



# Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment

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*MDG-F Thematic Study: Key Findings and Achievements.*

## Executive Summary

### Background

#### Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment

The Millennium Declaration identified Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment (GEWE) as one of eight Millennium Development Goals and stated that it was an effective means to combat poverty, hunger and disease, as well as to stimulate development that is truly sustainable. Millennium Development Goal 3 (MDG 3) was established to "Eliminate gender disparity in primary and secondary education, preferably by 2005, and at all levels of education no later than 2015." The MDG Summit 2010 called for further action to ensure gender parity in education, health, economic opportunities and decision-making through gender mainstreaming in development policymaking. An important route to achieving gender equality is by empowering of women through education, employment and political representation, as well as by ensuring women's access to reproductive health services. Another fundamental step towards the realization of gender equality is to eradicate all forms violence against women.

#### The MDG-Fund Gender Equality Thematic Window

In light of these developments, the 13 Joint Programmes (JPs) under this thematic window were designed to address gender equality in a broad and holistic manner, thereby contributing to the fulfillment of the civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights of women and girls. The overall design, purpose and structure of the Joint Programmes were rooted in the recognition that GEWE are vital for the realization of human rights for all. The main thematic issues selected reflect a deep understanding that in order to achieve gender equality, both *de facto* and *de jure*, it is necessary to build a society in which women and men share equally in the distribution of power and influence and have equal access to education, health, decent work and livelihoods.

The Joint Programmes were carried out in countries with varying degrees of poverty and levels of development, as well as distinctive political, economic and social conditions. They were all designed to address national development priorities in keeping with the United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF), and taking into account the goal of "Delivering as One". Most of the programmes involved a wide range of partners and the application of a multidisciplinary multi-sector approach due to the fact that gender equality is a cross-cutting issue that needs to be addressed in all spheres and areas (health, education, employment, political participation, etc.). Numerous beneficiaries and stakeholders (both duty-bearers and rights-holders) were targeted at all levels. A majority of the JPs involved the sectoral ministries and line ministries responsible for service provision; they thus reached a large

number of government officials, including those working at local government level. Most of the programmes identified beneficiaries/rights holders whose human rights were not respected and protected and who largely belong to the most disadvantaged and excluded population groups.

Nearly all of the Joint Programmes (11) tackled Gender-Based Violence. The other main thematic areas were Economic and Political Empowerment of Women, and issues related to Reproductive Health and HIV/AIDS. Diverse approaches and interventions were applied at different levels, ranging from strategies to improve and implement national laws and policies which were found in the vast majority of Joint Programmes, to capacity building interventions at the local level targeting municipalities and local government bodies. All of the JPs included some form of training, which varied from formal capacity building initiatives to holding information sessions as a means to promote gender equality and to protect the rights of women and girls. Interventions were also undertaken at the individual level by working directly with the intended beneficiaries to strengthen their capacity to claim and exercise their human rights. All the Joint Programmes also concentrated their efforts on increasing public awareness and knowledge through the creation and diffusion of information and expertise, as a means to bring about social change with specific results at the policy level. This was achieved through, for example, communication and advocacy activities, the development of studies and policy papers, and the use of diverse tools and training materials.

## Achievements and Results



For the most part, the programmes were envisaged to help bring about positive social change in the lives of the rights-holders/participants/beneficiaries and, at the same time, build the capacity of the duty-bearers at all levels to fulfill their corresponding duties and obligations. Social change was visualized and anticipated in the design and planning phase of the Joint Programmes, which called for multi-stakeholder collaboration and a multi-sectoral approach, thereby constituting a collective effort to

transform attitudes and behavior within society. The notion of social change was generally based on a set of assumptions and the identification of conditions that need to occur to bring about such transformations. Therefore, in all of the JPs, regardless of the thematic area being covered, specific examples can be found of the way social change was achieved in terms of behavior and attitudes among the beneficiaries, both rights-holders and duty-bearers.

The interventions and approaches selected for the programmes fall into four categories:

### Capacity development to address Gender-Based Violence (GBV)

Changing behaviors related to violence against women and girls was a major component of the programme in Bangladesh. Some 23,986 people including journalists, employers, managers, trade union leaders, district officials, teachers, judges and prosecutors, members of the Sex Workers Network, and many others received awareness training on GBV.

The Joint Programme in Colombia was implemented at the national level and in four regions of the country, with notable results. There is reported evidence of an increase awareness of GBV among members of the media and in the political campaigns. New strategic alliances were formed which have brought together government institutions and civil society, and new spaces and mechanisms for dialogue have been created. In all, the programme was able to strengthen the institutions responsible for prevention of GBV and the provision of services to victims. Particularly noteworthy is the strengthening of data collection systems and the creation of a solid body of evidence from which to develop public policies.

Addressing governance issues was a key factor for the success of the programme in Morocco as well as the partnerships that were established between 13 ministerial departments eight UN Agencies and civil society as represented by 40 NGOs. As a result of the programme, penal laws were improved to protect women and children, women and girls were reportedly empowered as actors of development, women's rights were integrated in policies and programs of local government, and a range of social services (e.g. health, justice, police) were established in six regions for victims of violence.

### **Legislative and policy frameworks, and gender-responsive budgeting**

An important achievement of the programme in Brazil was strengthening the capacity of the Special Secretariat for Women's Policies (SPM) and the Special Secretariat for the Promotion of Policies on Racial Equality (SEPPIR) to ensure gender and racial perspectives in all policies, programmes and public services. A specific outcome was the development of a methodology for monitoring the SEPPIR Action Plan.



