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# BREAKING BARRIERS

## Gender Perspectives and Empowerment of Women in Least Developed Countries

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**UN-OHRLS**

United Nations Office of the High Representative for the Least Developed Countries,  
Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States (UN-OHRLS)



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## Foreword

The United Nations is in the process of conducting a comprehensive midterm global review on the implementation of the 2001 Brussels Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries for the Decade 2001-2010. This review will culminate with the High-level Meeting of the 61<sup>st</sup> session of the General Assembly on 18-19 September 2006.

I take this opportunity to commend the efforts of the 50 LDCs in having undertaken their national reviews and for submitting their respective National Reports on the outcomes as well as their experience in implementing the seven commitments of the Brussels Programme for the period 2001 to 2005. LDCs have identified the obstacles that they have faced in implementing the Programme and indicated how they wish to proceed with further implementation. It is clear that the LDCs will need a firm re-commitment to the Brussels Programme by the international community and particularly their development partners in order to meaningfully achieve the objectives set out in the Programme. One of the most critical commitments is the achievement of gender parity in all aspects of society in the LDCs, including social and economic development. The LDCs have the main responsibility in this regard in the context of their own societies and countries. Societal and legal norms and practices must be made conducive to ensuring gender parity. They also need international resources and assistance in formulating and implementing their social and economic plans towards addressing the needs of women and children in all aspects, and especially in health, education, economic opportunities and participation in the decision-making processes.

The UN-OHRLLS is pleased to bring out this informative publication as an advocacy tool to draw the attention of the international community, including civil society and the private sector, to the state of human development in LDCs focussing on women and gender. It is a special effort to highlight gender issues as a very crucial element in the development efforts of LDCs.

It is my hope that the LDCs will be able to make significant progress in addressing gender issues in all their dimensions in the coming years, and that the international community will come forward with renewed political will to help and assist them in this common endeavour of ours.



Anwarul K. Chowdhury  
Under-Secretary-General and High Representative  
United Nations, New York

9 August 2006

Sixty years have passed since the founders of the United Nations inscribed, on the first page of our Charter, the equal rights of men and women. Since then, study after study has taught us that there is no tool for development more effective than the empowerment of women. No other policy is as likely to raise economic productivity, or to reduce infant and maternal mortality. No other policy is as sure to improve nutrition and promote health -- including the prevention of HIV/AIDS. No other policy is as powerful in increasing the chances of education for the next generation. And I would also venture that no policy is more important in preventing conflict, or in achieving reconciliation after a conflict has ended. But whatever the very real benefits of investing in women, the most important fact remains: women themselves have the right to live in dignity, in freedom from want and from fear.

Kofi Annan

Commission on the Status of Women marking Beijing +10

28 February 2005

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## Glossary

|                    |  |
|--------------------|--|
| AED                | Academy for Education Development  |
| AIDS               | Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome  |
| AWO                | Angolan Women's Organization   |
| Brussels Programme | The Brussels Programme of Action   |
| CBOs               | Community Based Organizations  |
| CEDAW              | Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women   |
| CEEWU              | Council for Economic Empowerment of Women in Uganda  |
| DAW                | Division for the Advancement of Women  |
| DDR                | Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration.   |
| DFID               | Department for International Development   |
| EFA                | Education for All  |
| FFRP               | Forum for Rwandan Women Parliamentarians   |
| GBI                | Gender Budget Initiatives  |
| GBV                | Gender Based Violence  |
| GDP                | Gross Domestic Product   |
| GER                | Gross Enrolment Rate   |
| GNI                | Gross National Income  |
| HIV                | Human Immunodeficiency Virus   |
| ICRW               | International Center on Research on Women  |
| ILO                | International Labour Organization  |
| IT                 | Information Technology   |
| LDCs               | Least Developed Countries  |
| MDGs               | Millennium Development Goals   |
| MTR                | Mid-Term Review  |
| NAPW               | National Action Plan for Women   |
| NER                | Net Enrolment Rate   |
| NGOWG              | Non Government Organization Working Group on Women, Peace and Security   |
| PRS                | Poverty Reduction Strategy   |
| TGNP               | Tanzania Gender Networking Programme   |
| UN                 | United Nations   |
| UNAIDS             | Joint United Nations Programme on HIV and AIDS   |
| UNICEF             | United Nation's Children's Fund  |
| UNCTAD             | United Nations Conference on Trade and Development   |
| UNDP               | United Nations Development Programme   |
| UNESCO             | United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation   |
| UNIFEM             | United Nations Development Fund for Women  |
| UN-OHRLLS          | United Nations Office of the High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States |
| UPE                | Universal Primary Education  |
| UWEAL              | Uganda Women Entrepreneur Association  |
| WHO                | World Health Organization  |
| WIRES              | Women's Information Resource Electronic Service  |

## **Executive Summary**

Gender inequality has serious social, political and economic implications. Women are particularly disadvantaged and, as they account for half of the world's population, the consequences are grave both individually and cumulatively for nations. The plight of women in the Least Developed Countries (LDCs) is particularly dire as they are commonly marginalized in societies that are already overwhelmed by poverty, underdevelopment and frequent unstable security conditions. Consequently, in conflicts, economic shocks or natural disasters, women are exposed to specific dangers to their person, their children, and their livelihoods.

The Programme of Action (commonly known as the Brussels Programme) for the Least Developed Countries for the Decade 2001-2010 adopted in May 2001 is a fast-track initiative to achieve substantial progress in poverty reduction and to promote sustainable development. The Brussels Programme involves seven commitments. Gender is addressed specifically under Commitment 3: building human and institutional capacity. Gender is also one of the ten cross-cutting themes prevalent across all of the Brussels Programme commitments

This report has been prepared in the context of the mid-term comprehensive global review of the Brussels Programme and examines the status of human development in LDCs by focusing on gender. Specifically, it assesses the status of women in LDCs as per the direction provided by the Programme's three areas: economic, social and political spheres. It highlights where LDCs and their development partners have been successful in meeting these commitments and identifies areas where urgent action is required.

The gender challenge for the LDCs is critical and specific actions with the help and support of their development partners, including civil society, private sector and all other stakeholders is absolutely essential to address this problem. Hence at the United Nations General Assembly's High-level Meeting in September 2006 it is critical for the international community to reaffirm commitments, and priorities with particular attention to gender issues to achieve the goals set out in the Brussels Programme.

# 1. Introduction

Gender equality remains an elusive goal across the world. Despite recent progress, clear disparities exist between genders in the economic, political and social spheres. The challenge is greatest in LDCs. Historical social structures resulting in the marginalization of women have been compounded by poverty and the vulnerabilities and weaknesses of these countries. Such circumstances have undermined their ability to improve the basic living conditions in their societies in respect of women and girls.

Any strategy aiming to ensure that LDCs enjoy the benefit of accelerated growth and sustainable development must include women. Addressing gender inequality and empowering women will substantially improve the human resource weaknesses in these countries. Despite significant achievements driven by international initiatives, including the Beijing Platform of 1995, the Millennium Declaration in 2000 and Brussels Programme, LDCs still have a long path to traverse to redress the economic, social and political inequalities that exist between genders.

## 1.1 At a Glance: Gender in LDCs

Statistics tell their own story about gender disparities in LDCs. Despite the lack of quality disaggregate data by gender; what exists indicates that much still needs to be achieved to improve gender parity in LDCs.

At a glance, women from LDCs are worse off compared to their counterparts in other developing countries, let alone those in the developed world. Least developed countries are the poorest of nations with nearly 50 per cent of their population living on less than \$1 a day. The percentage increases to 80 percent if the calculation is done on less than \$2. The gross national income (GNI) per capita averaged \$345 in 2004. Both these figures are significantly worse than the rest of the developing world. Poverty inevitably has a female face; worldwide the majority of those who live on less than a \$1 a day are women (United Nations 2000).

Almost all LDCs (48 out of 50) are parties to the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) with Afghanistan, Kiribati, Mauritania, Sao Tome & Principe and Timor Leste ratifying the Convention after the initiation of the Brussels Programme. Eight LDCs have also ratified the Optional Protocol to the Convention. Yet many LDCs still need to undertake a number of measures to meaningfully translate the Convention to actual equality of rights for women.

**Table 1: Gender in LDCs**

| Gender in LDC   | Least developed countries | Developing countries | World           |
|---|---------------------------|----------------------|-----------------|
| <b>Some general indicators</b>  |                           |                      |                 |
| Total population (thousands) 2004   | 741597                    | 5166574              | 6374050         |
| Gross National Income per capita (US\$) 2004  | 345                       | 1524                 | 6298            |
| % of population below \$1 a day (1993-2004 <sup>a</sup> )                               | 41                        | 22                   | 21              |
| <b>Gender and Health</b>  |                           |                      |                 |
| Life expectancy: females as a % of males 2004   | 104                       | 106                  | 106             |
| Antenatal care coverage (percentage, 1996-2004 <sup>a</sup> )                           | 59                        | 71                   | 71              |
| Skilled attendant at delivery (percentage, 1996-2004 <sup>a</sup> )                     | 35                        | 59                   | 63              |
| Lifetime risk of maternal death, 2001 (1 in:)   | 14                        | 61                   | 74              |
| Maternal mortality ration 2000 adjusted   | 890                       | 440                  | 440             |
| <b>Gender and HIV/AIDS</b>  |                           |                      |                 |
| Adult HIV prevalence rate (15-49) end 2003 estimate                                     | 3.2                       | 1.2                  | 1.1             |
| Estimated women living with HIV 2003 (in thousands)                                     | 6100                      | 16300                | 1700            |
| Contraceptive prevalence (%) 1996-2004  | 28                        | 60                   | 60              |
| <b>Gender and Education</b>   |                           |                      |                 |
| Adult literacy parity rates (females as a percentage of males, 2000-2004 <sup>a</sup> ) | 71                        | 84                   | 86              |
| Net primary school attendance ratio, boys (1996-2004 <sup>a</sup> )                     | 60                        | 76                   | 76              |
| Net primary school attendance ratio, girls (1996-2004 <sup>a</sup> )                    | 55                        | 72                   | 72              |
| Net secondary school attendance ratio, boys (1996-2004 <sup>a</sup> )                   | 21                        | 40 <sup>b</sup>      | 40 <sup>b</sup> |
| Net secondary school attendance ratio, girls (1996-2004 <sup>a</sup> )                  | 19                        | 37 <sup>b</sup>      | 37 <sup>b</sup> |

<sup>a</sup>Data refer to the most recent year available during the period specified

<sup>b</sup>Excludes China

Source: The United Nations Children Fund (2006) *The State of the World's Children* New York, UNICEF.

