No Empowerment without Rights, No Rights without Politics: Gender-Equality, Mdgs and the Post-2015 Development Agenda

Corresponding Author: Idris Hussayn

Received 21 January, 2018; Accepted 09 February, 2018 © The author(s) 2018. Published with open access at www.questjournals.org

ABSTRACT: The main argument of this paper is that progress towards gender equality and women’s empowerment in the development agenda requires a human rights-based approach, and requires support for the women’s movement to activate and energize the agenda. Both are missing from Millennium Development Goal (MDG) 3. Empowerment requires agency along multiple dimensions—sexual, reproductive, economic, political, and legal. However, MDG 3 frames women’s empowerment as reducing educational disparities. By omitting other rights and not recognizing the multiple interdependent and indivisible human rights of women, the goal of empowerment is distorted and “development silos” are created. Women’s organizations are key actors in pushing past such distortions and silos at all levels, and hence crucial to pushing the gender equality agenda forward. However, the politics of agenda setting also influences funding priorities such that financial support for women’s organizations and for substantive women’s empowerment projects is limited. To re-focus the post-2015 Development Agenda around human rights, we conclude by outlining an approach of issue-based goals and people-focused targets, which makes substantive space for civil society including women’s rights organizations.

KEYWORDS: Gender; Empowerment; Development; Poverty; Human rights

I. INTRODUCTION

The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), their targets and their indicators have dominated development discourse in the last two decades, being upheld as the gold standard for development by various international organizations. Yet some have argued that these goals are reductionist, simplistic and do not do justice to the Millennium Declaration (Amin 2006; Fukuda-Parr 2012; Kabeer 2010; Langford 2010; Saith 2006; Sen 2013; Vandermoortele 2012; Yamin and Falb 2012). The breadth and depth of the Declaration necessarily meant choosing a tractable set of goals, targets and indicators to guide policies and monitor outcomes. However, the politics of agenda setting prioritized a narrow set of issues within particular themes such as poverty alleviation and women’s empowerment. Themes such as inequality and sustainability were absent altogether in the MDGs. While the goals give us a relatively narrow view of development, the chosen targets and indicators led to largely disconnected funding and policy priorities instead of the integrated approach envisioned in the Millennium Declaration. The development agenda shaped by the MDGs created what have been termed “development silos” (DAWN 2012), delinked from human rights and the principles outlined in the Millennium Declaration.

This paper focuses on gender equality and women’s empowerment (MDG 3). Its core argument is that progress toward this goal in the development agenda requires two ingredients that are missing from the MDG framework—a human rights-based approach, and support for women’s organizations to advocate for it. Human rights gradually gained prominence in the development debate through the UN conferences of the 1990s, the work of the Special Rapporteurs appointed by the Human Rights Council, and advocacy by civil society organizations. The World Conference on Human Rights held in Vienna during 1993 was a critical milestone for a rights-based approach to development, especially for gender equality and the empowerment of women. More than 800 non-governmental organizations were represented at the conference and more than 1500 at the civil society forum preceding the conference.

The common ground forged between different actors integrated the rights of all people as a fundamental basis for designing and implementing laws, development programs and financing. Human rights were declared universal, indivisible and interdependent, and women’s rights—economic, political, cultural, reproductive and sexual, including bodily autonomy and integrity—were officially acknowledged as human rights.
The women’s rights movement had previously succeeded in generating support for the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), adopted in 1979. But Vienna signaled a watershed through its inclusion of women’s rights groups from the South and North in the mainstream human rights movement. Their advocacy led to women’s rights being treated as indivisible and interdependent in both private and public spheres, and the right to self-determination as including freedom to make sexual and reproductive choices (Abeysekara 2005; UN 1993).

The UN system provided several other platforms where civil society advocated embedding human rights in the development agenda and obtained concrete commitments from governments (Abeysekara 2005; Antrobus 2005; Fukuda-Parr, Yamin, and Greenstein 2014; Saith 2006). In particular, demands to recognize women’s reproductive and sexual choices were taken forward successfully by women’s groups in Cairo in 1994 and Beijing in 1995, despite bitter opposition from religious conservative groups.

