

## Gender equality at the 2010 UN MDG review summit: statement to the UK Government

Women and girls make up 70 percent of the world's poorest people – a result of systemic discrimination. This discrimination is not only unjust; it is also steadily undermining progress on all of the Millennium Development Goals<sup>1</sup>. Unless the barriers that prevent women and girls from escaping poverty are explicitly addressed, development gains will remain beyond reach for the poorest and most vulnerable people.

The UK Gender and Development Network therefore recommends placing gender equality at the heart of the UK's strategy to accelerate progress to 2015, as part of the Government's broader commitment to fairness. In particular we urge the UK Government to focus on three priority areas in setting its position for the 2010 UN summit.

### 1. Expand economic opportunities for women

We strongly endorse the recommendation in the DFID Conference Chair's Summary<sup>2</sup> for a new global compact for the economic empowerment of women and girls. This must include renewed attention to removing barriers to female entrepreneurship by increasing women's access to business training and inclusive financial services – beyond small loans. Increased attention to monitoring and improving the *quality* of women's employment is also a priority, including by encouraging minimum standards for hiring, training and promoting women in private sector firms. Companies should be held accountable against existing frameworks, such as the United Nations Global Compact<sup>3</sup> and the Women's Empowerment Principles<sup>4</sup>, as a means to ensure employment practices are equitable and fair.

In the context of the global financial crisis, which has compounded the obstacles women face in securing decent employment, we further urge the UK Government to work with the World Bank, regional development banks and others to ensure that fiscal stimulus packages are gender-responsive. Stimulus packages must include employment targets for women as well as men, and protect and create jobs in all sectors, including those that typically employ women. Important steps include providing support to small businesses as well as larger ones, and increasing public expenditure not only in physical infrastructure such as the construction of roads, but also in social infrastructure such as care services.

### 2. Promote women's political participation and leadership

Rapidly accelerated investment in women's political participation and leadership is crucial to making progress on gender equality. Where women have political voice and are able to influence decisions on government priorities and resources, wider benefits to society are also achieved<sup>5</sup>. We urge the UK government to call for this investment as a central component of the proposed Global Development Action Plan to reach the MDGs by 2015. In particular, support for the adoption of affirmative action measures such as quotas, reservations and women standing for open seats must be a priority, alongside robust education, training and mentoring initiatives to ensure participation is meaningful.

### 3. Increase efforts to end violence against women and girls

Violence against women and girls continues to undermine all global development efforts, acting as an often invisible barrier to progress, peace and sustainable growth<sup>6</sup>. The UK Government has taken positive steps on this agenda to date, with concrete resources directed to tackling violence against women and girls in conflict and post-conflict contexts as well as recently appointing a Minister to lead a programme of work on violence against women and girls overseas. There remains a gap between this approach and wider development initiatives however, with no mention of violence against women and girls in any of the MDGs. We urge the UK Government to translate its recent investments in this area across all its development work by working with other governments to develop a global target and specific indicators for country and regional reporting on ending violence against women and girls as part of the core MDG framework.

<sup>1</sup> [http://www.actionaid.org.uk/doc\\_lib/aamdg.pdf](http://www.actionaid.org.uk/doc_lib/aamdg.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.dfid.gov.uk/Documents/publications/Conference-chairs-summary.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.unglobalcompact.org/>

<sup>4</sup> [http://www.unglobalcompact.org/Issues/human\\_rights/equality\\_means\\_business.html](http://www.unglobalcompact.org/Issues/human_rights/equality_means_business.html)

<sup>5</sup> [http://www.unifem.org/progress/2008/media/POWW08\\_chap02\\_politics.pdf](http://www.unifem.org/progress/2008/media/POWW08_chap02_politics.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> [http://www.actionaid.org.uk/doc\\_lib/destined\\_to\\_fail.pdf](http://www.actionaid.org.uk/doc_lib/destined_to_fail.pdf)