Health indicators confirm the difficult situation of women in LDCs. Maternal death is significantly higher in LDCs as are actual maternal mortality ratios. Annually, there are 890 pregnancy related deaths per 100,000 live births. Predictably this correlates with poor health care provision. Women in LDCs are less likely to have a skilled attendant at delivery and comparatively lower antenatal coverage.

Adult (15-49) HIV/AIDS prevalence rate in LDCs is almost three times higher than in the rest of the developing world. Of the 11 million adults living with HIV/AIDS in LDCs in 2003, over six million were women – a significantly larger number than men (UNICEF 2006). Contraceptive prevalence was also considerably lower.

Education for women and girls has economic and social spill over effects on society. In LDCs, female education continues to lag behind. Across the board, for both girls and boys school attendance ratios are lower than in the comparator regions. Within the LDCs, girls' attendance ratios are lower than that of boys across both primary and secondary schools. Figures on adult literacy further indicate that women are lagging behind. Adult literacy parity rates indicate that female literacy rates are 71 per cent of that of men.

## 1.2. Gender Equality and Empowerment: the Brussels Programme

The Brussels Programme has as its over-arching objective to make substantial progress towards halving poverty by 2015 and promoting sustainable development. The emphasis is on including women, who are the greater part of those affected by poverty. To achieve this, the Brussels Programme encompasses goals, commitments, priorities and follow-up actions which serve to direct, invigorate and focus the international community to help LDCs 'catch-up'. There also exists a framework of partnerships, under LDCs ownership, between LDCs and their development partners, to generate concrete actions in areas outlined in the Brussels Programme.

### Box 1: Brussels Programme Commitments

|               |  |
|---------------|--|
| Commitment 1: | Fostering a people-centred policy framework                        |
| Commitment 2: | Good governance at national and international levels               |
| Commitment 3: | Building human and institutional capacities                        |
| Commitment 4: | Building productive capacities to make globalization work for LDCs |
| Commitment 5: | Enhancing the role of trade in development                         |
| Commitment 6: | Reducing vulnerability and protecting the environment              |
| Commitment 7: | Mobilizing financial resources                                     |

The Brussels Programme is composed of seven commitments, ten cross-cutting priorities and 30 goals, including those that are common with the MDGs. Mutually shared commitments were adopted by LDCs and their partners to produce an enabling environment for LDCs to pursue a sustainable path towards economic growth. Gender issues are discussed under almost all the commitments and are one of the explicit cross-cutting priorities. As part of the events leading up to the Third United Nation Conference for Least Developed Countries held in Brussels in May 2001, a preparatory workshop, entitled LDCs: Building Capacities for Mainstreaming Gender in Development Strategies was held in Cape Town, South Africa in March, 2001. The objective was "...to discuss capacity building to mainstream gender into the development strategies to reduce poverty and increase gender equality in LDCs" (UNCTAD, 2001). The Workshop made recommendations under five key areas: Poverty Reduction Strategies and Gender Equality, Engendering National Budgets and Development Strategies, Gender Equality and Trade, Engendering Strategies and microcredit. These recommendations formed the basis of issues considered on gender at the Third United Nations Conference for Least Developed Countries and contributed to the framing of the Brussels Programme.

Different aspects of gender empowerment and equality are discussed under each of the seven commitments of the Brussels Programme. For instance, under Commitment 2 on good governance, the Brussels Programme states, "...to fully protect and promote gender equality, non-discrimination and the empowerment of women as effective means contributing to eradication of poverty, elimination of hunger, combating disease and stimulating growth and sustainable development." Under Commitment 4, which focuses on building productive capacities to make globalization work for LDCs, the aim is "strengthening local institutions and enacting policies and legislation that provide for more equitable and secure access to ownership and control of natural resources, particularly land, water, fisheries and forests, by both women and men."



Gender and women issues are most explicitly dealt with under Commitment 3: building human and institutional capacity. Objectives relating to gender are covered within each area highlighted under these commitments, including social infrastructure and social service delivery, population, education and training, health, nutrition and sanitation, and social integration.

Gender is one of the ten cross-cutting priorities emphasized under the Brussels Programme, along with poverty eradication, employment, governance at the national and international levels, capacity building, sustainable development, special problems of landlocked and small island LDCs, and challenges faced by LDCs affected by conflict. Of the total 30 goals set out under the Brussels Programme, eight of them explicitly address women (Box 2). The goals cover providing access to reproductive health care, ensuring female access to free primary education, achieving 50 per cent improvement in adult literacy, particularly for women, eliminating gender disparity in primary and secondary education, reducing maternal mortality and reducing HIV infection rates.

### Box 2: Brussels Programme Goals Directly Related to Women

(Relevant paragraphs shown in parenthesis)

- Goal 5:** Making accessible, through the primary health system, reproductive health to all individuals of appropriate ages as soon as possible and no later than the year 2015 (34(a))
- Goal 6:** Making available the widest achievable range of safe, effective, affordable and acceptable family planning and contraceptive methods (36(b))
- Goal 7:** Ensuring that by 2015 all children, particularly girls, children in difficult circumstances and those belonging to ethnic minorities, have access to and complete, free and compulsory primary education of good quality (36(a))
- Goal 8:** Achieving a 50 per cent improvement in levels of adult literacy by 2015 especially for women, and equitable access to basic and continuing education for all adults (36(b))
- Goal 9:** Eliminating gender disparities in primary and secondary education by 2005 and achieving gender equality in education by 2015, with a focus on ensuring girls' full and equal access to and achievement in basic education of good quality (36(c))
- Goal 12:** Reducing the maternal mortality rate by three-quarters of the current rate by 2015 (38(c))
- Goal 15:** Reducing HIV infection rates in persons 15-24 years of age by 2005 in all countries, and by 25 per cent in the most affected countries (38(f))
- Goal 16:** Increase the percentage of women receiving maternal and pre-natal care by 60 per cent 38(g))

## 1.3. The Status of Gender at the Mid-Term Review<sup>1</sup>

Significant inroads have been made towards gender parity and equality in LDCs over the past decade, particularly in the social and political sphere. Women in Rwanda have achieved the highest political representation compared to anywhere else in the world. Liberia has elected the first female president of the African continent, Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf.

Comparisons between 1990/91 and 2002/03 figures indicate that enrolment rates across all LDCs have been on the rise<sup>2</sup> as are the ratios of girls to boys enrolment in primary education (UNICEF 2006)<sup>3</sup>. Similarly, ratios of girls to boys in secondary education suggest that the situation of girls has improved in LDCs.<sup>4</sup> Overall contraceptive use among married women aged 15-49 in LDCs has also increased during 1990/95 and 1996/04. The exceptions have been Rwanda and Angola, both post-conflict zones.

Yet, these improvements do not account for the low starting point of many of these countries, which indicates that, despite these improvement, the tasks facing LDCs in attaining gender equality is still considerable. There are also large variations between countries. For example, while the maternal mortality ratio (per 100,000) is as low as 130 for the Solomon Islands and Samoa, it is as high as 2000 for Sierra Leone and 1700 for Angola. Although data is sparse, the data that exist also suggest that HIV prevalence among pregnant women (15-24) in capital cities also shows a large variation. For Senegal the figure is as low as 1.1 per cent and as high as 27.8 per cent for Lesotho with Zambia coming a close second at 22.1 per cent. In the economic sphere, women's access to economic resources continues to be limited. In Mauritania, only 18.7 per cent of women have land titles in their own names. Similarly in Nepal in 2001 only 11 per cent of the total households reported women owning land (United Nations 2005).

<sup>1</sup> This section draws on data compiled for tables prepared by the Office of the High Representative for Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States for the Secretary-General's 2006 report on implementation of the Programme of Action for the least developed countries for the decade 2001-2010, (United Nations document A/61/82-E/2006/74).

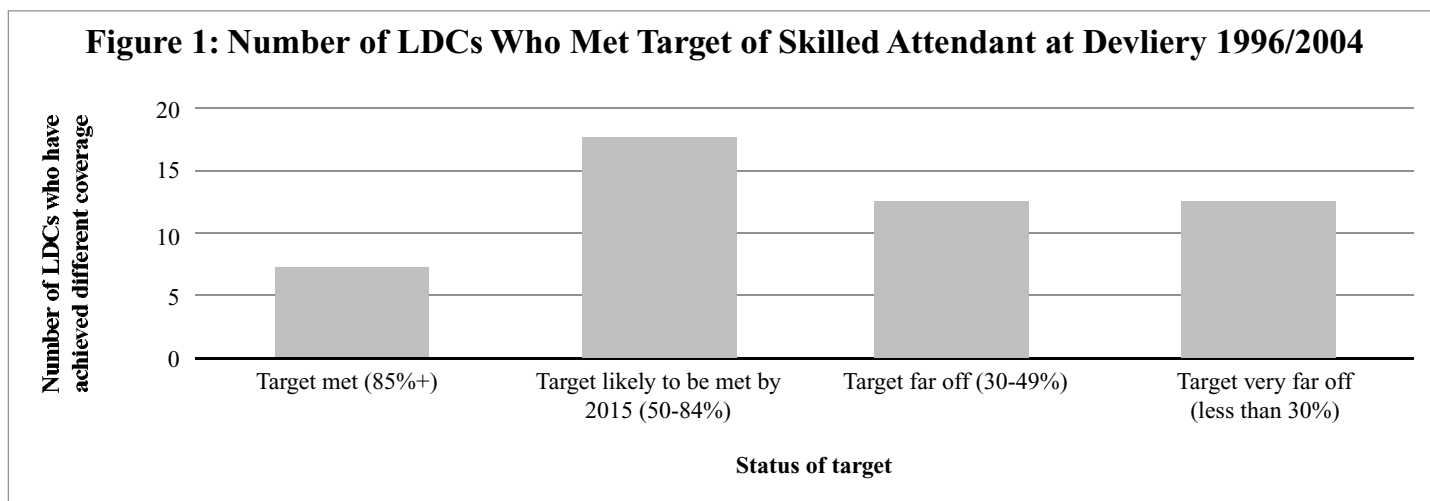
<sup>2</sup> The exceptions are Myanmar, Solomon Islands and Zambia.

<sup>3</sup> For country where data exists, the exceptions are Burundi, Eritrea, Lesotho and United Republic of Tanzania. As the ratios have been greater than 1 in the latter two countries, this indicates already high enrolment of girls.

