

**United Nations
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Expert Group Meeting
Achievements, gaps and challenges
in linking the implementation
of the Beijing Platform for Action and
the Millennium Declaration and
Millennium Development Goals
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MAKING THE MISSING LINK:

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This paper analyzes the impact of the macroeconomic framework underlying globalization on the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action in Sub-Saharan Africa and its implications for the MDG process. As such, it focuses on the areas of concern related to women's economic rights and poverty in the Beijing Platform For Action. It highlights the critical issues at the interface of gender inequality, poverty and neoliberal economic policy, and points to this prevailing macroeconomic framework as a critical gap in linking the Beijing PFA and MDGs.

The paper is in two main parts: the first part reviews the progress and setbacks in the implementation of the Beijing PFA in SSA with a focus on the relationships between gender inequality, neoliberal economic policies and poverty. The second part deals with the conceptualization of the links between the Beijing PFA and MDGs, and discusses key issues related to the Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs) from a gender perspective, along the conceptual and methodological issues that should be addressed in order to develop a conceptual framework for linking MDGs and the gender equality agenda.

1. Ten Years After Beijing: Trends and Issues in Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA)

The first part of this section focuses on the implementation of the Beijing PFA in SSA countries, with a view to highlight the major trends and issues related to women's economic rights and poverty. The second part examines the main policy responses to poverty issues from a gender perspective in order to assess their impact on the gender equality agenda and the implications for the core MDG related to poverty (MDG1).

1.1. Progress and Setbacks

Gender mainstreaming: A Double-Edged Strategy

The national and sub-regional reports on the implementation of the Beijing PFA indicate that considerable progress has been made in terms of legal texts and political participation. several e3or

unlike the MDGs, there are no time-bound targets and indicators. The sub-regional reports point to a common set of issues faced by most African countries in implementing the Beijing PFA. Among these, the weakening of the women's movement, economic barriers to women's empowerment and a disabling international environment feature prominently (Ouedraogo 2004; Renard Painter 2004).

The weakening of the women's movement is partly due to the development of a 'gender movement', which is a direct product of gender mainstreaming efforts at different levels. The emergence of this 'gender movement' that denies the existence of women's specific issues resulting from their subordination raises the issue of the prevailing tendency to use gender mainstreaming merely as a technical device, rather than as a political tool for women's

including the regional MDG report (UNDP-UNICEF 2002), underline that Africa is likely to be the only region where the number of poor people in 2015 will be higher than in the 1990s.

This is despite the fact that poverty reduction has become the top priority in official discourses and programmes/projects at both national and regional level. A wealth of studies has been carried out by an increasing number of stakeholders from the civil society, academia, governments and donors, along with the implementation of poverty reduction strategies at different levels. In fact, it appears that the changes entailed by the international consensus around the poverty reduction agenda thus far have affected only some aspects of poverty reduction policy processes. Current poverty trends indicate that in most cases, these changes have not altered the main policy thrust of poverty reduction strategies in the sub-region.

The most visible change at the policy level is the increased institutionalization of participatory approaches, in line with the evolution of the poverty reduction agenda at the global level. While such institutionalization provides a window of opportunity to integrate gender perspectives and to promote the democratization of p(tegie)a.082 TJs

2. Linking the Beijing PFA and MDGs

This section deals with some critical issues related to the conceptualization of the links between the Beijing PFA and MDGs and to current approaches for integrating a gender perspective into MDG monitoring processes. It focuses on PSRP processes that are expected to play a key role in the achievement of MDGs. It also offers some policy recommendations for the development of a conceptual framework that can be used to link the MDGs with other processes for achieving women's economic empowerment and gender equality.

2.1. The Critical Gap: Gender and the Macroeconomic Framework

Conceptual Issues

The conceptual framework for linking the Beijing PFA and MDGs should build on the identification of the specific ways in which the frameworks provided by the Beijing PFA, CEDAW and MDGs can support each other, as recommended by UNIFEM (UNIFEM 2004). It should also build on the identification of emerging issues that are critical to the achievement of MDGs, but are not directly addressed by the CEDAW and the Beijing PFA.

As mentioned above, the enduring predominance of the neoliberal macroeconomic framework is a key challenge arising from the current context of the implementation of the Beijing PFA and the MDG process. This framework which has proved to be detrimental to poor people's rights and livelihoods, especially women, has been consolidated by the geopolitical developments at the global level. While women's movements are confronted with the backlash by conservative

the World Bank [2003a] of 27 PRSPs reported that as many as 10 failed to include even the slightest recognition of the gender goal. Yet, gender equality is at the very heart of achieving the MDGs.” (Vandermoortele 2004).

