

**Statement of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination  
against Women on the post-2015 development agenda and the  
elimination of discrimination against women**

**1. The CEDAW Committee**

The Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (the Committee) welcomes the opportunity to provide input to the discussion regarding the post-2015 development agenda. As the international body charged with overseeing the implementation of the legal obligations of the 187 States parties under the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (the CEDAW Convention), the Committee is keenly aware of the nexus between development and the realization of women's rights. The near universal ratification of the CEDAW Convention, together with the vast experience of the Committee since its establishment in 1982 in relation to women and development garnered through its supervisory mandate, underlines the importance of the Committee's expertise in shaping the conceptual design of the post-2015 development agenda.

The Committee recalls that the Millennium Declaration, an unprecedented global consensus by Member States of the United Nations which presented a vision for achieving sustainable development, identifies gender equality as an essential component for achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The Committee also recalls the commitments made by the international community in the Beijing Declaration and Platform of Action. They both affirm the need to combat violence against women as well as the implementation of the CEDAW Convention. The Committee acknowledges the positive outcomes resulting from the implementation of the MDGs. It recalls that MDG 3 explicitly aimed to promote gender equality and empower women. However, the MDGs did not entirely embrace this full vision of gender equality, adopting only a narrow range of indicators to reflect a very narrow range of issues important for the elimination of discrimination against women. The Committee also notes that progress in the realization of this goal has been tracked through four indicators, which represent narrow, albeit important, aspects of gender equality, namely, participation of women and girls in education, improving the literacy ratio, employment, and improving the proportion of women in national parliaments. Through its regular discussions with States parties on the implementation of the CEDAW Convention, the Committee has been tracking the degree to which women and girls enjoy their rights. The

international community now has the opportunity to embrace a new paradigm that builds on the gaps and lessons of the MDGs and truly aims to eliminate discrimination against women. The Committee considers that the international community should deliver on its promise in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of a social and international order in which all human rights can be fully realized for all persons.

## **2. A human rights based approach to sustainable development**

International human rights law provides critical normative standards that are intrinsically linked to development such as those related to food, education, health, housing, non-discrimination, political participation, freedom of expression and freedom of assembly. It also provides strong standards on equality and non-discrimination for all. The CEDAW Convention prohibits any distinction, exclusion or restriction made on the basis of sex, which has the effect or purpose of impairing or nullifying the enjoyment and exercise of rights by women on an equal basis with men. The Committee has thus repeatedly articulated a vision of substantive equality which takes account of the reality of women's and girls' lives that is impacted both by consequences of the past as well as current inequalities between women and men, and requires measures to address both direct and indirect discrimination against women.

The post-2015 framework should be grounded in this existing international human rights framework, with a view to addressing all facets of the development challenge. The CEDAW Convention, along with the other international human rights treaties, establishes a normative framework built and accepted by States which sets with precision the minimum guarantees for the individual. A human rights-based approach to development ensures that rights are used as a means to promoting development – sustainable development will continue to be a distant dream if women's rights in particular are not prioritized. In addition, and more fundamentally, a human rights-based approach ensures that rights, including the rights related to gender equality, are the ultimate end of development. The Committee underscores the fact that anchoring the post-2015 framework in human rights standards would affirm that development is not only a matter of policy choices for countries but rather, a matter of human rights obligations. This fills the development agenda with the notions of accountability for those with obligations, and empowerment for those with rights. Building the new agenda on a firm foundation of equality and non-discrimination would ensure that no one is left behind. It is also essential to reaffirm the indivisibility of human rights, recognizing that efforts to eliminate discrimination in access to health care for women, for example, will founder

without respecting the right to freedom of choice and autonomy in respect of sexual and reproductive health care.

### **3. The MDGs on gender equality and women's empowerment**

From its experience, the Committee knows that traditional models of development that are based predominantly on economic growth, the expansion of the democratic space and peace, do not automatically lead to gender equality and the realization of women's rights and empowerment. For this reason, later models developed by feminist scholars envisaged addressing the needs and role of women in development processes. Yet, these models have also not resulted in the complete elimination of gender based discrimination and the full realization of women's rights and empowerment. Focusing only on the symptoms and manifestations of women's exclusion (e.g. lack of income, education or health), rather than their structural causes (e.g. discrimination, lack of access to justice and to resources, inadequate political representation), has often led to narrow, discretionary measures aimed at addressing short-term needs, which do not allow for an understanding of the real contribution of women to sustainable development. Moreover, recent studies estimate that over one third of women worldwide have suffered violence in their lifetime, which has dire implications for women's enjoyment of their human rights, as well as their economic, social and cultural potential. The failure of the MDGs to include gender-based violence and to address discrimination against women in access to justice, are major shortcomings which must be rectified.