<sup>4</sup> For country where data exists, the exceptions are Comoros, Lesotho, and Myanmar.

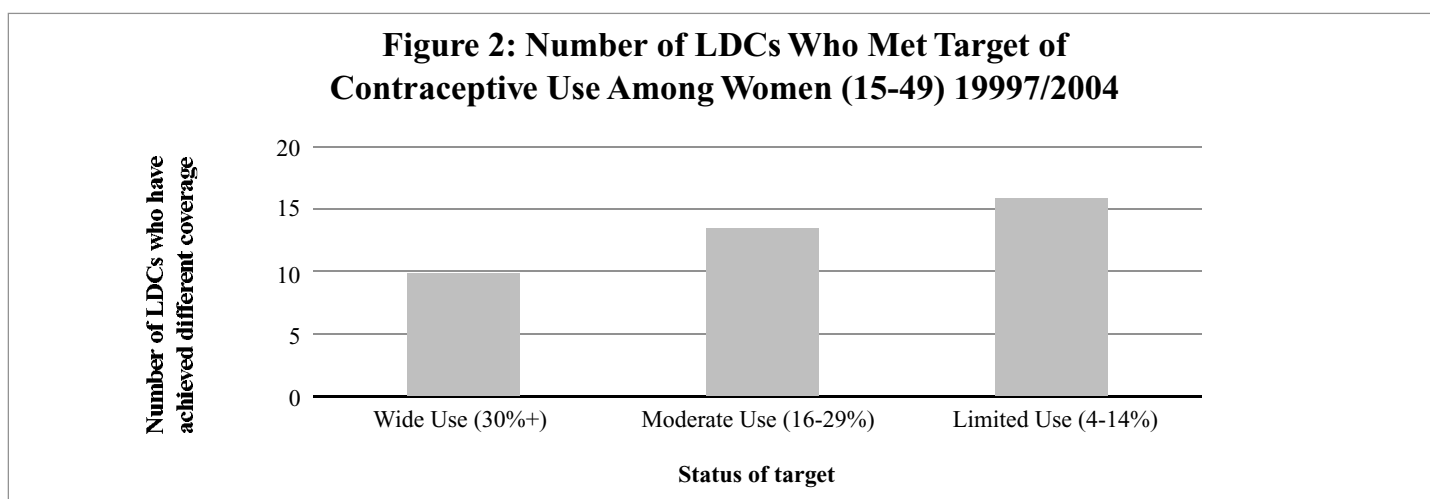
UN-OHRLLS<sup>5</sup> has identified a number of indicators for each of the 30 goals of the Brussels Programme. How the 50 LDCs have fared on these gender-related goals, highlights what has been achieved towards gender empowerment and equality.

**Goal 5: Making accessible, through the primary health care system, reproductive health to all individuals of appropriate ages as soon as possible and no later than the year 2015.**



The relevant indicator here is *skilled attendant at delivery*. Of the 50 LDCs, only seven countries have achieved above 85 per cent coverage of a skilled attendant being present at the time of delivery. Seventeen countries have achieved between 50-84 per cent coverage and could potentially meet the 2015 MDG target of 85 percent plus coverage, while 26 countries remain far behind and require a significant commitment from the international community to help achieve this target.

**Goal 6: Making available the widest achievable range of safe, effective, affordable and acceptable family planning and contraceptive methods.**

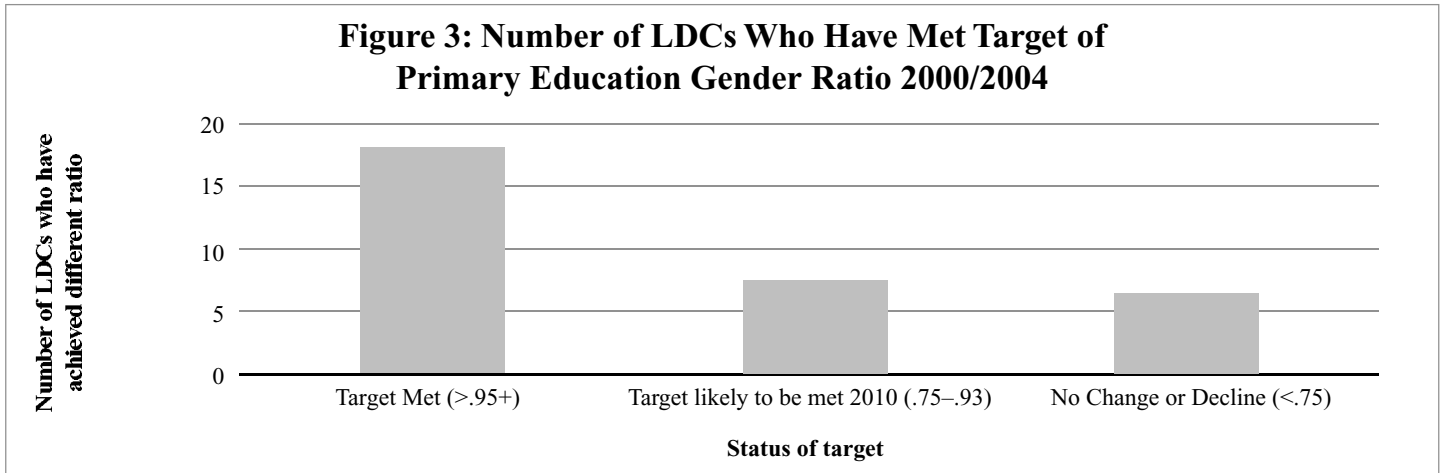


The relevant indicator here is *contraceptive use among women aged 15-49 in any union, any method*. Of the 39 countries for which data exists 10 countries have wide usage (taken to be above 30 percent coverage), 13 countries have moderate usage (16-29 percent coverage) while 16 countries have limited contraceptive usage (4-14 percent coverage). Over the period 1990/1996 and 1997-2004, 13 countries saw rapid increase of more than 10% to meet this goal.

**Goal 7: Ensuring that by 2015 all children, particularly girls, children in difficult circumstances and those belonging to ethnic minorities, have access to and complete, free and compulsory primary education of good quality; and**

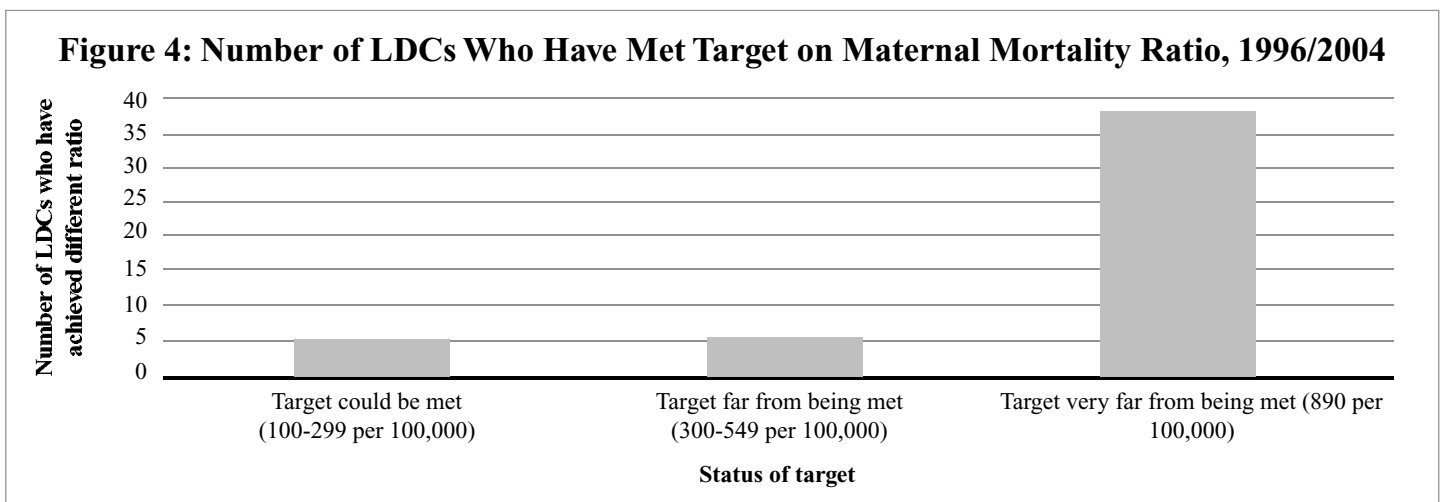
<sup>5</sup> This section draws upon analysis on LDC achievement on targets conducted by Robert Johnston, UN-OHRLLS consultant.

**Goal 9: Eliminating gender disparities in primary and secondary education by 2005 and achieving gender equality in education by 2015, with a focus on ensuring girls' full and equal access to and achievement in basic education of good quality.**



The indicator relevant here is the *primary education gender ratio*. The information from LDCs data is not sufficiently sophisticated to assess minority status; what exist are aggregate primary education gender ratios for the overall population. On this indicator, LDCs have performed best. Eighteen countries have already achieved parity (+.95) and seven are on track to meet it by 2010 (.75-.93). However, six countries have seen no change (less than .75) in ratios indicating little or no progress. As to secondary education, data only exists for 21 countries (no figure provided). Of those, only seven countries have met the target of gender parity and six are on track to meet it by 2010.

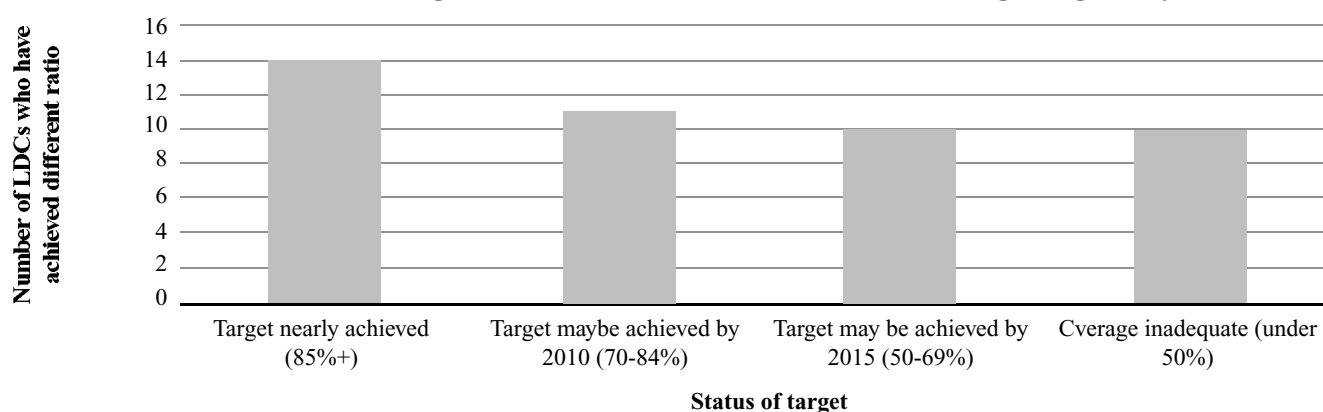
**Goal 12: Reducing the maternal mortality rate by three-quarters of the current rate by 2015.**



Here the relevant indicator is *maternal mortality ratio, pregnancy-related death per 100,000 live births*. Least Developed Countries on aggregate have performed badly on this indicator. Only five countries have a maternal mortality rate between 100-299 per 100,000 births, and hence are in the position to potentially meet this target by 2015. In the remaining LDCs maternal deaths are extremely high compared to other regional groupings.

