

**Commission on the Status of Women  
Fifty-fourth session  
New York, 1-12 March 2010**

**HIGH-LEVEL ROUNDTABLE**

**The implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action,  
the outcomes of the twenty-third special session of the General  
Assembly and its contribution to shaping a gender perspective towards  
the full realization of the Millennium Development Goals**

Written Statement \*

Keynote Speech by

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\* The views expressed in this paper are those of the author and do not necessarily represent those of the United Nations.

Excellencies, Ministers, Distinguished Delegates, Representatives of Civil Society, Ladies and Gentlemen, I would like to thank you for giving me the opportunity to address you today.

I have been asked to speak about the achievements and gaps in linking the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action and the Millennium Development Goals. This is, of course, an important topic. But rather than focusing on the technocratic modalities of the linkages, I would like to highlight the ultimate goal of both the Platform and the MDGs, which is gender equality and women's empowerment and the progress that we as a global community have made in achieving it.

I'd like to set my remarks in the context of the current global financial crisis and economic recession. While throwing millions of people out of work, increasing poverty, and stalling growth, this crisis also presents the possibility for new beginnings – for changes in policy priorities, for changes in the rules of the game, and for changes in the way institutions- governments and international agencies- do business. To make these possibilities real, however, we have to ramp up our creative thinking and strategizing. This may also involve a rethinking of some of the paradigms and frameworks within which we situate our actions. I'll come back to this point toward the end of my remarks.

Three quarters through the timeframe for achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDG), and 15 years after the passage of the Beijing Platform for Action, progress on reducing gender inequality and empowering women has been mixed. There have been notable gains for women and girls in education and political participation since 1995, when the Platform was ratified. But in other areas, progress lags or still cannot be assessed. Improvements in employment and women's reproductive health have lagged. Despite our efforts to hasten collection of data on key gender gaps, progress still cannot be measured because of limited or nonexistent data in areas such as ownership of assets; unpaid work burdens resulting from inadequate provision of water, energy and transportation; and violence against women.

To achieve gender equality and women's empowerment, action is needed to strengthen women's capabilities, opportunities and security. The U.N. Millennium Project Task Force 3 for Education and Gender Equality, of which I was part, recommended seven strategic priorities that focus on education, health, infrastructure, employment, property ownership, political participation and reductions in violence. These priorities encapsulate the linkages between the Platform for Action and the broader interpretation of MDG3. The task force also proposed 12 indicators to measure progress on these priorities, rather than the four MDG indicators that have been recommended for tracking progress.

A recent analysis of those 12 indicators that I did with colleagues from the International Center for Research on Women (ICRW) shows that clear progress has been made in enhancing women's capabilities, especially in education and increasing women's political representation in national parliaments and local governments. But much more needs to be done. Time constraints prevent me from elaborating on all seven priorities, so I would like in these brief remarks to focus on six.

The first strategic priority is to strengthen opportunities for post-primary education. The good news is gender disparities in primary enrollment and completion ratios have been substantially reduced, especially among low and lower middle income countries in sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia. But gaps persist. Low female to male primary enrollment ratios remain in some low income countries in sub-Saharan Africa.

Most countries achieved gender parity in secondary education enrollment in 2005. But gender parity ratios were below .90 in 34 low and lower middle income countries in sub-Saharan Africa, East Asia Pacific, Middle East and North Africa, and South Asia. Reverse gender gaps—fewer boys than girls—in secondary enrollment persist in 23 countries in Latin America, 12 countries in East Asia, and seven countries in the Middle East and North Africa, a worrisome trend that should be monitored. Progress toward gender parity in secondary completion cannot be assessed because data do not exist.

A recent report by Cynthia Lloyd from Population Council for the Coalition for Adolescent Girls (CAG) reiterates the Task Force recommendation to expand opportunities for girls to attend secondary school. We all agree that governments should define basic education as education through lower secondary school or to age 16. To do this, the Population Council report notes that governments and the private sector will need to increase the number of formal and non-formal secondary school places in the educational system - by extending existing primary school facilities and offering well-targeted subsidies to disadvantaged girls to attend either public or private secondary schools. The Population Council report also calls attention to a number of other key interventions, including supporting the non-formal education system, producing curricula that is relevant to adolescent girls, and offering post-secondary vocational programs.

Post-secondary vocational programs are particularly important from an economic perspective. The majority of girls who complete secondary school do not continue on to university. Those girls need programs that support them in making a successful transition to remunerative work and household financial management. Such programs must be based on market assessments and provide relevant, flexible skills for employment and professional growth in an ever-changing global economy.

To complement these interventions, the UN system can help to build and maintain a global database – accessible to all - that includes several components: data on completion rates at all levels of education, data on the quality of education, and information on the variety of education programs that exist for adolescents, including the Population Council report suggestion of promising models appropriate to girls' educational needs in different settings.