At the UN International Conference on Population and Development held in Cairo, sexual and reproductive health and rights, women’s empowerment, and male responsibility were highlighted as central to addressing population and development concerns. At the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing, more than 50,000 women negotiated with governments and other stakeholders over 12 areas of concerns and 42 sub-themes, locating women’s empowerment in multiple dimensions of agency at the individual, household, national and international levels (Sen and Mukherjee 2013; UN 1995).

With so much prior achievement, how were the MDGs narrowed down in their approach? In 1996, the OECD’s Development Assistance Committee (DAC) came up with a list of International Development Goals and time-bound quantitative targets informed by earlier conferences but distinct in two important respects. First, they were formulated by a small group of rich countries and not by the global community; and there was no place given to civil society organizations. Second, these were a narrower set of targets (such as halving poverty as defined by the World Bank criterion of $1 a day), less ambitious than the vision of development couched within a rights-based approach. In October 2000, the International Development Goals were articulated as the MDGs in a joint report by the UN, OECD, World Bank and IMF (Saith 2006). This report elicited strong criticism from various civil society stakeholders for its hollowing out of the development agenda (Galtung et al. 2006). Nonetheless, in 2002 these narrower goals, couched within the neo-liberal agenda of the Monterrey conference document on Financing for Development, were supported by a number of governments. In the Monterrey consensus, external assistance was contingent on poor countries taking steps towards liberalizing markets and following fiscal discipline and the role of the private sector was emphasized strongly.

The rights-based approach that was central to earlier international agreements on development and gender equality was eroded (Galtung et al. 2008; Saith 2006; UN 2003). The MDGs represented a North–South compromise to give greater focus to development but built on continuity of neoliberal macroeconomic policies. On this basis they became synonymous with the global development agenda, bringing together multiple stakeholders: development agencies, national governments, regional governments and civil society organizations (Fukuda-Parr 2012, 2013).

Women’s rights had a mixed passage in this compromised context. MDG 3 was explicitly framed in terms of gender equality and women’s empowerment. Substantive promotion of these had much potential, not only for MDG 3 but also to achieve other goals. Yet MDG 3 was whittled down to uncontroversial issues and disjointed targets and indicators. The nature of interdependence and indivisibility of women’s human rights is elaborated below to show how important it is in empowering women and why the MDG framework falls short in this respect.

**Millennium Development Goal 3.**
**Goal 3: “Promote gender equality and women’s empowerment”**
**Target**
3A: “Eliminate gender disparity in primary and secondary education, preferably by 2005, and in all levels of education no later than 2015”

**Indicators:**
3.1: Ratio of girls to boys in primary, secondary and tertiary education
3.2: Share of women in wage employment in the non-agricultural sector
3.3: Proportion of seats held by women in national parliaments

**The Political Economy of the MDGs and Women’s Empowerment**
The Empowerment-Rights Nexus
Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era (DAWN), is credited with earliest writings on women’s empowerment which drew upon practical experiences with policies, programs and civil society actions in several countries (Sen and Mukherje, 2014; Sen and Grown 1987). Empowerment was understood by DAWN and in the

*Corresponding Author: Idris Hussayn*
pioneering work of Batliwala (1994) and others to mean the transformation of unequal power relations. It includes the processes by which people who have been unable to exercise agency or autonomy gain such abilities. Such a transformation requires both external resources (such as land, credit, access to technology and markets, supportive political institutions and cultural norms) and internal capacities (such as knowledge and self-confidence).

Resources and capacities shape people’s ability to act upon plans and lead the lives they desire. How women empower themselves varies in different contexts and cultures, but certain elements are common and central (Sen and Mukheje 2014). Empowered women are not only able to access resources, or participate in politics and public life, but also enjoy bodily autonomy and integrity, and freedom from violence. While there has been healthy debate on such aspects of agency and empowerment, it is evident that empowerment is not only about addressing immediate inequalities faced by women but also changes in consciousness and agency that challenge patriarchal structures (Sen and Mukheje 2015; Batliwala 1994, 2007; Bisnath and Elson 1999; Kabeer 1999; Malhotra, Schuler, and Boender 2002; Sen 1994). This requires agency along multiple dimensions—sexual, reproductive, economic including unpaid care, political, legal—and multiple freedoms, including, most importantly, from threats and violence. All of these are interdependent and indivisible as understood in human rights discourse.