**Goal 16: Increase the percentage of women receiving maternal and pre-natal care by 60 per cent.**

**Figure 5: Number of LDCs Who Have Met Target of Women Receiving Antenatal Care At Least Once During Pregnancy**



The relevant indicator is women *receiving antenatal care at least once during pregnancy from skilled health personnel*. Of the 45 countries for which we have data, 35 have nearly achieved this target or potentially can achieve it by 2015. Improving antenatal care has a direct impact on maternal mortality as well as maternal morbidity and the improvement of these indicators has a significant impact on a country's human development index. The inroads that have been made by LDCs in extending antenatal care does not compare well against these countries' poor performance on maternal mortality ratios (see Goal 12). This suggests that the challenge is beyond that of extending access –a necessary but insufficient measure –to ensuring access of a reasonable “quality”.

## 2. Gender and the Economic Sphere

### 2.1. Engendering the Economic Tools of Development

Lifting women from poverty is about equalizing their opportunities in the economic, social and political spheres. Moreover, these initiatives have to be pursued on a consistent and permanent basis in order to affect a transformative change in women's lives and contribute to the eradication of poverty.

Equalizing opportunities for gender and gender empowerment is fundamentally about 'gender mainstreaming' - including into the policy process all aspects of development theory and practice of *both* men and women. Gender roles are social constructs that define relationships between men and women. Hence, equalizing opportunities, empowering women, and ending feminization of poverty depends critically on negotiating with men to accept newly defined roles and responsibilities in all spheres of society including negotiating the power basis of gender relationships.

Engendering economic tools of development has been a key strategy that LDCs and their partners have pursued. United Nations organizations and their partners have worked at mainstreaming gender in order to ensure that within their own programmes, both genders are equal beneficiaries of all policy and programme support (UNDP 2006). The United Nations agencies have worked with governments to ensure that economic planning processes and other necessary economic tools are gender sensitive. This has included gender sensitizing budgets (Gender Budget Initiatives- (GBI)), monitoring and reporting processes (including the MDGs), and legislation and the collection of data. In total, 49 out of the 50 LDCs have established national mechanisms for gender equality and empowerment.

Gender Budget Initiatives have been implemented in a number of countries including Tanzania, Rwanda, Cambodia and Nepal. In Afghanistan, UNIFEM has worked actively to engender the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP) and the broader national planning process by following a two-pronged strategy. This has included a process of consultation led by the Ministry of Women Affairs with 26 other entities/commissions/other government units, civil society and international donors to develop a National Action Plan for Women (NAPW). The second component has been advocacy to ensure that the interim PRSP (also known as the Afghan National Development Strategy) includes the NAPW as a commitment.<sup>6</sup> A similar engendering exercise has been taking place in Cambodia to ensure that beyond Goal 3 of the MDGs (promote gender equality and empower women) all goals of the MDGs are engendered for the upcoming Cambodia MDG Country Report. UNIFEM worked within the various government planning and policy processes to ensure that a stronger gender perspective was reflected.<sup>7</sup>

#### Box 3: Gender Budgeting Initiatives in Tanzania

The Tanzania Gender Budget Initiative was started by Tanzania Gender Networking Programme (TGNP)'s Feminist Activism Coalition (FemAct) and is a well-respected lobbying initiative that has had the support of a number of multilateral and bilateral donors including UNIFEM. The objective of the TGNP's GBI initiative has been to encourage policy makers, economists, statisticians and researchers to adopt a more progressive and gender responsive approach in Tanzania's budgetary processes. The project has first focused on information gathering, building conceptual clarity and creating entry points with key policy makers. The second phase, beginning in 2000, has focused on building gender capacity of key policy planners and at the grass root levels in the areas of gender planning and macro-economic policy. UNIFEM's support has been in the particular area of engendering macro-economic tools and frameworks to improve gender interpretations for national Gross Domestic Product (GDP) forecasting and modelling. This GBI initiative has developed checklists which have helped planners to mainstream gender issues into the medium term economic planning process. The NGO has been effective in leveraging its advocacy position and was able to seize opportunities to effectively collaborate with the key planning ministries (Balmori 2003).

(See [http://www.tgnp.co.tz/GBI\\_Campaign.htm](http://www.tgnp.co.tz/GBI_Campaign.htm))

Although these efforts demonstrate ground-breaking work by the partners, these initiatives are only the start to what is required to engender the policy process in LDCs. A recent UNDP report that reviews the National MDG Reports through a gender lens reviewed 21 LDCs. The study evaluated how each report covered issues of gender. For example, in references to Goal 1-Eradication of Extreme Poverty – it measured each report's usage of gender disaggregated data and how each national poverty plan targeted support for women. Out of the 21 LDCs covered, only four countries used gender disaggregated data (Benin, Cape Verde, Rwanda and Cambodia). As to gender targeted support, no LDCs in the national poverty plan directly argued for targeted support for women (UNDP 2005).

<sup>6</sup> See <http://afghanistan.unifem.org/achievement.htm>

<sup>7</sup> See <http://www.unifem-ecogov-apas.org/>

Despite the call for gender disaggregated data by gender in the Beijing Platform for Action, collection of data remains dismal. Without adequate disaggregate statistics the task of advocacy, planning and implementation for understanding the magnitude and eliminating gender inequality becomes even more difficult. The United Nation report, *The World's Women: Progress in Statistic* (2005) examines the status of gender disaggregated statistics across the world. Table 2 shows the number of LDCs that reported statistics by gender in areas of mortality, education, and economic activity. Excluding statistics on primary education enrolment<sup>8</sup>, few LDCs report gender disaggregated statistics in any of these areas more than once. Continuous reporting of statistics for five years or more is a rarity, except in the case of enrolment of primary education. Additionally, statistics on economic activities disaggregated by gender are particularly weak and these are critical for the purposes of economic planning and analysis.

**Table 2: Number of LDCs that Reported Select Mortality, Education and Economic Activity Indicators by Gender**

| STATISTICS ON MORTALITY             | NO OF LDCS | STATISTICS ON MORTALITY                        | NO OF LDCS | STATISTICS ON MORTALITY                 | NO OF LDCS |
|-------------------------------------|------------|--|------------|---|------------|
| <b>Death</b>                        |            | <b>Enrol. of Primary Education<sup>a</sup></b> |            | <b>Economically Active Population</b>   |            |
| Total, at least once                | 14         | Total, at least once                           | 48         | Total, at least once                    | 14         |
| By sex, at least once               | 9          | By sex, at least once                          | 47         | By sex, at least once                   | 13         |
| Sex and age, at least once          | 5          | Sex and age, at least once <sup>b</sup>        | 34         | Sex and age, at least once <sup>b</sup> | 12         |
| By sex and age, at least five years | 1          | By sex and age, at least five years            | 35         | By sex and age, at least five years     | 0          |
| <b>Death by Cause</b>               |            | <b>Literacy<sup>c</sup></b>                    |            | <b>Unemployd Population</b>             |            |
| Total, at least once                | 3          | Total  | 13         | Total, at least once                    | 9          |
| By sex, at least once               | 3          | Total by sex                                   | 12         | By sex, at least once                   | 9          |
| Sex and age, at least once          | 3          | Total by sex and age                           | 12         | Sex and age, at least once              | 6          |
| By sex and age, at least five years | 1          |  |            | By sex and age, at least five years     | 0          |
|                                     |            | <b>Education Attainment<sup>c</sup></b>        |            | <b>Employed Pop. By Occupation</b>      |            |
|                                     |            | Total  | 9          | Total                                   | 10         |
|                                     |            | Total by sex                                   | 9          | Total by sex                            | 9          |
|                                     |            | Total by sex and age                           | 8          | Total by sex and age                    | 0          |

<sup>a</sup> Reported data for the academic years 1995/1996 to 2001/2002 (excluding the academic year 1997/1998)

<sup>b</sup> Reported data at least once for the academic years 1998/1999 to 2001/2002

<sup>c</sup> From population censuses

Source: United Nations (2005c). *The World's Women 2005: Progress in Statistics*. New York, United Nations.

## 2.2. The Feminization of Poverty and the Informal Economy

Women are more likely than men to be employed in the informal economy in developing countries, and are usually limited to a narrow range of activities in more precarious types of employment. Women's income from such activities tend to be extremely low and there are limited opportunities for women, particularly those in single female headed households, to break out of the cycle of poverty (UNIFEM 2005). Although more men than women are in the workforce 60 to 80 per cent of the informal workforce in developing countries is women (ILO 2004).

Poverty drives women to the informal economy. In conflict zones where economic infrastructure has been destroyed, uncertainty persists and women head a larger share of single headed households, poverty is a grave reality. Structural adjustment and globalization have also shrunk 'formal' arenas of work, causing 'informal' areas of employment to grow. Facing poverty, poor people work regardless of the source of their income or the precariousness of the work involved (Chen et al. 2004). In LDCs, where severe poverty persists and, in many cases, where inequalities are growing, women sustain themselves by entering the informal economy. Despite the worldwide decline in poverty<sup>9</sup> in sub-Saharan Africa for example – the location of a large percentage of the LDCs – poverty has increased (UNIFEM 2005). Here 84 per cent of the women non-agricultural workers are employed in the informal economy as compared to 63 percent of the non-agricultural male workers. In a number of LDCs, this share is larger. For example, in Benin and Chad this share is 97 and 85 per cent respectively (ILO 2002).

<sup>8</sup> Many LDCs also maintain gender disaggregated data for secondary education.

