



Let Women Flourish

Asma Lateef, Bread for the World Institute

In 1948, Eleanor Roosevelt chaired the committee that drafted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Ultimately adopted by all nations, the Declaration lays out a vision of a world where all people “without distinction of any kind, such as race, color, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth, or other status,” would have basic rights—with basic human needs met—and equal rights under the law.

That vision remains just that—a tantalizing vision. True, women and girls have made progress, but the world is still not living up to the promises made in the text of the Declaration. The inequalities women and girls suffer are magnified even more for most, once we add on the additional layers of discrimination based on race, ethnicity, religion, class, and more.

Most countries now have laws that recognize women as equal in every way—yet women disproportionately suffer from hunger and poverty; they carry out much more than their half of the unpaid work on which families, communities, and economies depend; and a third of all women and girls are victims of violence during their lives, most times at the hands of a husband or male partner.

Building on the 1995 Beijing Platform for Action, with its focus on ending gender inequality, the U.N. Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) linked the welfare and well-being of women and girls to the goals of ending hunger and extreme poverty. In addition to a stand-alone goal of promoting gender equality and empowering women—with targets for women’s secondary and tertiary education, literacy, wage employment in a non-agricul-

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— High Level Panel on the Post-2015 Development Agenda



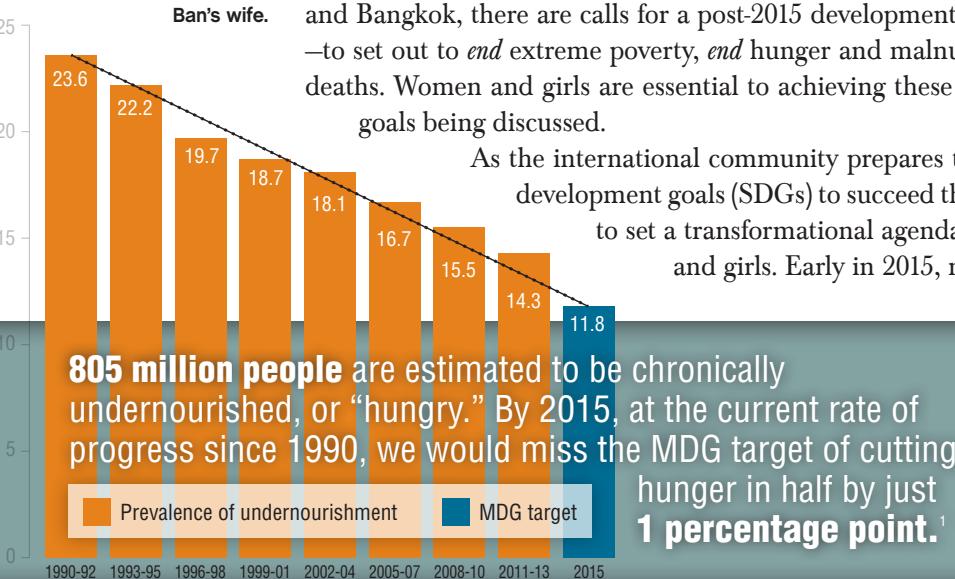
Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon (center) greets British Actor and UN Women Goodwill Ambassador Emma Watson at a special event organized by UN Women in support of their HeForShe campaign. To the right is Yoo Soontaek, Mr. Ban's wife.

report has shown, gaps in access to health care, education, and financial assets are still pervasive. A “business as usual” approach is not acceptable and has not led to sufficient progress so far because gender bias affects so much and has proven so resistant to change.

Unfinished Business

As the deadline for the MDGs approaches at the end of 2015, from the Secretary-General of the United Nations, Ban Ki-moon, to “people on the street” in Baku, Bogota, Bamako, and Bangkok, there are calls for a post-2015 development framework to be more ambitious—to set out to *end* extreme poverty, *end* hunger and malnutrition, and *end* preventable child deaths. Women and girls are essential to achieving these goals as well as all the rest of the goals being discussed.

As the international community prepares to launch a new set of sustainable development goals (SDGs) to succeed the MDGs, this is a critical moment to set a transformational agenda to achieve for equality of women and girls. Early in 2015, negotiations on the SDGs begin in



tural sector, and seats in parliament—the MDGs included universal primary education for all boys and girls and a goal with targets for reducing maternal mortality.

Progress towards these goals and targets has been mixed and uneven. A progress chart on page 213 shows how regions are doing. The MDG experience underscores that the inequities women and girls face are persistent, deep-seated and self-reinforcing. They are embedded in the inequities and discrimination faced by poor and hungry people as a group, but issues specific to women often go unrecognized by governments and society writ large. As this

Every **\$1** invested in preventing chronic malnutrition returns **\$30** in economic output.²

CONCLUSION

earnest. Since 2012, the United Nations has coordinated consultations on future goals in 88 developing countries, working with governments, civil society, universities, and the private sector. The intention was to hear from a range of people, especially those who live in extreme poverty and are typically excluded from such discussions. There have also been 11 thematic consultations, including one on food security and nutrition, and an online global survey filled out by more than 800,000 people.