The programme in Guatemala aimed at the implementation of the National Policy for the Promotion and Development of Women (PNPDIM) and the Policy for Equal Opportunity (PEO) 2008-2023. To achieve this, it strengthened the capacity of the Presidential Secretary for Women (SEPREM) and the Office for the Defense of Indigenous Women (DEMI). These efforts enabled the integration of the national policy by eight Ministries and Secretariats (e.g. Education, Health, Economy, Labour, Agriculture and Finance) as well as a significant increase in the national budget for SEPREM, which is expected to ensure its continuity and sustainability.

In Nicaragua, there is reportedly a growing commitment on behalf of the mayors in the 15 municipalities targeted by the Joint Programme: an estimated 113,814 women were mobilized and consulted for the formulation of gender responsive budgets and local gender policies, and 23,098 women participated in local government decision-making processes regarding the financing of their income-generating projects. These positive developments at the municipal level led to gender mainstreaming in the national budget and the establishment of institutional measures such as creating gender units in national government commissions, among other results.

## Advocacy and communication

A good example of advocacy efforts to enlist the support of key duty-bearers was evident in Vietnam. Field visits by Members of Parliament to four regions were made possible by the Joint Programme. Subsequently, the parliamentarians raised issues of concern within their communities in Parliament in order to hold line ministries accountable.

In Timor-Leste, a campaign on GBV was conducted with a total of 81 awareness raising events, including 26 newspaper articles, two television programmes and five national radio programmes. A total of 68,500 information materials were developed and disseminated carrying messages on GBV, child protection and human trafficking.

In the Occupied Palestinian Territory, the programme produced a number of studies, policy papers, surveys and training manuals. A study on women's cooperatives entitled "Mainstreaming Gender Equality Concerns in Palestinian Cooperatives" was a major achievement. The study is expected to lead to specific capacity building proposals that will contribute to strengthening women's cooperatives. A survey on violence against women in the work area -- the first of its kind -- was developed, and a Help Line was created that operates 16 hours per day, seven days a week. As a direct result of the Joint Programme, six ministries are now working together to implement the National Strategy to combat GBV.

## Establishment of networks and mechanisms



In Bangladesh, the programme supported the legal establishment of the Sex Workers Network, which allows them to advocate for their rights. In Brazil, as a result of advocacy efforts supported by the Joint Programme, the Red de Mujeres del Noreste (Network of Women of the Northeast) was established and became associated with the Federation of Women Journalists for Latin America. In Guatemala, the JP designed the Instituto Autonomo de Formación Política de Mujeres Indígenas (an independent institute for capacity building of indigenous women) and provided a number of tools for its creation.

This included a political and communication strategy to empower 35 women identified with potential for elective office in several regions of the country. In Ethiopia, for the first time in two regions, Women's Savings and Credit cooperatives were formed.

Besides Gender-Based Violence, programmes focused on two thematic areas: Economic and Political Empowerment of Women, and Reproductive Health and HIV/AIDS.

## Economic and Political Empowerment of Women

In many parts of the world, gender equality is undermined by women's lack of access to resources, rights and entitlements. As many as nine Joint Programmes focused on the economic and political empowerment of women. In Bolivia, the programme focused on increasing the economic empowerment of the most disadvantaged and excluded women, improving the lives of an estimated 4,640 women by increasing their incomes and enabling them to support their families and reach a certain level of

economic independence. An estimated 12,817 women obtained either a birth certificate or an official identity card. Emphasis was also placed on women's economic rights, on their right to participate in decision making processes, their right to access information and to public and private spaces for negotiation as small business owners.

## Reproductive Health

In **Ethiopia**, a baseline survey indicated that adolescent girls and women have limited reproductive health knowledge and girls between 15-19 years of age are seven times more likely to be infected by HIV than boys. The JP supported training on HIV/AIDS, reproductive health and family planning services. The increased knowledge by the women beneficiaries of reproductive health, combined with reproductive health services, have led to improved health behavior. Community conversation was one of the approaches that stimulated dialogue and consciousness on HIV/AIDS and reproductive health issues. Communities gave testimonies of observable changed behavior among beneficiaries of the Joint Programme.

## Key Lessons and Recommendations

**Strong leadership was deemed essential:** The choice of lead government agency made a difference in the level of leadership provided. It was also noted that when the offices of the Resident Coordinator, Agency heads and senior government officials provided strong support, the Joint Programmes had greater success during their implementation.

**Targeting the most excluded groups** is an effective strategy to reduce inequalities and contributes towards achieving gender equality and the MDGs in particular.

**The important role of civil society** was inherent in most of the Joint Programmes, but was not always elaborated.

**Increased knowledge of human rights:** Some programmes caused significant change in the lives of disadvantaged women as a result of the knowledge they gained on human rights and of the importance, for example, of having an identification card or birth certificate in order to be active citizens.

**Political will is fundamental for sustaining the achievements towards GEWE:** Since government authorities and particularly legislators are constantly changing, institutional building through capacity development is essential in order for results to be sustainable. Thus, awareness-raising, sensitization and capacity building must be continuous and ongoing.

**Access to full report:** <http://on.mdgfund.org/WdmsHx>