It is clear that sustainable development is utterly unachievable if fifty percent of the population is neglected. We know that empowering women and girls not only enhances their ability to claim their rights, but also has powerful effects on social change and economic growth.

### **4. The way forward**

The Committee's efforts have thus already helped to provide a strong framework for bridging the accountability mechanism gap of the MDGs and also for bringing to the fore relevant data from countries on women and development. The CEDAW Committee, taking stock of its experience, suggests the following:

✓ First, a post-2015 **architecture** that is explicitly based on the promotion of all human rights, addressing people's right to be free from want but also free from fear.

✓ Second, the post-2015 agenda should include a “**transformative stand-alone goal**” on gender equality and women’s empowerment to underline the centrality of the rights of women and girls to future development gains seeking not only formal equality, but also substantive equality. A specific consideration should be given to indicators that capture situations predominantly experienced by women and girls, related to gender based violence, sexual and reproductive health, maternity and family leave policies, and forced and child marriages.

✓ Third, a commitment to gender equality and to the principle of equality and non-discrimination more broadly should be mainstreamed throughout all **goals**, to ensure that the new agenda does not exclude those facing discrimination, or worse, that it deepens existing inequalities. This can be achieved by ensuring that all **indicators are disaggregated by sex**, in order to give a clear and disaggregated view of progress over time. Together with discrimination on the basis of sex, all grounds of discrimination prohibited by international human rights law must be addressed in this process, as women regularly face multiple or intersecting forms of discrimination. This could significantly expand the possibility to capture not just the situation of women, but the situation of rural and urban women, women with disabilities, indigenous women, as well as women and girls from other minority groups.

✓ Fourth, **targets** should be universal or ‘zero’ targets that are more ambitious than the MDG targets to ensure that no one is left behind, including women facing multiple or intersecting forms of discrimination who are the least advantaged in most societies. Clear timelines should be set to ensure that steady progress is made to reach all groups and reduce the inequalities between different groups. For example, setting interim targets would go a long way in ensuring that continuous steps are taken towards reaching everyone without discrimination.

✓ Fifth, **accountability** mechanisms will be essential for ensuring that progress is tracked and that States are accountable to their populations. Explicitly tying development objectives to universally agreed human rights obligations supports a shift in paradigm – from a

discourse of charity and expediency to one of rights and legal obligations. With this approach comes the need for duty bearers to be held accountable for achievements. Whatever accountability mechanism is adopted, the CEDAW Committee (along with the other human rights treaty bodies) should have a critical role in ensuring accountability for gender equality through its periodic review of state party reports, its consideration of individual communications and its inquiry procedure. It would, therefore, be useful for example, if the new accountability framework could ensure the systematic exchange of information between the treaty bodies and any new accountability mechanism designed to monitor the new goals, targets and indicators. Under its reporting procedure, the Committee has found that MDG 3, despite its narrow focus, has been of great value in galvanizing efforts that have led to improved data collection and accountability. In its authoritative guidance to State parties to the CEDAW Convention expounded through General Recommendation No. 9, the Committee seeks from State parties the submission of reliable data disaggregated by sex in order to fully understand the situation of women.

## 5. Conclusion

The Committee considers the post-2015 development agenda a unique opportunity for accelerating measures aimed at addressing critical issues regarding gender equality and the empowerment of women by adopting a stand-alone goal on gender equality and mainstreaming gender in all goals, including through disaggregating all indicators by sex. All **goals, targets and indicators** should be aligned with **human rights standards**. Based on its mandate, the Committee shall continue to be a **critical pillar** for the future work of the post-2015 development agenda in partly addressing, through its various procedures under the CEDAW Convention, which remains the most comprehensive internationally binding instrument on women's rights, the **deficiencies in accountability** and in implementation by the multilateral system and various stakeholders in this area. The Committee also recognizes the **critical role that civil society organizations play in development** and in the implementation of the CEDAW Convention. It, therefore, expresses the hope that the international community will continue its engagement with them in the future work on the post-2015 development agenda.

The Committee, also, calls upon the international community to ensure a strong accountability framework that holds States accountable to their citizens. On this point, the Committee joins the statement of the Chairpersons of the human rights treaty bodies on the post-2015 development agenda in requesting for the strengthening of the treaty bodies

as critical players in the outcome and the accountability arrangements of the post-2015 development architecture.

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