The second strategic priority is to guarantee women's reproductive health and rights. Among other things, the Task Force recommended focusing on improving adolescent health and reducing maternal mortality.

Adolescent fertility rates have decreased globally over the past decade. But in low and lower middle income countries, adolescent fertility rates remain high when compared to developed countries, where the fertility rate hovers at 12.08 live births per 1,000 adolescents. All low and middle income countries in developing regions had higher adolescent fertility rates ranging from 14.32 in upper middle income countries in the Middle East and North Africa to a high of 119.41 live births per 1,000 adolescents for low income countries in sub-Saharan Africa. In some parts of the developing world, such as South Asia, a large proportion of adolescent fertility occurs within marriage, highlighting the need to increase age at marriage. Child marriage, in fact, is a manifestation of girls' powerlessness and a driver of health risks. The Coalition for Adolescent Girls, along with others, urges international agencies to identify the practice, affecting at least half of all girls in about a dozen countries, as a human rights violation. This body could usefully take that up. In addition, girls need national laws to prevent child marriage, along with donor support for national responses—for example, marriage registration systems and incentive schemes to keep girls in school—and programs to mobilize communities and create viable alternatives to marriage.

The Coalition for Adolescent Girls report on adolescent health by Miriam Temin and Ruth Levine of the Center for Global Development has expanded on the Task Force recommendations for this priority population. Because young women have a high HIV prevalence in many countries, and often have higher prevalence than men, HIV prevention needs to be focused on adolescent girls, especially in the hyper-endemic countries. This means supporting efforts to transform harmful social norms, ensuring that essential services and commodities are in place for girls, educating girls about avoiding HIV/AIDS as part of comprehensive sexuality education, and working with boys and men to change their behavior—for themselves and their partners.

[By the way, using data from a limited set of program experiences, the Center for Global Development estimates that the average annual costs of a full set of priority interventions for adolescent girls in the 10- to 19-year-old age range in low- and low-middle-income countries during 2010–2015 is \$359.31 per girl—or about \$1 a day.]

Of the data that my colleagues and I reviewed recently, the least progress has been made on maternal mortality, even in the context of greater overall attention to reproductive health and increases in resources. One reason that improvements in maternal health have not been more rapid is that health systems are not working – either for adolescents or for mothers. We have known for quite some time that maternal deaths can be treated with relatively simple, well-known interventions, collectively known as emergency obstetric care (EmOC), delivered at the health center or district hospital level. Several countries – despite income constraints – including Sri Lanka, Honduras, Vietnam, and Bangladesh – have made incredible progress in lowering maternal deaths and offer lessons for other countries to follow suit.

The third strategic priority is investment in infrastructure to reduce women's time burdens. In most rural communities in low-income and some middle-income countries, women and girls (and sometimes boys) compensate for infrastructure deficits: the lack of

electricity or other fuel sources, the lack of water and sanitation facilities, and the lack of roads and motorized transport. Many countries have invested in large-scale infrastructure projects, especially energy, but few countries have collected the data to track how those investments impact women's and men's time use and work burdens. Moreover, less progress has been made on scaling up a range of other low-cost technologies that both reduce the time that women spend compensating for lack of infrastructure and enable them to earn income; these include decentralized village power systems using diesel-powered mini-grids for charging batteries that can be carried to households and direct current batteries that can operate fluorescent-current lamps.

The fourth strategic priority is reducing gender gaps in employment. More women participate in employment now than ever before, reflecting the growth in economic opportunities available to them. Women's share of nonagricultural employment has risen or stayed the same in all regions since 2000, yet in most countries around the world, females face inferior employment opportunities relative to males, which is why the Task Force urged a specific emphasis on informal employment, wages and occupational segregation.

Prior to the crisis, gender wage gaps had risen in some parts of the world and fallen in others. (In many developed countries, wage gaps narrowed as women's educational attainment and labor market experience improved. Similarly, relative wages for women compared with men appear to have risen in several countries in Latin America and the Caribbean, with the exception of Honduras, Jamaica and Venezuela.)

There is of course the danger that whatever progress women have made in the labor market will reverse because of the current crisis. This is an issue in both developed and developing economies.<sup>1</sup> Employment is not expected to return to pre-crisis levels until 2017, making economic stimulus a priority.

In many countries, women are often at the back of the job queue, so governments need to ensure that jobs be available to women, for instance, through the economic stimulus packages in the 54+ high and middle income countries where they have been implemented, in public job creation programs, in investments for technological upgrading and green energy. There is some discussion about scaling back stimulus packets now that some economies are beginning to recover. But I want to caution against scaling down stimulus packages at the present time, which in my view would prevent economic recovery and perhaps lead to what economists call a double dip recession. There are strong economic grounds to prioritize fiscal stimulus over reducing budget deficits in times of crisis. We also need to guard against the erosion of labor rights, as well as key family friendly policies that enable women and men to balance paid work and unpaid care.