Drawing from Batliwala (1994, 2007), Bisnath and Elson, Kabeer (1999), Malhotra, Schuler and Boender (2002) and Sen (1994) Sen and Mukheje (2014) concluded that women’s agency can be promoted by shifting the distribution of resources—assets, institutions, norms, and knowledge—in favor of women, and ensuring freedom from violence so they can exercise greater control over their lives and have a wider set of choices. Interdependence and indivisibility mean that advancement in some dimensions of agency can lead to progress on others (Sen and Mukheje 2014). Equally, lack of progress in some dimensions can hamper others. This is illustrated by the fact that countries as diverse as Malawi, Cuba, China, Latvia, France and the USA, have similar Global Gender Gap Index (GGGI) scores (Sen and Mukheje 2014) —the GGGI being a weighted average of achievements in education, economic participation and opportunity; health and survival and political empowerment.

Higher gross domestic product per person (that, on average, leads to better capabilities such as education, health and economic outcomes) does not necessarily lead to higher levels of gender equality in France, Japan and Saudi Arabia.

The reasons lie in the complex interlinking of gender inequalities. Improving women’s education and health does not translate into empowerment if women do not have sexual and reproductive rights, freedom from the drudgery of unpaid work such as fetching water, fuel, other housework, the same political rights and access to productive assets and economic opportunities as men, or freedom from violence (UN Millennium Project 2005). The reverse also holds; insufficient access to assets, limited sexual and reproductive rights, or significant time spent in unpaid household chores can limit health and educational achievement.

The foundation for an approach that recognizes this interdependence was laid in Vienna in 1993 at the human rights conference, and carried forward in the Cairo and Beijing conferences of 1994 and 1995. Yet it was missing from MDG3’s targets and indicators, which are narrowed down to reducing gender disparities in all levels of education, and ad hoc measures of women’s employment in the non-agricultural sector and political representation. The problem is three-fold. First, key aspects of women’s autonomy and agency, in particular, their sexual and reproductive rights, were omitted altogether by the MDGs. Only around one-quarter of the issues covered by the Beijing Platform for Action were directly or indirectly covered by an MDG target or indicator(s) or both—education, health, women’s employment and political representation, and access to water and sanitation. Several other crucial rights and areas of intervention did not find any place in the MDG framework, and neither did different aspects of discrimination and measures to tackle these as given in CEDAW (Sen and Mukhejee 2013). Such omissions are regrettable, integral as these are to women’s self-determination and bodily integrity.

Second, women’s economic and political participation was not handled with sufficient depth. Since gender is a social construct with considerable diversity across countries and sub-national areas, goals and targets have to leave enough room for national and local implementation strategies appropriate to specific contexts. MDG3 has a single target—to eliminate gender disparities in education—but education by itself cannot capture the many and diverse forms of discrimination. It is not very helpful for countries where there are few gender gaps in education that are inimical to girls, but where inequality manifests in several other dimensions such as violence against women, as in the Caribbean, Sri Lanka and Kerala (India) necessarily translate into better economic opportunities.

More, other human rights violations such as insufficient access to political positions and high incidence of violence against women may remain even for educated women. Even in economically advanced countries
such as Norway, the USA and Germany and emerging economies of Brazil where there are no gender gaps in education, a significant proportion of women have experienced violence by an intimate partner (Sen and Mukherje, 2014). Similarly, an increased share of women in non-agricultural wage employment (MDG Indicator 3.2) and in parliament (MDG Indicator 3.3) has the potential to improve women’s position in their households, and in public policy formulation and implementation respectively (Sen and Mukherje, 2014).

However, such factors alone are not magic bullets. Political representation is problematic when women in political positions have to refashion themselves to be “honorary males” who reinforce patriarchal norms and rules or when such representation is still embedded in institutions that are “male-biased” (Devika and Mukherjee 2007; Elson 1995). Non-agricultural wage employment yields minimal benefits to women if the work is insecure, informal, poorly paid without social security and other benefits, and devalues women’s unpaid care responsibilities and the constraints these impose on them. Thus, women’s shares of non-agricultural employment are certainly higher in developed countries but not necessarily matched by equal earnings. Countries such as Bangladesh that have had female heads of state for several years, or even Norway that scores high on female political representation, still have high proportions of women facing intimate partner violence (Sen and Mukherje, 2014).