<sup>9</sup> Poverty here is defined as the number of people living on less than a \$1 a day.

At the same time, the nature of employment in the informal sector prevents women from actually breaking out of the cycle of poverty. Segregation by type of work is also a feature of the informal sector and this reinforces the inability of women to break out the cycle of poverty. The segmentation of the informal sector broadly follows the following hierarchy: employers, own account operators, unpaid family workers, employees of informal enterprises, other informal wage workers and home workers. Accompanying this segmentation are two stylized facts: (i) that there are significant differential incomes between employers and home-workers, the two extremes of the segmented market and (ii) men tend to dominate the employer category while women are predominately home workers (Chen et al 2004). Hence as women dominate the home worker segment, they are the lower wage earners. This reinforces their inability to break out of the cycle of poverty and is exacerbated by their lack of access to “voice”, formalized institutional power and resources to scale up their economic activities.

A number of initiatives can help break women out of the vicious cycle of poverty linked with informal employment. Some measures include engendering microfinance, training and technologies for capacity building of female entrepreneurs in the informal sector, enforcing women’s property rights and workers’ rights. Such policies would help women break the cycle of poverty. A number of projects have enabled women entrepreneurs through the use of technology. For example, internet technology is being used to provide information on both credit sources as well as other aspects of production to help women to stream line production. In Uganda, The Council for Economic Empowerment of Women in Uganda (CEEWU) has established a system known as Women’s Information Resource Electronic Service (WIRES) which provides information on credit and other activities to help women as entrepreneurs. Information technology (IT) is also helping women fishers become more effective in transporting their produce to where there is a demand for their produce. The Grand Coast Fishing Operators’ Union, a women’s organization which markets fish, employs IT to ensure that supply is going to demand sources along the coast (Halfkin and Tarrgat 2001). Box 4 highlights how the non-profit sector is enabling women entrepreneurs in Bangladesh by loaning resources to buy phones.

#### **Box 4: Grameen Phone Ladies: Citizen Sector Organizations and Business**

In 1996, The Grameen Bank combined its expertise in microfinance with the rise of the latest digital wireless technology and formed Grameen Phone. Grameen Phone is a for-profit corporation which has a nationwide license to operate a mobile network in Bangladesh. Through its non-profit partner, Grameen Telecom, the project runs the Village Phone Programme which dispenses phones to the rural areas via a loan. The primary beneficiaries of the project have been women. Over 190,000 phones have been dispersed. Villagers buy these phones through a loan from the Grameen Bank and then use them to run phone kiosks operated as owner-operated enterprises. Approximately 75 per cent of these owner operators are women. These women-run businesses not only generate income but also have other benefits. Women use phones to connect to their relatives and greater network and to link up with health and education services. It has also been used for getting agricultural price information.

### **2.3 Globalization, Trade and Women**

Globalization and changing global trade relations have a differential impact on different genders. Recent discourse on globalization, trade and economic development have assumed that liberalized markets and technological changes have a positive impact on poverty reduction and that women and men are equal beneficiaries (Sever 2006). This is not so. Theoretically, at least, the effect of trade is neutral, regardless of gender, but in reality its effect is filtered through existing inequalities in power, resources (land, credit, and information) and opportunities that exist between men and women (UNCTAD 2003). Women’s occupations and sources of livelihood determine whether they will be able to take advantage of the new opportunities brought about by trade liberalization.

Given the inequalities between genders in LDCs as well as the international trading environment, it is more than likely that the effect of trade and globalisation could be negative rather than positive. A number of factors makes such a situation this possible. As discussed earlier, women in LDCs are either employed in the agricultural sector or otherwise largely employed in the informal sector. In other parts of the world the proportion of economically active women working in the agricultural sector is declining. In LDCs however it has been increasing and is likely to increase further by 2010 (UNCTAD 2003). Yet agricultural goods are struggling on the global market. This is particularly so for agricultural produce from LDCs. Small farmers from poor countries are not able to compete globally and benefits from such trade are questionable. Together these factors suggest that women in agricultural occupations in LDCs may not benefit to the extent they otherwise could from trade (UNCTAD 2003).

The situation is not much better in urban settings of LDCs where women are largely employed in the informal sector. Although trade may generate greater growth in employment in the informal sector, women remain economically and politically weak and may not necessarily be the key beneficiaries. As women have few employment alternatives, they may not be able to negotiate the terms of their employment or claim their due labour rights (Sever 2006). Consequently women may not be able to negotiate a fair wage. One example of this is Bangladesh. Between 1990 and 1997 real wages of lowest skilled workers in the garment industry declined by 28 per cent despite the increase in value added per worker increasing over the same period (Chen et al 2004). If, on the other hand, trade and globalization undercuts small micro-enterprises – where many women are self-employed – women will be net losers from trade.

Women in LDCs require support in order to enable them to take advantage of the potential gains from trade. They need entitlements to assets and properties. Trade also needs to be engendered and policy makers need to account for the differential impact of trade on women in their policy process. Policy interventions can countervail women's lack of assets, for example gender sensitive financing. Not new, conventionally this policy has focused on micro-finance. However, in order for women to take advantage of the opportunities from trade, up-scaling production requires financing to be up-scaled too. Female entrepreneurs also require necessary training and access to information in order to take advantage of opportunities in global markets. One project which has incorporated some of these features is the Uganda Women Entrepreneur Association (UWEAL) described in Box 5.

### **Box 5: Uganda Women Entrepreneurs Association (UWEAL)**

UWEAL offers a wide range of services to female entrepreneurs in Uganda. Central to its approach is tailoring its capacity building activities to the specific member's needs. The Association also focuses on helping women develop networks, enabling women to share ideas and experiences about running a business. They offer programmes which teach women computer skills and how to write financial and business proposals. UWEAL, on behalf of its members, also actively engages in policy dialogue and participates in debates on legislation—particularly, legislation involving property rights. UWEAL for example has lobbied the African Development Bank to offer guarantee loans to women. UWEAL currently also serves as the centre for the International Trade Centre-Supported 'Access Programme. This links UWEAL's programmes with other initiatives and trainings on export-related knowledge and information. UWEAL works in seven districts of Uganda and currently has over 1000 members.

Source: Sever 2006



## 3. Gender and the Social Sphere

### 3.1 The Rights of Women: Which Rights?

At the most fundamental level, underlying all policy interventions on gender empowerment and equality requires LDCs to commit themselves to the political, human and reproductive rights exemplified in the CEDAW. Countries who are signatories to the Convention are required to end all discrimination against women. They are required to eliminate discriminatory laws and adopt those that favour gender equality, protect women against discrimination, and prevent other parties (organizations, enterprises and persons) from discriminating against women. By becoming signatories and implementing these policies at the national level, LDCs set up the framework which underpins all other types of policies that empower women. Annex 1 lists all LDCs and their current status on the CEDAW and the accompanying Optional Protocol.

Most of the LDCs have ratified the CEDAW but few LDCs have opted to ratify the Optional Protocol, the instrument that recognizes the competence of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination of Women to hear complaints on violations of CEDAW by individuals or groups. A number of countries have also signed the Convention “with reservations” on certain articles. Compliance at the national level has been poor. Countries need to ensure that *de jure* rights are in fact enjoyed *de facto*. Some LDCs have promulgated gender laws but customary laws and practices still prevail and hamper these initiatives. As Table 3 shows few LDCs offer equal inheritance, property or divorce rights to women.

Even when laws are legislated, few women can take advantage of them. The lack of literacy and income, locational disadvantages and/or unequal power relationships between men and women prevent women from availing their legal rights (Zuckerman and Greenburg 2004). The inability to avail rights or the lack of institutionalized rights underlies why women are disempowered. One area which has dire economic consequences is the lack of property and inheritance rights. Women are rarely allowed to inherit, dispose or manage land or other assets. Women who lack assets are unable to put up collateral to borrow money and are often left to seek out a marginal existence in the informal sector. The lack of assets could also drive women to prostitution making them more prone to HIV/AIDS and social exploitation and discrimination. Weak property rights and inheritance rights are also likely to lead to female homelessness and economic destitution.

**Table 3: Access of Women to Equal Inheritance, Property and Divorce Rights**

| REGION | Country                                     | Equal Inheritance Rights | Equal Property Rights | Equal Divorce Rights |
|--------|---|--------------------------|-----------------------|----------------------|
| AFRICA | ANGOLA                                      | yes                      | yes                   | yes                  |
|        | BENIN                                       | no <sup>a</sup>          | no <sup>a</sup>       | n.a.                 |
|        | BURKINA FASO                                | no                       | yes                   | no                   |
|        | BURUNDI                                     | no                       | no                    | n.a.                 |
|        | CAPE VERDE                                  | yes                      | n.a.                  | yes                  |
|        | CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC                    | yes                      | yes                   | yes                  |
|        | CHAD  | yes                      | yes                   | n.a.                 |
|        | COMOROS                                     | n.a.                     | yes                   | no                   |
|        | DEMOCRATIC PEOPLE'S<br>REUBLIC OF THE CONGO | no                       | no <sup>a</sup>       | no                   |
|        | DJIBOUTI EQUATORIAL                         |                          |                       |                      |
|        | GUINEA ERITREA                              | n.a.                     | no                    | n.a.                 |
|        | ETHIOPIA                                    | yes                      | yes                   | no                   |
|        | GAMBIA                                      | no                       | n.a.                  | no                   |
|        | GUINEA                                      | no                       | no                    | no                   |
|        | GUINEA BISSAU                               | no                       | no                    | no                   |
|        | LESOTHO                                     | no                       | no                    | no                   |
|        | LIBERIA                                     |                          |                       |                      |
|        | MADAGASCAR                                  | no                       | no                    | n.a.                 |
|        | MALAWI                                      | n.a.                     | yes                   | yes                  |
|        | MALI  | no                       | no                    | no                   |
|        | MAURITANIA                                  |                          |                       |                      |
|        | MOZAMBIQUE                                  | no                       | no                    | n.a.                 |
| NIGER  | no  | no                       | no                    |                      |
| RWANDA | yes   | yes                      | yes                   |                      |

