

## Many women and girls left out of development gains, UN agency reports



UNIFEM's Executive Director Ines Alberdi

20 September 2010 – In spite of strides made towards achieving the Millennium Development Goals (**MDGs**), large numbers of women and girls, especially those in rural areas, have been left behind and continue to live in exclusion and poverty, according to United Nations data unveiled today.

“Ending discrimination against women and enhancing gender justice are at the heart of meeting the MDGs,” said Inés Alberdi, Executive Director of the UN Development Fund for Women (**UNIFEM**), referring to the eight globally-agreed anti-poverty targets with a 2015 deadline.

The agency released its latest figures as scores of heads of State and government are gathering at a UN conference in New York to assess progress on reaching the MDGs, one of which focuses on promoting gender equality and empowering women.

“There is no shortage of promising practices to end inequalities between women and men, but there remains a critical shortage of resources to scale up investment of best practices that work,” Ms. Alberdi stressed.

The findings released today are part of the forthcoming report entitled ***Progress of the World’s Women 2010/2011, Access to Justice***, which will be launched in December.

The publication has revealed the need for urgent action in four areas critical to gender justice and the MDGs.

Firstly, stepped-up measures are needed to boost women-friendly public services to meet women and girls’ right to education, health and food, it says. In particular, secondary education is very important for girls because it enables them to access jobs, lowers their chance of contracting HIV and gives them a greater say in household decisions.

The report also underscores the need for land and jobs for women to ensure their right to decent livelihoods through access to economic assets, pointing to the example of Tajikistan, where the Government has taken steps to increase women’s control over land, with the proportion of farms headed by women climbing from 2 to 14 per cent between 2002 and 2008.

Third, the report urges an increase in women’s voices in decision-making, calling for more women in leadership from the community to the global level. Their limited participation in the public sphere starts in the home, UNIFEM says, with early marriages – disempowering girls throughout their lives – having the biggest impact.

Lastly, the publication emphasizes the importance of ending violence faced by too many women and girls on a daily basis. This violence, it stresses, stunts their opportunities, curtails their mobility and denies them of their rights.

UNIFEM is one of the four UN bodies – along with the Division for the Advancement of Women (**DAW**), the Office of the Special Adviser on Gender Issues, and the UN International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (**UN-INSTRAW**) – that will be merged under the new entity known as UN Women.

It was established in July by the General Assembly to oversee all of the world body's programmes aimed at promoting women's rights and their full participation in global affairs. One of its goals will be to support the Commission on the Status of Women and other inter-governmental bodies in devising policies.

UN Women, headed by former Chilean president Michelle Bachelet, will also aim to help Member States implement standards, provide technical and financial support to countries which request it, and forge partnerships with civil society. Within the UN, it will hold the world body accountable for its own commitments on gender equality.

In carrying out its functions, UN Women will be working with an annual budget of at least \$500 million – double the current combined resources of the four agencies it comprises. It is expected to become operational by next January.

**News Tracker: past stories on this issue**

UN Women's first chief voices optimism after being named to new post