The inadequacy of MDG indicators of wage employment and political representation, disconnected from other dimensions of inequality, are insufficient to measure gender inequality per se (Sen and Mukherje, 2014). This brings us to the third problem.

II. THE PROBLEM OF SILOS

It is evident that the MDGs did not have women’s human rights adequately built into their framework of targets and indicators such that gender equality and women’s empowerment could make consistent progress. As outlined above, this is not only a matter of outright omissions such as violence against women, or the “care” work that women are responsible for, but also by prioritizing some rights over others. Education and health were prioritized over economic and political rights; and even within health, maternal health and HIV/AIDS were prioritized to the exclusion of sexual and reproductive health more generally (Sen and Mukherje 2014; Baba, Rajwani and Hussayn, 2014).

The inclusion of universal access to reproductive health as target 5B only occurred much later in the MDG process after much pressure and advocacy. Such narrowness served to disconnect MDGs from each other and created “development silos” in practice (DAWN 2012). For instance, progress for MDG 1 on the reduction of extreme poverty would probably be faster if gender inequality were addressed effectively (Sen and Mukherje 2014; Hussayn et al 2016). Since the standard measures of extreme poverty such as $1.25 a day are at the household level, it is not possible to prove this directly. However, it is generally accepted that, because women are less educated, less likely to have productive assets such as land and finance, less likely to have paid work and, when working for pay, likely to be paid less than men, it is plausible that women are more likely to live in poverty (Elson and Balakrishnan 2012; Kabeer 2003; OECD 2010; UNW 2012).

If MDG 3 was framed to address gender inequalities along these multiple dimensions, then the potential to reduce hunger would be greater. Studies show that when women are more educated and have greater control over household expenditure, child malnutrition tends to be lower (World Bank 2003). Given the feminization of agriculture in regions that hold a large share of the world’s poor (such as India and China), development of both agricultural and non-agricultural livelihoods with women as empowered participants of the process is necessary. Improving women’s access to adequate finance, appropriate technologies and the know-how to use such technologies would raise productivity, reduce hunger and reduce poverty (UN Millennium Project 2005; World Bank 2012).

MDG2 on educational achievement could be realized if the barriers to girls’ education, such as a demand for their labor at home, early marriage, and perceptions of girls’ future roles as caregivers with limited earning opportunities, are tackled along with ensuring safety in schools, larger numbers of women teachers, and availability of decent toilets. An increase in girls’ attendance would contribute significantly to a rise in overall attendance ratios. Educated girls and women have greater control over their fertility, and this leads in turn to higher likelihoods of their children’s school enrollment and better health and nutrition outcomes (Kabeer 2005; UN Millennium Project 2005; World Bank 2012).

Gender equality is also critical to achieving MDG 4, MDG 5 and MDG 6 on reducing child mortality, improving maternal health and combating HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases respectively. Higher-under-five mortality among girls than boys is strongly associated with gender biases such as daughter aversion and son preference. Maternal morbidity and mortality are not only on account of weak health care systems but also a variety of harmful practices and constraints that violate women’s human rights, such as early and forced marriage, violence including by intimate partners, and constrained sexual and reproductive choices regarding contraception or safe and legal abortion.
For young women and adolescents, the absence of comprehensive sexuality education increases the risk of early pregnancy, and sexually transmitted infections. More than 60% of the roughly one million HIV infections among young people aged 15–24 are among girls and women (OECD 2010; UNW 2012; World Bank 2012). MDG 7 on environmental sustainability includes the target of improving access to drinking water and sanitation. Access to adequate water and sanitation not only prevents excess child and female mortality, but also reduces women’s unpaid labor time, a factor preventing their participation in paid work and in the public sphere. More, women’s economic participation as the primary caretakers within their households typically makes them the repositories of knowledge on common local and environmental resources such as forests, flora, fauna, water bodies, and so forth. Gender biases that prevent women’s participation, especially indigenous, migrant and refugee women, in public policy formulation and implementations short-change processes designed to promote sustainability (UNDP 2012; UNESCO 2010).