With regards to trade liberalization which is considered as the panacea for overcoming poverty, ‘the current round of PRSPs say very little about trade policy...(…)...PRSPs fail to consider the impact of trade on different groups of poor and vulnerable people. Effects are not disaggregated between consumers, producers and employees, between urban and rural population, or by gender. Dimensions of poverty beyond income – risk and insecurity, access to services, and empowerment – are almost completely ignored.” (Ladd 2003).

Moreover, efforts to take into account women’s unpaid and uncounted work suffer from an overemphasis on “time famine’ and on an “exclusive concentration on time as a proxy for burden, effort and equity...” (Jackson and Palmer-Jones 1998:19). In the context of increasing levels of poverty in SSA, this has led to focus on increasing income-generating activities and employment opportunities for women, based on the assumption that the time liberated from reproductive tasks will be used for ‘productive’ activities. While this assumption remains to be validated, it also overlooks the implications for work intensity and the associated bodily costs.

Given the centrality of women’s work for poverty reduction, such an approach to poverty as well as the labor-intensive strategies promoted by many development partners, are likely to have a negative impact on women’s well being as an integral part of their entitlements and rights (Jackson and Palmer-Jones 1998, Razavi 1998).

This also points to the need to re-consider the conventional indicators used to measure gender bias. In this regard, recent research work on gender indicators in the context of economic reforms provides interesting contributions to the definition of gender-related measures based on both quantitative and qualitative data (Mukhopadhyay and Sudarshan eds. 2003). Another important contribution is the African Gender and Development Index (AGDI) developed by UNECA in collaboration with African gender researchers and activists.

Debt, free trade, and ODA

The MDG reporting processes at the national level pertain to the first seven goals, as the monitoring of MDG 8 to develop a global partnership for development is deemed to be relevant only at the international level. This automatically excludes any analysis and discussion of critical gender issues at the macro level, in particular issues related to debt, trade and ODA.

These issues have been the subject of a number of analyses and intense advocacy and lobbying by gender equality and women activists during the last few years, especially within the UN processes such as the Beijing+5 Review and Financing for Development. Given the current trends in SSA, it is clear that MDGs will not be achieved unless these issues are addressed.

With respect to debt, on average SSA countries spent twice as much on debt servicing to external creditors as their spending on basic social services during the 1990s. The well-known impacts of this problem on poor women and people are worsened by the moves towards free trade.

regard to the MDGs related to gender and health, recent research on the intersections between

Policy Recommendations

Policy positions that build on the links between the Beijing PFA and MDGs should reflect the explicit recognition in the Millennium Declaration that gender equality is central to the achievement of MDGs. As such, they must seek to address the root causes of poverty and gender inequality that are embedded in the prevailing global macroeconomic framework as well as in patriarchal structures at the micro and meso levels, and to challenge the power relations that are at the heart of global inequities and imbalances against poor countries.

MDGs should not be used as an ²additional conditionality by the ¹IFIs. As a matter of democracy, transparency and accountability, all of them should be subject to participatory monitoring at the national level. In particular, MG 8 involves critical issues at the macro level for gender equality and should be monitored at the national level with the full participation of women.

The crucial need to link human rights and MDGs cannot be overemphasized, as it is key to challenging the neoliberal paradigm that disempowers women and other marginalized groups. The increasing interest in the rights-based approach among the civil society and development practitioners is a welcome development, however there is still need for the definition of an operational rights-based approach to economic policy making, on the model of the framework for applying the right to health to TRIPS negotiations on essential medicines at the WTO, proposed by the Special Rapporteur on the Right to Health (UNCHR 2004).

Engendering the macroeconomic framework is one of the major task at hand for ensuring that gender equality issues are taken into account in the formulation of policies and monitoring of progress towards achieving the MDGs. This effort should build on the work that has been done on gender, macroeconomic and trade policy issues by women researchers and activists, along with some UN agencies and other development institutions¹.

These efforts at the conceptual level should be complemented by the necessary reforms at the institutional level. In particular, gender equality advocates and women's organizations have called for the democratization of global economic governance and for human rights to be the overarching framework for macroeconomic and trade policies.

While addressing the data gaps and strengthening national capacities for collection, production, dissemination and analysis of gender sensitive and sex-disaggregated statistics should remain a priority, it is important to up-scale the existing processes so as to move towards the construction of gender-aware economic models and policy tools.

In terms of monitoring and accountability mechanisms, the links with the PRSP monitoring processes should be critically exe5

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Millennium Declaration to become a reality by 2015, the achievement of the gender equality agenda requires at least the same sense of urgency as the achievement of MDGs. Ten years after Beijing, there are no excuses for failing women.

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