedules;
- Make schools girl-friendly by improving the safety, design and policies of schools, such as building latrines for girls and allowing married adolescents to attend school; and
- Improve the quality of education by training more women as teachers, especially in secondary schools, using gender-sensitive textbooks, and developing curriculum for girls that is strong in math and science.

In Mexico, the government – concerned by evidence that showed girls dropping out of school at high rates after primary school – initiated in 1997 a cash-for-education program called Progresá. Using an award system that grants girls incrementally higher payments as they progress through primary and secondary school, the program increased girls' primary school enrollment by 1 percent (to 93 percent) and increased secondary

school enrollment by between 3.5 percent and 5.8 percent (to between 70 percent and 73 percent). Even small program changes can improve education for girls in short time.

Guarantee Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights

Currently, women's reproductive health remains poor, and in many developing countries, women's reproductive rights are not being fully realized. As a result, maternal mortality rates are high. A women's chance of dying from pregnancy-related complications is nearly 50 times higher in developing countries than in developed countries. Women also are increasingly vulnerable to sexually transmitted infections, particularly HIV. Many sexually active adolescents do not use contraception. Of the roughly 260 million women ages 15–19 worldwide, both married and unmarried, about 11 percent (29 million) are sexually active and do not want to become pregnant but are not using a modern method of birth control. To ensure the health of women, children and families in developing countries, women must be guaranteed universal access to sexual and reproductive health services through the primary health care system, including full access to sexual and reproductive health information. Comprehensive sexuality education programs also are needed outside of the health care system.

Nearly half of maternal deaths in the developing world occur during labor, delivery or the immediate postpartum period. Access to skilled care and emergency obstetrics services during these periods is critical. However, about two-thirds of births worldwide occur outside of health facilities. Consequently, increasing women's access to emergency obstetric care is crucial to ensuring maternal health. Skilled birth attendants also are needed. In Tanzania and the Democratic Republic of Congo, special training for non-specialist medical personnel, such as medical assistants and nurses, has led to lower maternal mortality rates in those countries.

A key lesson learned in the fight against HIV and AIDS is that single-purpose programs almost always fail to reach women. Instead, counseling, prevention, and treatment services for HIV and other sexually transmitted infections need to be integrated with other reproductive health services and made available through the primary health care system. Such an approach best helps the most vulnerable girls and women, such as poor women and adolescents. Moreover, when it comes to HIV and AIDS or any other reproductive health issue, men are important allies in improving women's health. They should be engaged both as partners and agents of change.

Infrastructure To Ease Time Burdens

Women's and girls' ability to go to school and participate in civic activities often is limited by their responsibilities at home. Routine tasks such as drawing water, collecting firewood or walking to a market can take hours, not minutes. One study found that women in Zambia spent more than 800 hours a year collecting firewood and an additional 200 hours fetching water.

The time burden on women and girls can be dramatically reduced with the appropriate infrastructure: efficient energy sources, accessible and affordable transportation, and water and sanitation systems. Cooking fuels such as kerosene and LPG are recognized as good substitutes for traditional biofuels because of their higher thermal efficiency and relative lack of pollutants. Feeder and main roads can greatly expand women's opportunities, especially when combined with accessible and affordable modes of transportation. Finally, increasing women's participation in the design and implementation of infrastructure projects can help to overcome obstacles to access and affordability.

In Mali, the U.N. Industrial Development Organization and the International Fund for Agriculture worked with communities and women's groups to design and create platforms with a 10-horsepower diesel engine that supplies power for various activities, including agricultural milling and de-husking, lighting, welding and pumping water. Between 1999 and 2004, some 400 platforms were installed across the country, reaching 8,000 women. A study of the impact in twelve villages found several beneficial impacts. Women were able to save time and labor and shift into income-generating activities, leading to an average daily increase of \$0.47. More girls also stayed in school until grade 5, and women's health improved because they were able to visit local clinics more often.

Guarantee Property and Inheritance Rights

People who own and control assets such as land and housing have more economic security, are more likely to take economic risks that lead to growth, and receive important economic returns including income. Yet women in many countries are far less likely than men to own or control assets. Ensuring women's property and inheritance rights is a crucial step in empowering women.

Since 1995, there has been growing awareness and policy attention to this issue. But there is no easy fix. Interventions must be context-specific and considered carefully. To begin, countries need to identify the points at which discrimination occurs, including complex and archaic legal systems, deep-rooted social and cultural norms, and a persistent lack of awareness of individual rights and legal protections.

Within countries, several types of changes are necessary to ensure women's property rights: amending and harmonizing statutory and customary laws, promoting legal literacy, supporting women's organizations that can help women make land claims, and recording women's share of land or property. In areas that are moving toward formal land registration systems, joint titling can enhance women's access to land, helping to guard against capricious decision-making by a spouse and protecting against the dispossession of women due to abandonment, separation, or divorce.

In Vietnam, marriage and family laws were revised in 2001, requiring both the husband's and wife's signatures on any document registering family assets and land use

rights. This significantly changed the former policy where certificates only had space for one signature – typically the husband’s – and women could only claim their rights in the presence of their husband. Following the revision of the law, the Vietnamese government selected two communes for a pilot project to reissue land title certificates with joint signatures. The project organized village meetings and distributed leaflets about the new law. As a result of the pilot, some 2,600 households now have joint titles. A 2002 evaluation concluded that the project also enabled the establishment of a gender-responsive land administration system, improved the ability of local governments to implement land reform, enabled local practices to comply with national law, and disseminated knowledge on national law in remote communities

Reduce Gender Inequality in Employment

In the past two decades, women increasingly are employed, in part because of global economic changes. Between 1990 and 2002, women’s share of nonagricultural employment increased in 93 of 131 countries. Yet women’s status in the labor market remains significantly inferior to men’s. The preferential hiring of men, occupational segregation, and women receiving lower pay for equal work are all examples of gender inequality in employment which continue. Not only do such inequalities contravene women’s right to work, but they are costly for women, their families, and their communities.