Persistent gender inequalities within homes and outside pose significant obstacles to achieving the MDGs. Removing such inequalities would empower women to improve their own and their families’ standard of living, and achieve other development goals. Such synergies are acknowledged in the Millennium Declaration and also by the OECD, UNESCO, the World Bank and the UN Inter-Agency Network on Women and Gender Equality (UN 2000, 2001, 2005, 2012; OECD 2010; UNESCO 2010; World Bank 2003, 2012).

Yet the MDG framework effectively ignores them, as do the related national policies, thereby stunting their transformative potential. This is exacerbated by lack of clarity on the processes by which MDG targets are to be achieved, or how indicators are to be used to track progress (Fukuda-Parr 2012; Vandermeulete 2012). While methods of implementation have to respond to context, consistency towards the basic goals requires basic guidelines, benchmarks, and guidance on alternative approaches.

The recommendations of the thematic task forces of the Millennium Project did provide detailed policy and program alternatives, good practices, and identified risks and shortcomings, but these were not incorporated effectively into the MDG framework (Sen and Mukherje, 2014). Although the latest report of UN Women on the post-2015 Development Agenda takes these concerns on board, it remains to be seen how these will filter through the political processes shaping the post-2015 Agenda and outcomes (UNW 2013).

III. THE RIGHTS POLITICS LINKAGE

The policy silos created by the MDGs deepened pre-existing fissures between and among advocates of economic justice and of gender justice; fissures that women’s organizations have struggled to bridge. Such politics work to suppress women’s rights in intended and unintended ways, and are also representative of power interests that sustain gender and other structural inequalities (Sen and Mukherje, 2014; Duran 2012; Harcourt, 2006).

The hegemony of the neo-liberal economic agenda poses serious challenges for economic justice since the 1980s this agenda has shaped global and national economic policies towards fiscal conservatism, open markets for capital and commodities, privatization, and a greater role to financial and corporate sectors. Such policies have had the combined effect of increasing inequalities between and within countries, loosening labor market regulations, pushing down wages, especially female wages, in export-oriented sectors, reducing real incomes and job growth, increasing social conflict and exclusion from common resources (Ghosh, 2005; Stiglitz, 2002; UNESCO and UNW, 2013).

Although recurring financial crises through the 1990s and more recently the great recession of 2008 have cast serious doubt on such market fundamentalism, its global dominance continues. A majority of all economies still retain a substantial neoliberal slant to their economic policies, prioritizing growth over development approaches that include widespread improvement in the material well-being of citizens and the freedom to which they have access.

The growing inequality in the global economy has manifested as a struggle between South and North (G77 vs. G8) over the “right to development,” trade and investment policies, and development assistance. These politics constitute a shifting terrain, with the emergence of fissures and fractions, new economic powers (such as BRICs) and changing struggles for economic and political dominance. The politics of gender equality and women’s human rights have tended to get caught within these power struggles. Women’s human rights often become a pawn in the global chess-game of power and pelf.

For example, at Rio + 20, the global conference to mark the 20th anniversary of the UN conference on environment and development during June 2012, North–South struggles over climate change resulted in the loss of reproductive rights in the final outcome document. 6

At the same time the presence of well-funded religious groups opposed to gender equality on the global scene and their expansion into developing countries has brought the political battles over women’s bodily autonomy onto national, regional and global arenas (Petchesky, 2003; Sen 2005; Sen and Correa, 2000). Religious fundamentalist groups colluding against gender equality and women’s human rights are located in both the North
and the South. Such fundamentalism is also associated with increased economic insecurity and conflict between distinct social groups shaped by race, ethnicity, caste, migrant and non-migrant status (Amin 2006; Chua 2004).

As identities harden, the fallback to conservative traditions goes hand in hand with a tendency to militate against an expansion of women’s rights and the rights of other marginalized groups. Indeed, such polarization to the right reaffirms traditional patriarchal gender roles and family relations. The dividing line thus has been the bodily autonomy and integrity central to women’s sexual and reproductive health and rights, and has often placed women’s rights activists between a rock and a hard place.