In 2012, the U.N. Secretary-General also convened a High Level Panel of Eminent Persons on the Post-2015 Development Agenda (HLP). The 27-member panel was charged with developing a set of recommendations on MDG successor goals. Its report, released in 2013, describes the priorities named by women and girls at its various consultations: “Women and girls asked in particular for protection of their property rights, their access to land, and to have a voice and to participate in economic and political life. They also asked the Panel to focus on ending violence against women and discrimination at work, at school, and in the law.”¹

The HLP report concluded that “Women across the world have to work hard to overcome significant barriers to opportunity. These barriers can only be removed when there is zero tolerance of violence against and exploitation of women and girls, and when they have full and equal rights in political, economic, and public spheres.”² The HLP report calls for a stand-alone goal on gender equality and women’s empowerment, but also proposes gender targets as part of other goals as well, recognizing that the issues connected to gender bias are cross-cutting.

In addition to the U.N.-sponsored consultations in developing countries and the HLP, another process that is feeding into the final negotiations on the goals is the Open Working Group on Sustainable Development (OWG).³ It was launched at the Rio +20 Summit in June 2012 with the goal of helping U.N. member states develop a set of sustainable development goals to be integrated into the post-2015 development agenda. The OWG was made



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New York Times columnist Nicholas Kristof with Rozina Haque of BRAC and Diah Saminarsih of Guiding Lights of the Archipelago in 2013 at the MDG Countdown event: “Women and Girls Transforming Societies.”

In 1990, almost half of the population in the developing world lived on less than \$1.25 a day.⁴ This rate dropped to **22 percent** by 2010, achieving the MDG target of reducing the percentage of people living in extreme poverty by half.³

By 2012,
ALL DEVELOPING REGIONS
had achieved, or were close to achieving,
gender parity in primary education.⁴

up of 30 member states of the U.N. General Assembly, including the United States. Over a 15-month period, the OWG held a series of consultations and 13 week-long sessions to draft and prioritize proposed goals. It was a transparent process in which the draft goals and the agenda were made available online ahead of each session so that civil society groups and others could react and provide feedback. Each session was also webcast so the public could hear the debate among member states. In July 2014, the OWG issued its final Outcome Document. The OWG also proposed a stand-alone goal on women's empowerment with six targets to help measure success. See Box C.1.

Paving the Way to a Sustainable Future

In the next year, civil society and the faith community have an important role to play in ensuring that policymakers, governments, and everyone involved in negotiations on the SDGs remain committed to setting an ambitious agenda for the goals. The SDGs must include stand-alone goals to end extreme poverty, hunger, and malnutrition. The next set of goals must also include a stand-alone goal to end gender inequality and empower women. This goal should include a target to both reduce the burden of unpaid care work that disproportionately falls on women and to ensure that unpaid care responsibilities are shared more equally by men and between families and social support systems. It should also include targets to end gender-based violence, including child marriage; to ensure that all women have the right to inherit and own property; and to ensure that all women and girls have access to quality education and health care.

Asma Lateef speaking at the International Food Policy Research Institute at the release of its 2013 Global Food Policy Report.



The image shows a woman with dark hair, Asma Lateef, speaking at a podium. She is wearing a dark top and a patterned scarf. A microphone is positioned in front of her. Behind her is a blue banner with the text "2013 GLOBAL FOOD POLICY REPORT IFPRI". The background is a plain wall.

women and girls face day in and day out. Civil society organizations, churches, and faith-based organizations in every country are well placed to make the connections between ending hunger and poverty and women's empowerment. They can help change social and cultural norms and practices that are harmful to women and girls. They can speak out against gender-based violence. They can pave the way for the SDGs to be embraced and supported by everyone. Now is a unique moment in history to stand up for women and girls. It is not only the just and right thing to do—it is essential to ending hunger and malnutrition.

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PROPOSED POST-MDG WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT GOAL

OPEN WORKING GROUP, UNITED NATIONS

Goal 5. Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls

- 5.1 - End all forms of discrimination against all women and girls everywhere.
- 5.2 - Eliminate all forms of violence against all women and girls in public and private spheres, including trafficking and sexual and other types of exploitation.
- 5.3 - Eliminate all harmful practices, such as child, early, and forced marriage, and female genital mutilation.
- 5.4 - Recognize and value unpaid care and domestic work through the provision of public services, infrastructure, and social protection policies, and the promotion of shared responsibility within the household and the family as nationally appropriate.
- 5.5 - Ensure women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic, and public life.
- 5.6 - Ensure universal access to sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights as agreed in accordance with the Program of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development and the Beijing Platform for Action and the outcome documents of their review conferences.
- 5.a - Undertake reforms to give women equal rights to economic resources, as well as access to ownership and control over land and other forms of property, financial services, inheritance, and natural resources in accordance with national laws.
- 5.b - Enhance the use of enabling technologies, in particular information and communications technology, to promote women's empowerment.
- 5.c - Adopt and strengthen sound policies and enforceable legislation for the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls at all levels.

HIGH LEVEL PANEL ON THE POST-2015 DEVELOPMENT AGENDA

Goal 2. Empower Girls and Women and Achieve Gender Equality

- 2a. - Prevent and eliminate all forms of violence against girls and women.
- 2b. - End child marriage.
- 2c. - Ensure equal right of women to own and inherit property, sign a contract, register a business, and open a bank account.
- 2d. - Eliminate discrimination against women in political, economic, and public life.