Interventions to address employment barriers and constraints take many forms, but they should be focused on reducing women’s reliance on the informal market, closing the gender gap in earnings and reducing occupational segregation. Expansion of national policies and programs to provide support for care—of children, people with disabilities, and the elderly—is an important intervention to enable women to participate in paid employment. In addition, broader economic and social policies are needed, such as supporting employment-enhancing economic growth in low-income countries; providing social protections like health and disability insurance; enforcing equality opportunity legislation, and reforming pension systems to reduce gender inequalities. The International Labour Organization (ILO) Decent Work initiative provides an international framework for promoting equal access to and treatment in employment.

Increase Women’s Seats in Government

Ensuring that women can participate in decision making on equal footing with men in all political arenas is key to empowering women. In the past decade, some countries have made notable progress in increasing women’s representation in political bodies. Still, in only 14 countries do women hold 30 percent or more of the seats in their national parliaments. Three factors have proven successful in boosting women’s participation in parliaments and local bodies. Gender quotas and reservations are an effective policy tool to increase women’s representation. Strong women’s movements and government policies that reduce women’s multiple burdens also can facilitate women’s political participation.

Combat Violence against Women

Violence against women occurs in epidemic proportions in many countries around the world. Surveys in various countries have found that between 10 percent and 69 percent of women report having experienced domestic violence. Though no single intervention will eliminate violence against women, a combination of infrastructural, legal, judicial, enforcement, health, and other service-related actions can significantly reduce it and its consequences. First and foremost, however, violence against women must be viewed as unacceptable. The Task Force recommends that the UN Secretary General, alongside heads of state, spearhead a global campaign establishing this norm and mobilizing resources and support to implement national plans to end violence against women.

Regional organizations can also play a role. The Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) has helped reduce domestic violence through its lending programs. Since 1998, the IDB has approved more than \$123 million in lending for the control and prevention of domestic violence in five countries: Chile, Columbia, Honduras, Jamaica, and Uruguay. These loans raised substantial domestic counterparts in the five countries. Some loans also integrated gender concerns in project components such as providing victims treatment; and ensuring that domestic violence data are collected in national crime information systems, police are trained to handle domestic violence cases, and the courts train judges and probation officers on intra-family violence. Some funding also goes to women's nongovernmental organizations that specialize in the research, advocacy, and treatment of violence against women.

Making It Happen

Although no country has successfully addressed all seven strategic priorities, some countries have shown that significant progress can be made to empower women and reduce gender disparities. The problem is not a lack of practical ways to address gender inequality but rather a lack of change on a large and deep enough scale to transform the way societies define and organize men's and women's roles, responsibilities, and control over resources. To make change happen, countries need:

- **Political Commitment** – Political leaders must be committed and help mobilize individuals and institutions at all levels of government and within international bodies;
- **Technical Capacity** – Leaders and others need technical expertise and knowledge of how to mainstream gender concerns into development policies and programs;
- **Institutional and Structural Change** – Women's groups, civil society, and government agencies need to push for change in the rules, structures, and processes that specify how resources are allocated and how tasks, responsibilities, and values are assigned in institutions and society more broadly;
- **Adequate Resources** – Government and nongovernmental organizations need adequate funding for direct interventions, and to build capacity, collect data, and

- evaluate programs and policies for gender equality and women's empowerment; and
- Accountability and Monitoring – Governments, international institutional and civil society organizations need systems and best practices to ensure that fundamental change is broad-based and lasting.

Moreover, cost does not have to be a barrier. The Task Force collaborated with the U.N. Millennium Project to create a needs assessment methodology to help countries and organizations calculate the costs for fulfilling the different strategic priorities. Though not exact, the estimates provide a guide to the level of investment needed to achieve gender equality and women's empowerment. Results from the assessment in Tajikistan – though preliminary – are illustrative, suggesting that the cost of universal primary and expanded secondary education would be roughly \$20 per person annually. The cost of setting up a primary health care system for child and maternal health, major infectious diseases, and sexual and reproductive health would average about \$29 per person annually. The cost of gender-specific interventions to meet Goal 3 in Tajikistan is estimated at \$10.56 million each year, which is 0.003 percent of its gross domestic product, and which contrasts with debt-servicing payments which accounted for about 4 percent of GDP in Tajikistan in 2001.

The next 10 years provide a new window of opportunity to take action on a global scale to achieve gender equality and empower women as part of meeting all of the MDGs. Governments and international organizations must set the tone and create the environment to make this possible. With adequate space and resources, women's organizations can help transform societies in ways that remove the women's constraints, guarantee their rights, and allow women to fulfill their potential.

¹ One hundred and seventy-eight states are parties to the convention, the most recent being Timor Leste and the Syrian Arab Republic, in early 2003 (Hannan 2003a).

² Other important conferences of the 1990s with a focus on gender equality include the World Conference on Human Rights in Vienna in 1993 and the World Summit on Social Development in Copenhagen in 1995.