

Introduction

The adoption of the Millennium Development Go

climate, food, energy, financial and economic crises on women's livelihoods and rights, which should be seen as a reminder that such as a fragmented and piecemeal approach cannot lead to the effective implementation of the BPFA or the achievement of MDGs.

1.2. Women's empowerment and gender equality require an alternative development framework

The orthodox neoliberal approach to development that prevails since the adoption of the Beijing Platform for Action has been translated into measures that hinder the achievement of its objectives and undermine women's rights. For instance, the fact that half of all maternal deaths (265,000) occur in Sub-Saharan Africa, and that "giving birth safely is largely a privilege of the rich" (UN 2009: 26) is a blatant violation of the right to health of millions of women. As it is also well known by now, the multiple crises that affect the neoliberal development system have thrown millions more people into poverty, including a majority of women, and derailed progress in the achievement of many MDGs, particularly in the developing countries.

Against this backdrop, the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action has proceeded as if it was taking place in a vacuum, and de-linked from the political economy of mainstream development processes. As such, there had been very little understanding that the objectives of the Beijing Platform for Action as well as the MDGs cannot be achieved when essential social services are being eroded by privatisation and deregulation, and when the role of the State is reduced to promoting free-market policies that do not bring about sustained growth of employment and incomes, and inclusive development which benefits poor people. Likewise, halving poverty by 2015 is not possible when women are contained in low-paid and vulnerable forms of employment (UN, 2009), and women's crucial contribution to poverty reduction and the economy through their reproductive and unpaid work is persistently ignored in statistics and economic policies.

As evidenced by both the Beijing+15 review and MDG reports, "progress for women and girls in many areas covered by the Millennium Development Goals lags behind overall gains. This outcome is indicative of the insufficient attention given to the gender equality dimensions in national development policies and strategies related to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals" (UN, 2010: 84). Furthermore, this also points out that it is women and girls who are the most affected by the deficiencies of the mainstream development model whereby social policies are not considered as an integral part of the development process, and reduced to safety nets for the billions of people who are deprived of their fundamental human rights to food, health, education, and social protection.

1.3. Women's empowerment and gender equality require an effective accountability framework

Whereas the MDGs were expected to provide a framework for holding Governments accountable for their commitments, civil society and women's organizations have underlined that "on one hand there is the failure to transform the MDGs into a legally binding agreement thus allowing impunity in terms of their implementation and on the other there is the failure to focus on social exclusion, discrimination and human rights and a lack of concrete and strong measures to develop an open, rule-based, predictable, non-discriminatory trading and financial system that addresses the needs of developing countries" (ICAE, 2010: 5).

Although a similar case can be made about the lack of accountability with respect to the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action, unlike the MDGs the main issue is not the absence of a normative framework, but the lack of political will on the part of many Governments to domesticate the legal framework and to apply the normative standards of equality and non-discrimination provided by the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW).

In the face of the gravity of the multiple global crises and hardship affecting a growing number of people, especially women and girls, it is clear that there is need for an effective accountability framework that can ensure that MDGs are implemented with due attention to the structural factors that inhibit gender equality and women's empowerment.

2. Strategies and processes for bringing the priorities and needs of women and girls to the

conditions will be taken into account in order to prevent detrimental effects on women's livelihoods and rights. For instance, the provision of microfinance will have little positive effects on poverty if unbridled trade liberalization leads to the loss of employment and incomes, as happened in many sub-Saharan African countries.

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3. Strengthening accountability for gender equality: key recommendations for action in 2010¹

The most urgent task at hand is the establishment of an accountability framework for both the MDGs and gender equality. In this regard, the accountability processes set up under CEDAW provide a model for assessing the process by which the MDGs are translated into results. The related monitoring and review processes should also be used to hold Governments accountable for the implementation of MDGs and MDG-based poverty reduction strategies. Unless such mechanisms are established within the MDGs implementation process to fulfill women's rights and to address inequality along gender, class, race and other axes of identity, the MDGs will be no more than 'the most distracting gimmick' (Antrobus, 2004, cited in Randriamaro, 2005) from the gender equality agenda.

The policy actions to accelerate the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action and the achievement of MDGs should take into account the impacts of the multiple global crises, and address the gaps and challenges in the twelve areas of concern in a holistic manner, through coherent and well-sequenced policy actions in the short and longer term.

In the short term, there is need to focus on the development and financing of gender-sensitive social protection and insurance systems in order to compensate for the reduction in real household incomes, with the recognition that universal programs (as opposed to targeted programmes) are the most appropriate for poor women. This would also involve the expansion of employment opportunities for women and public provisioning of adequate support mechanisms in order to alleviate women's work burden for social reproduction (Beijing areas: 1, 2, 3,7,9,12).

Influencing and monitoring budgets is also critically important in order to ensure that expenditures give priority to the needs of women and girls in terms of decent employment creation, social spending, agriculture and infrastructure investment, as well as to prevent regressive and gender-blind fiscal policies. This should apply not only to the national budgets of developing countries, but also to those of donor countries who are part of the duty-bearers for the realization of the rights of women and girls.

This short-term actions should be accompanied by the intensification of campaigns and actions on violence against women, in light of past experience which demonstrates that domestic and gender-based violence have increased with economic hardship (Beijing areas: 3,5).

In the longer-term, it will be critically important to acknowledge that it is high time to address past policy neglect in relation to the agricultural sector, particularly the subsistence subsector where women are concentrated. The recent food crisis has demonstrated the inadequacy of the

¹ This section draws on a position paper commissioned by UNIFEM on "The Economic Crisis and Its Impacts on Women and the Achievement of Gender Equality Targets in the Twelve Critical Areas of the BPFA".

prevailing market-based model of agricultural policies, and calls for alternative policies that build on and value women's central role in agricultural production, processing and marketing, and as the main custodians of biodiversity, indige

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