

Department of Economic and Social Affairs
Office for ECOSOC Support and Coordination

Achieving Gender Equality, Women's Empowerment and Strengthening Development Cooperation

DIALOGUES AT THE ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COUNCIL



United Nations
New York, 2010

Department of Economic and Social Affairs

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The views expressed in this publication are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs.

United Nations publication

Sales No. E.10.IV.10
ISBN 978-92-1-130302-5

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Increasing uniform delivery through collective action²

BY MR. BAN KI-MOON

Secretary-General
United Nations

As we meet, the world is still grappling with the aftershocks of multiple crises.

The financial, food and climate crises have set back efforts towards the Millennium Development Goals and threaten future progress.

We live under the shadow of continued global financial and economic uncertainty.

The recovery from the most severe recession in recent history has been tentative and uneven. It cannot compensate for the losses suffered.

Tens of millions more people have been pushed into extreme poverty. Yet, despite these setbacks, there is reason for optimism.

The 2010 Millennium Development Goals Report shows that we have made significant progress in some countries on reducing extreme poverty over the past decade.

The overall poverty rate is expected to fall to 15 per cent by 2015 – that is half of 1990 levels.

More children than ever before now have access to education. Global school enrolment stands at 85 per cent. Many countries have crossed the 90 per cent threshold.

We have seen significant declines in child mortality and the incidence of measles, malaria and neglected tropical diseases.

We have also seen dramatic increases in access to antiretroviral treatment for HIV/AIDS.

² From the 2010 ECOSOC High-level Segment, 28 June 2010.

Tens of millions of lives have been saved through collective action by governments, civil society and international organizations.

These successes - many of which have taken place in the world's poorest countries - show that the MDGs are achievable.

They show that where we try, we succeed. If we don't try, we fail. The recipe is clear: the right policies, adequate investment and reliable international support.

However, let me inject a note of caution. Overall progress has been uneven.

We are likely to miss several Goals, especially in the least developed countries, land-locked developing countries, small island developing states and countries in, or emerging from, conflict.

Climate change remains a threat to sustainability. Hunger and food insecurity stalk millions.

Stubborn disparities persist - between rich and poor, between rural and urban, between males and females.

The vast majority of the world's people still need - and deserve - drastic improvements in their quality of life.

They need a world where the benefits of economic and social development reach everyone - a world where the major economies are held accountable to their many commitments.

This is the message I will take to the MDG Summit in September.

And it is the message I delivered to G-20 leaders this weekend.

I was encouraged by the commitment of leaders there to accelerate progress on the MDGs, despite the challenges they face.

The next G20 Summit in Seoul, Republic of Korea, in November, will include development on the agenda for the first time.

Governments must agree on a concrete action plan that provides a clear roadmap to meet our promise by 2015.

We must deliver results for the world's most vulnerable.

As the United Nations' central forum for international economic and social issues, this Council has an important role to play.

I see three urgent areas for focus.

First: jobs. Today, world unemployment is the highest on record. 211 million people are unemployed. We need to create 470 million jobs in the next ten years. It is time to focus on decent work - in all nations, not just the wealthy - common-sense investment in green jobs and a green recovery.

Second: food security. Worldwide, more than 1 billion people are hungry. Let us respond to this unprecedented number by delivering on the commitments made in l'Aquila. Let us invest in the world's small farmers. They produce most of the world's food and are the mainstays of developing economies.

Third, let us invest in women. This is where we need progress the most. Social, political and economic equality for women is integral to the achievement of all MDGs. Until women and girls are liberated from poverty and injustice, all our goals - peace, security, sustainable development - stand in jeopardy.

It is therefore most appropriate that this session of the Economic and Social Council is focused on gender equality and women's empowerment.

Empowering women is an economic and social imperative.

Of the 72 million children of primary-school age still excluded from school systems, two-thirds are girls.

Women hold only 18 per cent of the world's parliamentary seats.

And throughout the world, too many women live in fear of violence. Violence against women is a crime and must not be acceptable in any culture.

In too many countries, policies, legal frameworks and social justice systems are just not adequate.

Of all the MDGs, the one where we have achieved least success is on maternal health.

Each year, between 10 and 15 million women suffer long-term disability due to complications during pregnancy or childbirth.

Every year, more than a million children are left motherless. In the 21st century, it is unacceptable that mothers should still be dying as they deliver new life.

I urge this Council to generate support for our Joint Action Plan on women's and children's health.

Indeed, you have a crucial role in making women central to all future negotiations on development.

The outcome of the recent 15-year review of the Beijing Declaration should feed directly into your negotiations and into the outcome of the MDG Summit in September.

Together, we must urge governments to change attitudes and policies towards women and girls.

We must end inequality and discrimination and make women and girls aware of their inalienable rights.

This is a landmark year for gender issues. We are commemorating the 15th anniversary of the Beijing Declaration and the 10th Anniversary of Security Council resolution 1325, to name just a few highlights.

And this year, we are on track for another major step forward.

I welcome the decision by the Sixty-third session of the General Assembly to merge the four United Nations gender entities into a composite entity. I am closely following the ongoing intergovernmental negotiations during the current session that will make this a reality.

The creation of UN Women will mark a significant advance towards further strengthening our capacity to work with Member States to coherently meet the needs of women and girls.

We all need to deliver as we collectively tackle global crises and work towards the MDGs.

Women need to be included at all levels of political decision-making.

We must strengthen political commitment to change laws and policies that discriminate against them. Women's contributions in homes and in workplaces are essential to improving food security; to building community resilience to climate change and natural disasters; and to finding lasting solutions to poverty.

I count on you to maintain focus on gender equality and women's empowerment in your negotiations at the Annual Ministerial Review and at the Development Cooperation Forum.

And I urge you to consider how to expand your national efforts towards the Millennium Development Goals.

Each is achievable. We have the tools. Let us match them with political will and cooperation.