

# The Economic Empowerment of Women Since the Beijing Conference: Are We Winning?

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THE WORLD BANK



# EMPOWERMENT is defined as

**“women’s ability to make strategic life choices where that ability had been previously denied them”** (Kabeer 1999)



# Are Women More Empowered Today?

- In developed countries, the answer is **YES**
  - Women are now the majority of
    - The American workforce
    - University graduates in OECD countries
    - Professionals working in several rich countries, including the US\*
- In developing countries, the answer is more **MIXED**
- Empowerment is being systematically monitored globally
  - Common platform agreed at the 1995 Beijing Conference
  - 2005 Millennium Development Goals (MDG)

\* December 30, 2009 issue of *Economist*



# Beijing Conference Declaration

- **Created a framework which aims for the empowerment of all women** in order to recognize that women face barriers to full equality and advancement in addition to such factors as their race, age, language, ethnicity, culture, religion or disability
  
- The framework “Platform for Action” has 6 strategic areas:
  1. Women’s economic rights and independence, including access to employment, appropriate working conditions and control over economic resources.
  2. Facilitate women’s equal access to resources, employment, markets and trade.
  3. Provide business services, training and access to markets, information and technology, particularly to low-income women.
  4. Strengthen women’s economic capacity and commercial networks.
  5. Eliminate occupational segregation and all forms of employment discrimination.
  6. Promote harmonization of work and family responsibilities for women and men.



# Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)

6 out of 8 of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) have a strong gender component: Empowerment is an explicit MDG

- ♀ Goal 1 – Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger
- ♀ Goal 2 – Achieve universal primary education
- ♀ **Goal 3 – Promote gender equality and empower women**
- ♀ Goal 4 – Reduce child mortality
- ♀ Goal 5 – Improve maternal health
- ♀ Goal 6 – Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria & other diseases
- Goal 7 – Ensure environmental sustainability
- Goal 8 – Develop a global partnership for development



# MDG 3: Promote gender equality & empower women

- Aims to close the gender gap and empower women as effective ways to combat poverty and stimulate sustainable development.
- Target: Eliminate gender disparity in primary and secondary education, preferably by 2005, and at all levels of education no later than 2015
- Indicators are
  - the ratio of literate females to males among 15- to 25- year-olds
  - the share of women in wage employment in the nonagricultural sector
  - the proportion of seats held by women in national parliaments



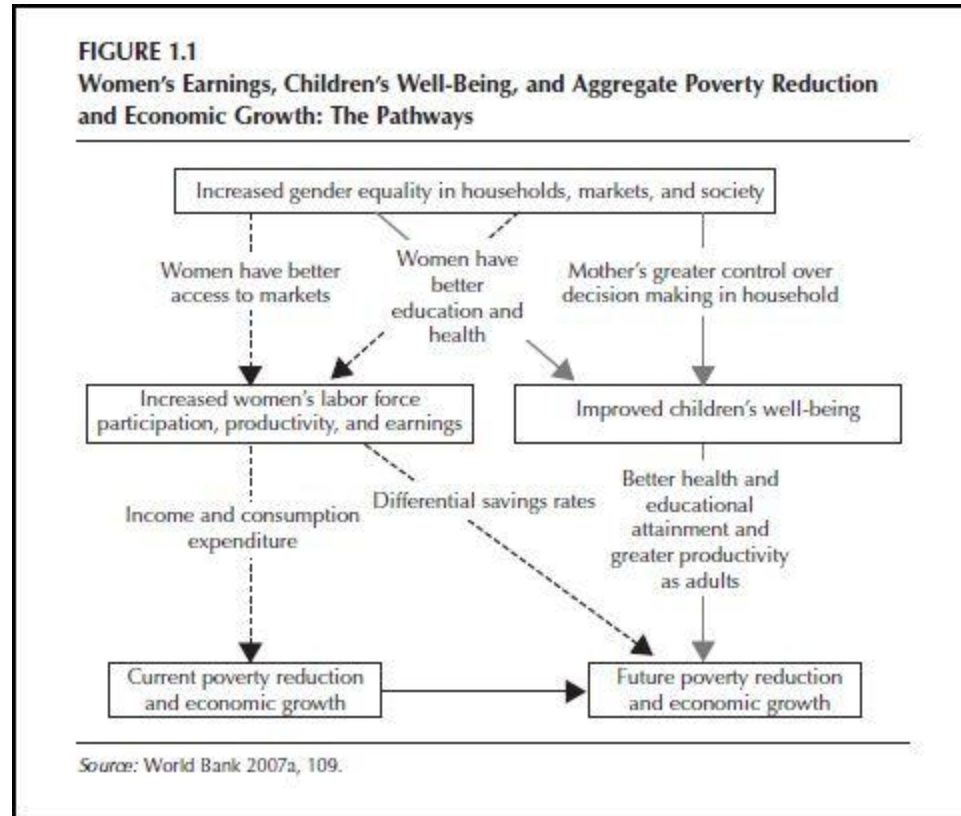
# MDG3: How are we doing?