Table continued on Page 12

Table 3 cont'd

| REGION                                 | Country                          | Equal Inheritance Rights | Equal Property Rights | Equal Divorce Rights |
|--|----------------------------------|--------------------------|-----------------------|----------------------|
|  | SAO TOME & PRINCIPE              |                          |                       |                      |
|  | SENEGAL                          | no                       | no                    | yes                  |
|  | SIERRA LEONE                     | no                       | no                    | no                   |
|  | SOMALIA                          |                          |                       |                      |
|  | SUDAN                            |                          |                       |                      |
|  | TOGO                             | no                       | no                    | no                   |
|  | UGANDA                           | no                       | no                    | no                   |
|  | UNITED REPUBLIC OF TANZANIA      | no                       | no                    | no                   |
| <b>LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN</b> | ZAMBIA                           | no                       | no                    | no                   |
|  | HAITI                            | n.a.                     | n.a.                  | no                   |
|  | AFGHANISTAN                      |                          |                       |                      |
|  | BANGLADESH                       | no                       | no                    | n.a.                 |
|  | BHUTAN                           | yes                      | n.a.                  | yes                  |
|  | CAMBODIA                         | n.a.                     | yes                   | yes                  |
| <b>ASIA AND PACIFIC</b>                | KIRIBATI                         |                          |                       |                      |
|  | LAO PEOPLE'S DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC | n.a.                     | yes                   | n.a.                 |
|  | MALDIVES                         |                          |                       |                      |
|  | MYANMAR                          |                          |                       |                      |
|  | NEPAL                            | no                       | no                    | no                   |
|  | SAMOA                            |                          |                       |                      |
|  | SOLOMON ISLANDS                  |                          |                       |                      |
|  | TIMOR LESTE                      |                          |                       |                      |
|  | TUVALU                           |                          |                       |                      |
|  | VANUATA                          |                          |                       |                      |
|  | YEMEN                            | n.a.                     | n.a.                  | no <sup>a</sup>      |

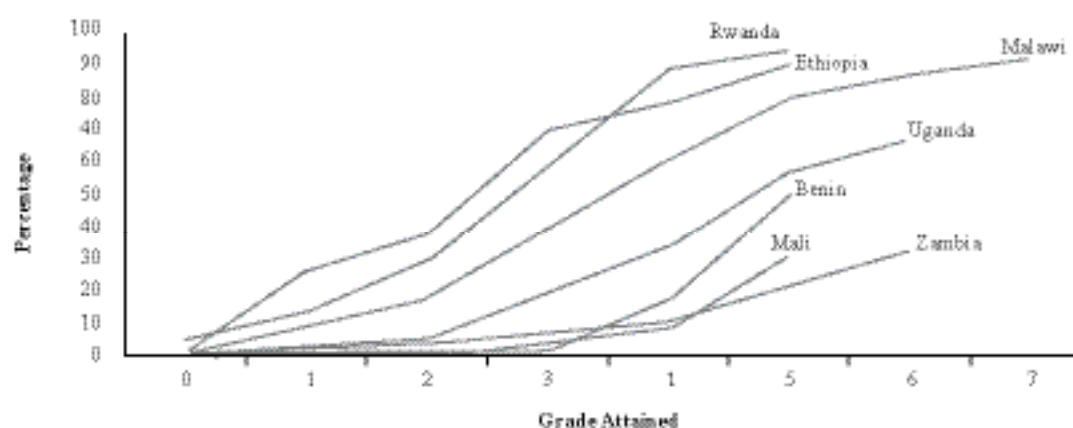
<sup>a</sup>Property and inheritance rights are equal in civil code, but according to customary law and in practice, women are restricted from inheriting or holding property  
Note: n.a.=not available  
Source: Lloyd 2005

### 3.2. Educating Women to Equalize Opportunities

In LDCs women and female children may have differential access to educational opportunities than their male counterparts. This can have long-term consequences and affect the economic and productive lives of different genders. Different initiatives, beginning with the World Conference on Education for All (EFA) (Jomtiem Thailand 1990), The Dakar Framework, the MDGs and more recently the EFA Fast Track Initiative (2002), have placed basic education on the development agenda. All these initiatives have emphasized increasing school accessibility for girls and eliminating gender disparities in primary education. Fortunately, in LDCs, despite the wide variation between countries, international initiatives are paying off. Most LDCs are on track to meet Goal 9 of the Brussels Programme. Bangladesh, Benin, Chad, Guinea, Mali and Mauritania have made remarkable gains towards attaining gender parity in enrolment and have been credited with making some of the most significant gains towards achieving this goal in the 2005 EFA Global Monitoring Report (UNESCO 2005). Yet many LDCs still have the lowest gender parity ratios. This includes Mali, who despite being credited for making huge gains is one of the three countries with the lowest gender parity ratios. The other two are Burkina Faso and Niger (UNESCO 2005).

However increasing enrolment is not the same as achieving universal primary education (UPE). Much still needs to be done to ensure that girls attend schools full time as well as complete primary school. Evidence on basic literacy levels<sup>10</sup> of young girls in sub-Saharan Africa indicates that completing primary school is critical for attaining basic literacy (Figure 6). Literacy levels drop below 50 per cent if students drop out before finishing grade 4. There is however a wide variation in literacy between countries even at grade 4. For example at grade 4 level, Zambia, Mali and Benin perform well below 50 per cent literacy while Rwanda, Ethiopia and Malawi perform much better. Evidence suggests that those who fall behind in literacy in the early grades are also more liable to drop out. These are likely to be the poorest, as this group is overly represented in those who drop out (Lloyd 2005).

<sup>10</sup> This is based on a test of simple sentences in the local language. See Lloyd 2005.

**Figure 6: Percentage of Young Women who can Read a Simple Sentence by Grade Attained**

Source: Lloyd (2005)

Specific policies have gone a long way in targeting gender parity. In Bangladesh for example the policy of free education for girls up to grade 8 and the room created for NGO-run non-formal schools largely explains Bangladesh's success in achieving gender parity. Non-government schools account for 8.5 per cent of primary school enrolment and have grown four-fold in a ten year period. Non-formal programmes have been particularly beneficial for girls as they offer flexibility (Chowdhury et al, 2002). Ethiopia will potentially be able to meet 2015 targets because of its comprehensive policy of gender mainstreaming. Gender mainstreaming in education sector is supported at all levels of government. The Education and Training Strategy – besides pursuing UPE by 2015 – has focused on changing attitudes towards women by engendering curriculum design, emphasizing recruitment of women, training and assigning women teachers as well as directing financial resources to ensure increased female participation in schooling. Critical to this success has been strong political will to support the engendering process in education (Rose 2003). Eliminating user fees for primary education has contributed significantly to improve female enrolment in a number of sub-Saharan LDCs (see Table 4).

**Table 4: Eliminating User Fees and its Impact on Enrolment**

| Country  | Free Primary Education Provision   | Gross and Net Enrolment |   |
|----------|--|-------------------------|---|
| Malawi   | October 1994<br>• Free tuition, books, stationary<br>• Uniform not compulsory  | 1992                    | GER 77.0                                    |
|          |  | 1996                    | 138.0 67.0                                  |
|          |  | 2000/1                  | 136.9 100.6                                 |
|          |  |                         |   |
| Tanzania | October 2001<br>• Free tuition (7-10years old first and then extended)<br>• No mandatory cash contributions<br>• Uniforms not compulsory                         | 1999                    | GER 63.0 NER 46.7                           |
|          |  | 2000/1                  | 100.4 99.3                                  |
|          |  |                         |   |
| Uganda   | January 1997<br>• Free tuition (6-12 yrs old)<br>• Costs remain: clothing, school feeding, scholastic materials and school funds contribution                    | 1995                    | GER 74.3                                    |
|          |  | 2000/1                  | 135.8 109.5                                 |
|          |  |                         |   |
| Zambia   | February 2002<br>• User fees abolished<br>• Uniforms not compulsory<br>• Fees can be levied by PTA and boards, but no student can be denied an education at cost | 2001                    | GER 76.9 NER 65.1*                          |
|          |  | 2002                    | 81.0 66.1                                   |
|          |  |                         |   |
|          |  |                         | *68.5% including community school enrolment |

Source: Adapted from Riddell (2003)

### 3.3. Women and HIV/AIDS: Its Disproportionate Impact

HIV/AIDS has had a disproportionate impact on girls and women and, increasingly, the disease's primary victims are women (UNDP 2005). Three quarters of all women with HIV, worldwide, live in sub-Saharan Africa, many of these in LDCs. Here women are 1.3 times more likely to be HIV positive than men. However, the situation is particularly bad among 15-24 year olds. Among this group, women/girls are three to six times more likely to be infected (UNAIDS 2004).

Women's increasing vulnerability to HIV/AIDS is a product of social, cultural and economic norms that have always oppressed women (UNAIDS 2004). Sexual risk-taking is a product of gender inequalities. Women, who lack social and economic power, are more vulnerable and more willing to take risks. As the weaker partner in marriage, women are less able to negotiate with their husbands on aspects of sexual behaviour. In Zambia, for example, only 11 per cent of women believed that they had the right to ask their husbands to use a condom when they knew that he was HIV positive (UNAIDS 2004). Poverty adds another layer of complexity onto gender inequalities. In Southern Africa, studies show that women sell sex because they lack education, or because sectors where women have traditionally been employed have been hard hit by changes in the global economy (Hunter 2002). Lack of property rights to assets and resources also makes it more likely that women may opt for prostitution to support themselves, with the associated risks of HIV/AIDS. At the same time, given the stigma associated with HIV/AIDS, women suffering from the disease are likely to be ostracized. This could lead to further destitution. Secure property rights is an essential element of the HIV/AIDS prevention strategy.

#### **Box 6: Community Conversations-Transforming the HIV/AIDS Response in Ethiopia**

In a strategic partnership with the Ethiopian Government, NGOs, Community Based Organizations (CBOs) and other United Nation agencies, UNDP has created a "space" for community dialogue on sensitive issues that directly impact HIV, sexual roles and gender practices. Through the Community Conversation Programme traditionally taboo subjects have been brought out in the open forcing communities to confront these issues, gain a greater understanding and collectively work at determining solutions. In the Alaba district, for example, the project has helped elders understand the link between female genital mutilation and how this can increase the risk of HIV. As a direct consequence, thousands of girls no longer have to go through the procedure. In the Yabelo district, through the direct interventions of the project, awareness has been created about the link between extramarital sex and HIV/AIDS. Consequently, the community governance structures have recommended pre-marital testing for couples intending to marry. This has led to a positive change in the community and increased awareness, resulting in the abandonment of multiple sexual partnerships.