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<sup>1</sup> In the US, for instance, while more men than women have lost jobs, the unemployment rate for single mothers is double that for all women and the unemployment rate for black women is double that for white women.

In the context of the current crisis, we can't overlook those in informal employment. There is a common misconception that the informal economy serves as a cushion for formal workers who lose their jobs. While that is true, this does not mean that those working in the informal economy necessarily thrive. In fact, economic downturns often affect the informal economy in the same ways as they affect the formal economy. Like formal wage workers, informal wage workers face loss of jobs or (further) informalization of their employment contracts. Specific bail-outs or rescue plans should be developed in consultation with different groups of working poor that would help them maintain existing employment opportunities during the crisis or secure new employment opportunities after the crisis.

The fifth strategic priority is increasing women's ownership and control over productive assets. I'll highlight only two of the many dimensions involved in increasing women's property ownership. The first is measurement of the gender asset gap. I have become tired of complaining about the lack of sex-disaggregated information on physical and financial assets, so with the support of the Dutch MDG3 Fund, I am working with colleagues in universities in Ghana, Ecuador, and India to implement a nationally representative household survey in Ecuador and Ghana, and state level household survey in Karnataka, India that asks adult males and females about ownership, valuation, decision-making, control over, and disposal of assets such as land, housing, livestock, non-farm businesses, and financial assets. Our aim is two-fold: to create an indicator for MDG tracking of the gender asset gap, and to determine the minimal number of questions on sex-disaggregated asset ownership that all countries can add at little cost to their census or living standard surveys.

The second dimension is how to increase women's ownership of productive assets. Many countries – like India – have begun to pass good legislation recognizing women's ability to own assets. But this is not enough. Reconciling entrenched social norms with national laws requires change at the community level, where the needs and benefits are most easily seen and addressed. Worldwide, community-based initiatives are attempting to identify and eliminate the factors that prevent women from fulfilling their rights. These factors include a lack of legal knowledge on statutory rights among women and communities, women's limited resources and documentation, crises that exacerbate women's insecure property rights, interpretation of customary and religious laws that in practice overrule statutory protections, and economic and demographic changes that affect land tenure. Many creative approaches exist to address these constraints which require resources to scale up for greater impact.

Finally, the last strategic priority I will mention is action to combat violence against women. As you know, gender-based violence is arguably the most widespread of all human rights violations, is a pervasive and systemic public health issue affecting all socio-economic and cultural groups throughout the world, and involves high costs to both individuals and societies. It increases in times of crisis. There are many good government initiatives such as Bangladesh's Multi-Sectoral Program on Violence against Women, Morocco's recent national plan to address violence against women, and Uganda's pending Domestic Violence Bill. But our governments and international donors

can do more: at the international level by increasing funding for the UNIFEM-managed Fund for Gender Equality and within countries, providing support services, including integrated health services, for survivors of violence, strengthening of policies and legislation related to violence, and promoting multi-sectoral networks at a community level for violence prevention.

Notice that one theme that runs through my discussion of realizing these seven strategic priorities is the necessity of resources and public investment. Implementing these priorities costs money, and I have previously done some estimates of the costs of achieving gender equality across all the MDGs. Knowing the costs is only the first step. The next is examining the various ways of raising public revenue/resources that can be used for gender equality investments.<sup>2</sup>

How can we raise resources for public investment? There are two aspects to this. First, in the developed economies, governments need to realize their commitment to allocating 0.7 percent of their gross national income to official development assistance. This is hard to do in the context of crisis, but there are ways to mobilize resources. Stimulus packages that lead to recovery and economic growth are important. But there are also other mechanisms. One idea which has been around for some time that is finally gaining traction is a financial transaction tax. A group of economists, of which I am one, has called on the G-20 to implement such a tax. The logic is simple. It would impose a modest fee on trades of stocks, futures, credit default swaps, and other financial instruments. The United Kingdom currently puts a 0.25 percent tax on the sale or purchase of shares of stock. This has very little impact on people who buy stock with the intent of holding it for a long period of time. Estimates by economists in the US suggest that an FTT in the US could raise more than \$140 billion a year, an amount equal to 1 percent of GDP.<sup>3</sup>

In middle and low-middle income countries economies, domestic resource mobilization is also critical. With colleagues from the University in KwaZulu Natal in South Africa and universities and think tanks in Uganda, Ghana, Morocco, India, Argentina, Mexico, and the UK, I have just completed a book on gender equity in taxation. The main goal of taxation, of course, is to raise government revenue, and feminist economists support this goal since higher tax revenues enable governments to spend more on social programs - such as health, education, and public transport - that have positive gender equality outcomes and also stimulate economic growth and development. (Diane Elson has shown that countries that are unable to raise sufficient revenues are likely to underprovide social services, thereby increasing the burden of unpaid care and social provision shouldered by women).