Goals and Targets	Africa		Asia				Oceania	Latin America & Caribbean	Commonwealth of Independent States	
	Northern	Sub-Saharan	Eastern	South-Eastern	Southern	Western			Europe	Asia
<b>Equal girls enrolment in primary school</b>	Close to Parity	Close to Parity	Parity	Parity	Parity	Close to Parity	Almost Close to Parity	Parity	Parity	Parity
<b>Women's share of paid employment</b>	Low Share	Low Share	High Share	Medium Share	Low Share	Low Share	Medium Share	High Share	High Share	High Share
<b>Women's equal representation in national parliaments</b>	Very low	Low	Moderate	Low	Low	Very Low	Very Low	Moderate	Low	Low

Source: UN MDG:2009 Progress Chart at [http://mdgs.un.org/unsd/mdg/Resources/Static/Products/Progress2009/MDG\\_Report\\_2009\\_Progress\\_Chart\\_En.pdf](http://mdgs.un.org/unsd/mdg/Resources/Static/Products/Progress2009/MDG_Report_2009_Progress_Chart_En.pdf)



# MDG3: How are we doing?



**Figure 1.1** shows that one important pathway goes from equality of opportunity through participation in labor, land, financial, and product markets, while the other pathway links equality of opportunity for women to improved children's well-being. **Both pathways end in accelerated poverty reduction, increased productivity, and potentially more rapid growth.**



# MDG3: Results and analysis

- The pace and success of global initiatives and national plans for eliminating inequalities and empowering women is **uneven** and **slower** than expected.
- Progress is at the primary education level, where all developing regions with the exception of Sub-Saharan Africa are on track to achieve parity by 2015.
  - The effects of the global economic crises could reverse these gains and prevent new public sector investments.
- There is a sense of urgency to achieve MDG3 - not only because of the 2015 deadline, but also because of potentially lost opportunity.
- More attention is now being turned to the private sector (for profit and not-for profit) to achieve MDG3.



# MDG3: Representation in National Parliaments

Some countries have set quotas for female representation in government

- India recently passed the Women's Reservation Bill, which sets aside one-third of the elected seats in the national, state and local governments for women.
  - Rationale is that women were more likely than men to invest public money in services valued by women, like better access to safe drinking water.
    - A study of 161 villages in West Bengal State found that more women (31 percent) than men (17 percent) raised the issue of drinking water in local government meetings.
    - Villages with a woman leader constructed or repaired a total of 24 drinking water facilities, while villages with a man in charge constructed or repaired 15.
- Concept of quotas in government was discussed at the 12 Beijing Conference ([http://www.onlinewomeninpolitics.org/beijing12/Chapter4\\_Dahlerup.pdf](http://www.onlinewomeninpolitics.org/beijing12/Chapter4_Dahlerup.pdf))
- The World Bank Group itself has set the goal of gender parity in Management by the end of 2012.
  - Interesting feedback in the recent Staff Survey about perception of qualifications: some backlash



# Women help themselves through the Private Sector

*“...Another way that women are empowered is by being able to work in a paid job or run their own business. Entering the formal economy as workers or businesswomen allows women to provide for themselves and their families, and to play their part in generating economic growth and job creation.”*

Source: *Women, Business and the Law*. World Bank Group, 2010



# Win: Win in the Private Sector

Businesses benefit on many levels when inequalities are eliminated and women are integrated and participate in all spheres of life.

- Closing the gender gap can add 0.5 % to a country's per capita GNP
- Each year of schooling increases a woman's income by 10 to 20%

Women often spend a greater part of this income than men on improving the health, education and advancement of their children, families and communities.

- Healthy, educated and more equitable societies are likely to create more stable, secure environments for businesses and investors.
- Countries with higher scores on the ease of doing business have larger shares of women in the ranks of both entrepreneurs and workers.

*Women play a central role to achieve all the Millennium Development Goals: their economic importance should not be ignored*



# What About Now? Impact of the Financial Crises

- Female unemployment has grown disproportionately since 2008
- Women can be at higher risk of losing their jobs
  - More likely than men to work part-time or as temps
    - In a recession, these are often the workers that employers find easiest to let go.
  - However, because the loss of job in male-dominated sectors like construction has been so high, it's outweighed the impact of this extra risk factor for women
- Progress on MDG3 is now threatened by sluggish economic growth, diminished resources, fewer trade opportunities for the developing countries, and possible reductions in aid flows from donor nations.



# Some thoughts from experts

- Women have made and continue to make essential and enormous contributions to the economy, but that the benefits they themselves receive are not always commensurate with their contributions.
- Education is the main element for women's economic empowerment.
  - Elimination of illiteracy and implementation of universal access to education is the first step to economic empowerment.
  - The other two elements were achieving economic independence and political engagement.
- Approaches that work to empower women economically cannot be identical in all types of countries, for urban and rural settings, or for educated and illiterate women.
  - Initiatives of governments and civil society are important, but are not enough.
- High priority needs to be given to removing impediments to women's equal access in employment and trade, and not just to enact new laws to prevent discrimination.
- Harmonization of work and family responsibilities for women and men has been generally neglected.
- Mechanisms need to be put in place to ensure that the laws that promote equality for women are implemented and monitored.
  - The legislative levers that have been introduced offer great potential, but it is necessary to keep in mind that over thirty years of equal pay legislation in some countries have not closed the earnings gap.
- Finally, women need to be made aware of their rights and be equipped with self-confidence and knowledge to raise their voices and be successful in a patriarchal society. Women need to know their economic and civil rights, understand national and international laws, and acquire skills to communicate with decision-makers.



# Yes, We Can

- Like Malcolm Gladwell's book describes, we are at or near a *Tipping Point* with women's empowerment in many countries and regions around the world
  
- To actual "tip" and affect change, we need to continue to work on multiple levels
  - Policy- pockets where women are not empowered to own property etc
  - Cultural– huge debate in France now about the veil
  - Personal - we as individuals can empower women economically
    - Buy local!
    - Support your local female entrepreneurs!
    - Smile to your hard working colleagues!
  
- One day, it will be the norm for women everywhere to be empowered, economically and other wise