Among a number of LDCs, HIV/AIDS prevalence rate have been modestly declining or remaining steady. In Uganda, for example, prevalence rates have declined by one per cent amongst 15-49 aged adults during 2001-2003. However, HIV prevalence in pregnant women in the same period is at ten per cent highlighting the complexity of the challenge. Other countries have also seen a modest decline in the same period, including Burundi, Cambodia, Lesotho, Togo, Tanzania and Zambia. Whether this modest decline reflects a longer trend is difficult to determine as the trend covers a very short period. In some countries the trend is the opposite direction. These include Angola, Guinea, Madagascar, Mauritania, Nepal, Sudan, Liberia and Myanmar where prevalence rates are increasing. The complex picture suggests there is little room for complacency.

Several innovative programmes have been implemented under different partnerships to stem the tide of the number of women suffering from HIV/AIDS. The UNDP Community Conversation Programme in Ethiopia (Box 6) has created an environment involving the whole community, including men, to discuss taboo issues related to HIV/AIDS such as extramarital relations and female genital mutilation. The project is having a direct impact and positively changing community behaviour. Other projects are addressing the by-product of HIV/AIDS by addressing issues of food security, employment opportunities for female headed household and advocacy work to strengthen rights to assets. For example, the International Center for the Research for Women (ICRW), along with other regional partners, is working in Tanzania (and other countries in South and East Africa) to strengthen local parliamentarians' capacity to lobby for women's health care, particularly HIV/AIDS treatment, prevention and care. The project is funded by Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>11</sup> See [http://www.icrw.org/html/projects/projects\\_hiv aids.htm](http://www.icrw.org/html/projects/projects_hiv aids.htm)

### 3.4. Violence against Women

Gender based violence is a common across all nations, regardless of class, creed or culture and LDCs are not exempt. The Declaration on the Elimination of Violence adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 1993 defines violence against women as any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivations of liberty, whether occurring in public or private life. Violence against women is not only a manifestation of gender inequality but also serves to reinforce it (Bott et al. 2005). The key perpetrators of violence against women are by people close to them--commonly their own partners. A recent ten country study by the World Health Organization (WHO) found sexual violence less prevalent than physical violence, the exceptions being rural areas in Bangladesh and Ethiopia and urban centres in Thailand (WHO 2005). Many cases of acid-throwing to disfigure woman's face in Bangladesh have raised level of cruelty by men to new heights.

Women who suffer violence are more likely to suffer both mental and physical ill health. Violence against women can also result in fatalities. Sexual violence is also correlated with higher incidence of HIV/AIDS. In Kigali, Rwanda for example, women who are HIV positive are more likely to have undergone physical and sexual violence at the hands of their partners. This is confirmed by another study of an urban centre in Tanzania where HIV positive women suffered more physical and sexual abuse than women who were HIV negative (UNAIDS 2004).

A number of initiatives need to be taken to protect women from violence. A starting point is for countries to ratify CEDAW and necessitate national compliance. Laws that discriminate against women must be abolished, violence against women as a criminal offence needs to be legislated and existing laws that protect women need to be enforced. Women also need to be made aware of what legal rights they are entitled to and need to be shown how to utilize these rules to protect themselves. Attitudes of both men and women also need to be changed. In all these areas education and community mobilization are critical as is capacity building of local institutions.

In Angola, since 1997, a consortium of women organizations led by the Ministry of Family and Protection of Women, including the Angolan Women's Organization (AWO) and the Association of Women Lawyers, have conducted advocacy campaigns against gender violence. These activities have included distributing information public debates in the media, schools, police stations and at meetings with key figures in government, including the Attorney-General and the National Assembly Speaker (UN 2004). In Rwanda, UNIFEM-CARO and UNDP with the support of numerous local partners--including the Ministry of Gender and Family Promotion, Ministry of Local Government, Rwandan Women Parliamentarians (FFRP), Parliament, Supreme Court, among others -- have supported the Enhancing Protection from Gender Based Violence Project. The project is a comprehensive package of policies which include training for law enforcement agents on human rights and women's rights, establishing a gender desk at the police headquarters, institutional support to strengthen the capacity to conduct needs assessments regarding gender based violence and support for female parliamentarians to consult with civil society regarding law reform and to ensure that existing legislation reflects gender equality principles embodied in the new constitution.

Community based initiatives have proved successful in changing attitudes and behaviour towards gender-based violence. Stepping Stones is a training programme directed at gender inequality to address issues of HIV/AIDS, violence and other health issues implemented in a number of LDCs including the Gambia, Tanzania, Uganda and Zambia. Using mixed methods (workshops, community-wider meetings, drama, peer group discussions etc.) evaluations in the Gambia have found that the programme improved self-reported attitudes and behaviour related to violence against women, specifically wife beating (Bott et al 2000).

## 4. Gender and the Political Sphere

### 4.1. Governance: Equalizing Opportunities to Make Change

Central to addressing the issues that marginalize women in social, economic and political spheres is providing increased access to platforms of government and ensuring that women are able to participate equally in decision-making processes. Government is about legislation, allocation of resources and accountability to citizens. The exclusion of women from this process results in one-sided policy-making which contributes to the continued marginalization of women. Research has also demonstrated that women's participation in government and decision-making has an impact in reducing poverty (Baden 2000).

The Beijing Platform for Action defined two strategic objectives in this area. These are:

- to ensure women's equal access to and full participation in power structures and decision-making;
- to increase women's capacity to participate in decision-making and leadership.

Four different types of female participation – although inter-related – are necessary at all levels of government to ensure equal participation of men and women in government. This include (i) *political participation* that allows for political agenda setting by women who are in politics; (ii) *political representation* that includes articulation and representation of different political positions in decision making arenas and other forums that exist in democratic societies; (iii) *political leadership* in articulating political agendas and transforming them in policy; and (iv) *political accountability* which holds representatives and organization representatives accountable for decisions and mandates defined by their position (United Nations 2005).

Women in a number of LDCs have made huge electoral gains in the last couple of years. In Rwanda women have captured almost 49 per cent of the Lower House parliamentary seats and 36 per cent of the Upper House in 2003. This is the largest female parliamentary representation anywhere in the world. Female representation is also high in Burundi (31 per cent in the Lower House and 33 per cent in the Upper House) and Mozambique (34 per cent in Lower House). In Afghanistan the Lower House (Loya Jirga) has 27 per cent representation of women. The Lao People's Democratic Republic and Timor Leste also have significant representation of women, with 23 and 25 per cent respectively. Yet, as Table 5 shows the majority of other LDCs continue to have very few women in their parliamentary bodies. International bodies still need to focus on advocating that these nations continue to undertake the necessary political reform to ensure that parity is reached. Beyond national bodies, female representation at local, sub-national, regional and sub-regional bodies also needs to be encouraged. Participation and, in many cases, leadership of women in the local bodies has resulted in better governance, transparency and accountability in respect of development projects.

Representation does not always translate into political participation and agenda setting. Beyond ensuring a critical mass of female representation in all bodies of government, more effort needs to be placed on increasing women's capacity to become substantive participants in government and to take leadership roles. Women parliamentarians often fail to represent women's interests. More often they take on the agendas of their political parties or their ethnic affiliations. This can be for a number of reasons. Women may not be aware of the critical issues confronting the women in their society or they may not know how to effectively represent women's concerns. They may also not have the networks, alliances or the resources required to pass legislation. Such capacity building is essential for political representation to translate to transformative changes for women. A number of projects have already been discussed in this report that are trying to change this, including ICRW's support for parliamentarians in Tanzania to lobby for HIV/AIDS related treatment and UNIFEM/UNDP's support to the Rwanda legislative structure to address issues of violence against women. Such programmes, which build the capacity of women in leadership positions across government at all levels, are required to ensure effective translation of women issues into gender friendly policies.

**Table 5: LDC Women Parliamentarians (as of November 2005)**

| REGION  | COUNTRY                                   | LOWER HOUSE (%) | UPPER HOUSE (%) |
|---|---|-----------------|-----------------|
| AFRICA  | Angola                                    | 0.2             | n/a             |
|   | Benin                                     | 0.1             | n/a             |
|   | Burkina Faso                              | 11.7            | n/a             |
|   | BURUNDI                                   | 30.5            | 32.7            |
|   | Cape Verde                                | 11.1            | n/a             |
|   | Central African Republic                  |                 | 0.0             |
|   | Chad                                      | 6.5             | n/a             |
|   | Comoros                                   | 3.0             | n/a             |
|   | Democratic People's Republic of the Congo | 12.0            | 2.5             |
|   | Djibouti                                  | 10.8            | n/a             |
|   | Equatorial Guinea                         | 18.0            | n/a             |
|   | Eritrea                                   | 22.0            | n/a             |
|   | Ethiopia                                  | 21.2            | ?               |
|   | Gambia                                    | 13.2            | n/a             |
|   | Guinea                                    | 19.3            | n/a             |
|   | Guinea Bissau                             | 14.0            | n/a             |
|   | Lesotho                                   | 11.7            | 36.4            |
|   | Liberia                                   | 12.5            | 16.7            |
|   | Madagascar                                | 6.9             | 11.1            |
|   | Malawi                                    | 13.6            | n/a             |
|   | Mali                                      | 10.2            | n/a             |
|   | Mauritania                                |                 | ?               |
|   | Mozambique                                | 34.8            | n/a             |
|   | Niger                                     | 12.4            | n/a             |
|   | Rwanda                                    | 48.8            | 34.6            |
|   | Sao Tome & Principe                       | 9.1             | n/a             |
|   | Senegal                                   | 19.2            | n/a             |
|   | Sierra Leone                              | 14.5            | n/a             |
|   | Somalia                                   | 8.0             | n/a             |
|   | Sudan                                     | 14.7            | 4.0             |
| Togo  | 7.4                                       | n/a             |                 |
| Uganda  | 23.9                                      | n/a             |                 |
| United Republic of Tanzania                               | 21.4                                      | n/a             |                 |
| Zambia  | 12.7                                      | n/a             |                 |
| ASIA AND<br>PACIFIC LATIN<br>AMERICA AND<br>THE CARIBBEAN | Haita                                     | 3.6             | 25.9            |
|   | Afghanistan                               | 27.3            | ?               |
| ASIA AND<br>PACIFIC                                       | Bangladesh**                              | 14.8            | n/a             |
|   | Bhutan                                    | 8.7             | n/a             |
|   | Cambodia                                  | 9.8             | 13.1            |
|   | Kiribati                                  | 4.8             | n/a             |
|   | Lao People's Democratic Republic          | 22.9            | n/a             |
|   | Maldives                                  | 12.0            | n/a             |
|   | Myanmar                                   | ?               | ?               |
|   | Nepal                                     | 5.9             | 8.3             |
|   | Samoa                                     | 6.1             | n/a             |
|   | Solomon Island                            | 0.0             | n/a             |
|   | Timor Leste                               | 25.3            | n/a             |
|   | Tubalu                                    | 0.0             | n/a             |
|   | Vanuata                                   | 3.8             | n/a             |
|   | Yemen                                     | 0.3             | 1.8             |