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<sup>2</sup> Such public investment crowds in private investment. It can reduce supply bottlenecks in the economy and relieve unpaid work burdens. Finally, it is a key contributor to economic growth.

<sup>3</sup> Dean Baker, Center for Economic Policy Research

We found that most of the tax systems in our study are designed in a way that does not unduly burden the poorest people, although the progressivity of these systems could be improved. But it also turns out that tax systems in most countries contain gender biases, both explicit and implicit.<sup>4</sup> We have argued, therefore, that as part of the tax reforms which many countries are pursuing, countries should review personal income tax codes and instruments for examples of such bias and take the legislative action that may be necessary to eliminate them. In addition, consumption taxes – such as the VAT – which hit all parts of the population and are widely perceived fall disproportionately on the poor since they spend a greater fraction of their incomes on goods and services that are subject to VAT, should be reviewed to ensure that they contain exemptions and zero-rating of basic consumption items, which have substantially positive outcomes in terms of poverty and gender equality.

Now, if a Financial Transaction Tax were to be implemented in the G20 countries, and more domestic resources mobilized, gender equality advocates will need to be at the forefront of discussions for how to allocate the revenue that is raised. At the national level, many countries are beginning to take a gender-aware perspective in their budgeting processes. The seven strategic priorities remain the guideposts for where funding should be allocated. But in the context of the current crisis, it is also critical to give priority to public expenditure on social protection, including conditional cash transfer programs, which protect the poorest households in face of economic and other shocks. This is an opportunity to begin talking about setting a global floor for social protection and making social protection systemic – as opposed to component by component. This means changing the approaches of development agencies and governments.

Social protection needs to be complemented by public sector job creation – good models exist in the National Rural Employment Guarantee program in India, the public works program in South Africa, or the former Jefes program in Argentina, although changes in the design features (such as providing child care) can make public employment programs even more gender equitable. Providing financial services (credit and the array of other financial instruments) targeted to female farmers and female entrepreneurs will provide women with livelihoods and income and boost economic growth, potentially also reducing reliance on food imports, which is critical for addressing the twin food crisis that has occurred in many countries in the past few years.

Ministries of Women's Affairs and women's organizations also need to be at the forefront of resource mobilization discussions at the international level. Should there be a new targeted high level fund – along the lines of the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, TB and Malaria? And if so, how much should be invested in it? My colleagues and I estimated that initially donors should commit resources in the range of \$13 billion annually over the next five years to finance interventions in low-income countries, and readjusted thereafter based on country's own domestic resource commitments to these interventions. Because achieving gender equality requires multiple tracks, such a fund (if

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<sup>4</sup> *Explicit* bias occurs when tax codes contain specific regulations or provisions that treat men and women differently. *Implicit* gender biases result when tax systems have different impacts on men and women because of systematically gendered social and economic customs and arrangements.



created) *cannot* be seen as the sole international source of financing for gender equality, since resources also need to be allocated to address gender issues throughout all other multilateral and bilateral funding streams – whether for agriculture and food production, health, education, water and sanitation, transportation and other infrastructure, employment, environmental sustainability, climate change, and so forth.

I would like to close with a comment on the future. The current crisis will pass, but crises will not. Ravi Kanbur, an economist at Cornell, recently noted that for developing countries, periodic crises are likely to be the “new normal.” I would argue that periodic crises have been the “new normal” all along in developing countries, known all too well to those who suffered through the debt crises in the 1980s, the financial crises of the 1990s and the early years of the current millennium. Because the current crisis hit the developed world, where conventional economic wisdom originates and dominates global policy discourse, and because of its severity, there are now more openings than in the past to revisit that conventional economic wisdom, especially about the role of macroeconomic and fiscal policy. There is new policy space to consider the role for demand-side economic management, a role for government regulation over the financial sector, and alternative approaches to trade and monetary policy.

This is an opportune moment for gender equality advocates to intervene in those discussions. Unless we do so, our aspirations – as represented in the Beijing Platform for Action and the MDGs – are doomed. Feminists around the world have many good ideas for resource mobilization and public investment, fiscal and monetary policy, and the role of the state – which underpins realization of the Platform for Action and the MDGs. We need to make sure these are front and center in the debate. As we intervene in these larger policy discussions, we cannot be straight-jacketed in the frameworks we have been using. We need new frameworks that can respond to the present socio-economic context and build the foundation for the future. Establishing a high level knowledge commission perhaps would be a good ad hoc step to bring it all together. Crises present opportunities for action, and we need to seize every one of them, in whatever forum – including at the upcoming Millennium Summit, as well as G20 meetings, G77 and others - to press our agenda and the changes that will make gender equality and women’s empowerment a reality.

Thank you.

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