Source: <http://www.ipu.org/wmn-e/classif.htm>

## 4.2. Recognizing Women: Their Role in Conflict and Conflict Resolution

Women bear an inordinate burden during conflict and in post-conflict situations. Women not only suffer from the trauma and the displacement caused by conflict, but increasingly they are becoming targets of war. Gender based violence and sexual violence have become weapons of warfare. Women and girls are also victims of circumstances that turn them into perpetrators of war as soldiers. Recent studies have documented the significant role women and girls have played in conflicts in Sierra Leone, Uganda and Mozambique (Mckay and Mazurana 2004). Conflict situations also produce huge demographic changes which can potentially force change in the economic, social and political roles that women play. During and after conflicts, women tend to out-number men; the number of widows increases as do female-headed households; and by default women take on new roles in addition to those they already undertake within the household. The traditional division of labour is challenged with these dramatic socio-economic changes. Often, this forces women to undertake marginal activities in the informal sector with dire effects on their health and security. This includes trafficking of women and sexual slavery?— women during these difficult times are unable to refuse this type of paid employment and, more often than not, are forced into these activities given their vulnerable situation during conflict. New economic roles can be liberating in some cases, but they can also make women more vulnerable to both physical and sexual violence.

In this context, it is impossible to imagine building a sustainable peace, and accompanying prosperity, without involving women and promoting gender equality (Caprioli 2003). At the minimum, their exclusion means that peace does not work for women (NGOWG 2006). In recent years involvement of women in the peace processes has yielded very positive results. The recognition of this reality has been very forcefully expressed in the UN Security Council Resolution 1325 (October 2000) which calls for women's full and equal participation in conflict prevention and resolution. It actively encourages all states 'to ensure increased representation of women at all decision-making levels in national, regional and international institutions and mechanism for the prevention, management and resolution of conflict;' and 'calls on all actors involved, when negotiating and implementing peace agreements, to adopt a gender perspective.'

### Box 7: Women's Involvement in the Burundi Peace Process

Through the collaborative effort of the Mwalimu Nyerere Foundation and with the support of the relevant UN offices, UNIFEM organized an All Party Burundi Women's Peace Conference in 2000. Women articulated a common vision of peace and reconciliation and a number of recommendations. Nineteen of the recommendations were subsequently incorporated in the final peace accord.

Fifteen LDCs are in conflict or post-conflict situations.<sup>12</sup> Inclusion of women is critical in attaining sustainable peace and development for these countries. A common issue in post conflict environments is the exclusion of women from the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) process. In Mozambique for instance, women did not go through encampment—a necessary phase of demobilization—because they were excluded or not informed, and because they fear the violence that occurs in encampments. Their 'invisibility' meant that they lost out from such benefits as transportation, settlement benefits and re-training. Women also get marginalized from the reintegration activities because of poor planning and existing societal biases. Women may often lose jobs because men returning from the conflict are given a preference—a phenomenon that occurred in Angola and Mozambique (Watteville 2002). Gender sensitive strategies need to be adopted both in the DDR processes as well as in post-conflict justice processes. Actively involving women from a wide range of socio-economic groups and ethnicities will ensure that women's experiences are included in the policy-making process.

Post-conflict situations are also opportunities to broker new institutional structures that ensure gender equality which are also essential for sustaining peace. A number of LDCs have taken advantage of this opportunity. In Rwanda and Timor Leste government ministries or units have been set up to deal with gender issues in the post conflict period. Rwanda has also legislated equal property rights for women in 2000 which is a critical building block for a reasonable livelihood of women in the post-conflict environment.

<sup>12</sup> These include: Afghanistan, Angola, Burundi, Cambodia, Central African Republic, Democratic Republic of Congo, Guinea Bissau, Haiti, Liberia, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, Solomon Islands, Somalia, the Sudan, and Timor Leste.



## 5. The Way Forward: Strengthening Partnerships

Although gender equity and empowerment in LDCs is improving, it still remains a distant goal for many of these countries. Women's lives are changing for the better, but not fast enough and not well-entrenched enough. The particular extreme poverty characteristics of LDCs—accentuated by conflict, natural disasters and structural weaknesses—further complicate the efforts to improve the situation for women. Gender inequality gets further exacerbated in conflict situations. Traditional gender roles, which are suspended during times of war, return in post-conflict environments and undermine women's reintegration after war. The lack of economic rights is common in many LDCs and this systematically disempowers women. Women are unable to scale up production and breakout of the cycle of poverty. Many women also do not necessarily benefit from the changing global trade environment which further pushes them into marginal economic activities. Women's representation in the political arena, although growing, does not always translate into improved capacity to effect substantive difference in policy and agenda setting which recognizes the role of women.

Despite these limitations, significant inroads have been made with regards to certain Brussels Programme goals. International initiatives on primary schooling are delivering gains in improving gender parity in enrolment for a number of LDCs. Moderate gains have also been made in contraceptive use and there are small declines in the prevalence of HIV/AIDS. However, it is difficult to predict whether these are long term trends. Least Developed Countries remain far behind on many of the other Brussels Programme goals that directly relate to women. Maternal mortality rates continue to be high and only five countries are on target to meet Goal 5 by 2015. Expanding access to reproductive health care (the objective of Goal 5), is still far off for many LDCs. More than half of the LDCs will not be able to ensure 85 per cent coverage of a skilled attendant birth by 2010.

The international community should re-affirm their political will and commitments to the Brussels Programme. Despite substantial achievements, member states still need to ensure that these goals particularly those relating to women are realized within the designated timeframe. Similar to the initiatives undertaken to tackle primary school enrolment and to counter the spread of HIV/AIDS, the international community should make a global commitment to address women's health in LDCs. Of the eight goals related to women in the Brussels Programme, member states are performing most poorly on issues of reproductive health and maternal mortality. LDCs should focus on legislating and enforcing property and inheritance rights for women at the earliest. The lack of right to assets usually is the starting point towards feminization of poverty.

The United Nations system should assist LDCs in benefiting from the implementation of the Security Council Resolution 1325 (2000) on Women's role in Peace and Security, and the United Nations Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women (1993).

LDCs who have not signed the CEDAW should take the step of ratifying the Convention and the Optional Protocol. The international community is also urged to help LDCs to translate their commitments under CEDAW into national policies and programmes that empower women.

Partnerships have played a critical role in the gains that have been made in gender equity and women's empowerment in LDCs over the past years. In the coming years, more effective and meaningful partnerships between LDCs and their development partners including United Nation agencies, other multilateral organizations, NGOs, civil society and the private sector will play a vital role in realizing the goals of the Brussels Programme, inter alia, as they relate to women and girls.

***It's all about empowering women –  
socially, legally, politically and economically***

### Annex 1: Status of LDCs on Ratification of CEDAW and Optional Protocol

|    | COUNTRY                          | RATIFIED CEDAW | RATIFIED THE<br>OPTIONAL PROTOCOL |
|----|----------------------------------|----------------|-----------------------------------|
| 1  | AFGHANISTAN                      | Y              | N                                 |
| 2  | ANGOLA                           | Y              | N                                 |
| 3  | BANGLADESH                       | Y              | Y                                 |
| 4  | BENIN                            | Y              | N                                 |
| 5  | BHUTAN                           | Y              | N                                 |
| 6  | BURKINA FASO                     | Y              | Y                                 |
| 7  | BURUNDI                          | Y              | N                                 |
| 8  | CAMBODIA                         | Y              | N                                 |
| 9  | CAPE VERDE                       | Y              | N                                 |
| 10 | CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC         | Y              | N                                 |
| 11 | CHAD                             | Y              | N                                 |
| 12 | COMOROS DEMOCRATIC PEOPLE'S      | Y              | N                                 |
| 13 | REUBLIC OF THE CONGO             | Y              | N                                 |
| 14 | DJIBOUTI                         | Y              | N                                 |
| 15 | EQUATORIAL GUINEA                | Y              | N                                 |
| 16 | ERITREA                          | Y              | N                                 |
| 17 | ETHIOPIA                         | Y              | N                                 |
| 18 | GAMBIA                           | Y              | N                                 |
| 19 | GUINEA                           | Y              | N                                 |
| 20 | GUINEA BISSAU                    | Y              | N                                 |
| 21 | HAITI                            | Y              | N                                 |
| 22 | KIRIBATI                         | Y              | N                                 |
| 23 | LAO PEOPLE'S DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC | Y              | N                                 |
| 24 | LESOTHO                          | Y              | Y                                 |
| 25 | LIBERIA                          | Y              | N                                 |
| 26 | MADAGASCAR                       | Y              | N                                 |
| 27 | MALAWI                           | Y              | N                                 |
| 28 | MALDIVES                         | Y              | Y                                 |
| 29 | MALI                             | Y              | Y                                 |
| 30 | MAURITANIA                       | Y              | N                                 |
| 31 | MOZAMBIQUE                       | Y              | N                                 |
| 32 | MYANMAR                          | Y              | N                                 |
| 33 | NEPAL                            | Y              | N                                 |
| 34 | NIGER                            | Y              | Y                                 |
| 35 | RWANDA                           | Y              | N                                 |
| 36 | SAMAO                            | Y              | N                                 |
| 37 | SAO TOME & PRINCIPE              | Y              | N                                 |
| 38 | SENEGAL                          | Y              | Y                                 |
| 39 | SIERRA LEONE                     | Y              | N                                 |
| 40 | SOLOMON ISLANDS                  | Y              | Y                                 |
| 41 | SOMALIA                          | N              | N                                 |
| 42 | SUDAN                            | N              | N                                 |
| 43 | TIMOR LESTE                      | Y              | Y                                 |
| 44 | TOGO                             | Y              | N                                 |
| 45 | TUVALU                           | Y              | N                                 |
| 46 | UGANDA                           | Y              | N                                 |
| 47 | UNITED REPUBLIC OF TANZANIA      | Y              | Y                                 |
| 48 | VANUATA                          | Y              | N                                 |
| 49 | YEMEN                            | Y              | N                                 |
| 50 | ZAMBIA                           | Y              | N                                 |

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