Nonetheless, the presence of women’s organizations at all levels is central to keeping the struggle for women’s human rights going. Women’s groups are key actors for social change, vital to the advancement of the gender equality agenda, and in drawing attention to the multiple dimensions along which women’s rights need to be protected, promoted and advanced (Antrobus and Sen 2005; World Bank 2012). For the MDGs to be transformed into a post-2015 Development Agenda that genuinely advances gender equality, the continuing presence of and funding for women’s organizations will be critical.

The fracturing and “siloization” of gender equality and the exclusion of critical women’s rights have not only narrowed the agenda but also skewed funding priorities. While funding may not automatically translate into desired development and gender equality outcomes, finances are obviously a necessary precondition to bring goals to reality. Overseas development assistance and private aid flows have been directed increasingly via the public sector to education, health and family planning since the late 1990s. However, women’s rights organizations have faced shortfalls in funding, especially for issues such as reproductive and sexual health and rights.

Earlier conferences on women’s rights had generated significant momentum for funding and implementation as mandated during the Beijing conference. Proposed measures included strengthening institutional mechanisms such as state agencies with women’s advancement as their principal mandate, mainstreaming gender in other agencies, legal reforms and new legislation to criminalize various forms of violence, and public policies to enhance women’s participation and opportunities in the economy and political decision-making (Harcourt 2006).

Since 1995 gender mainstreaming became the dominant strategy for OECD donors, despite voices within and outside pointing to limitations in its implementation (Aasen 2006). Such problems are replete with the limited technical capacity of national women’s machineries, and are compounded further by insufficient accountability mechanisms and political commitment (Chiwara and Karadeizli 2008; Sen 2000; UN Millennium Project 2005).

Consequently, financial outlays for gender equality have not matched the lip service given to MDG 3. Studies of various donor agencies including bilateral donors illustrate how strong statements of intention to the gender-mainstream do not translate into effective implementation in programs or resource allocation, let alone monitoring and evaluation. Further, some have argued that even when resources for mainstreaming increased, this may have been at the expense of funding for stand-alone gender programs, although this is difficult to prove (Aasen 2006; Clark et al. 2006). A major challenge is to increase the share of resources for gender equality in national budgets so that they do not remain overwhelmingly dependent on off-budget donor assistance.

Aid effectiveness measures bear some responsibility for the poor funding of women’s empowerment projects, women’s rights organizations and gender machineries. First, new modalities such as sector-wide approaches, basket funding and budget support have increased official development assistance going to developing countries, but women’s organizations, even ministries or machineries for women, often lose access to assistance funding (Aasen 2006; Clark et al. 2006). Second, as aid effectiveness is adopted to improve the financing available to achieve MDGs, there have been greater flows to low-income governments. Middle-income countries lose out even though aid may still be required to counter women’s human rights violations such as occupation segregation, lack of reproductive rights or violence against women.

Finally, aid effectiveness measures such as country ownership present conservative states with justification to abandon controversial issues not covered by the MDGs as a “foreign imposed agenda.” To the extent that women’s non-government organizations are supported, they are often unable to take critical stances and may well be penalized for doing so (Clark et al. 2006; Duran 2012).

Although bilateral aid is the principal source of funding for gender equality projects and women’s rights organizations (Alpizar et al. 2010; Clark et al. 2006; Pittman et al. 2012), these have low prioritization revealed by aid figures during 2002–2011. This is evident in the extent to which donor countries screen resources for gender priorities versus actual shares of gender focused aid in total aid. Aid volumes increased steadily, and the share of this screened for gender equality rose from about one-tenth to nearly two-thirds by 2011. A major jump in screening seems to have occurred in 2005 when the Millennium project’s thematic task force on gender reaffirmed the continued need for financing gender equality. Nevertheless, screening for gender equality was not matched by greater volumes of gender focused aid, which remained a very low 2–5% of all bilateral aid.

*Corresponding Author: Idris Hussayn
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>YEAR</th>
<th>Total sector allocable bilateral aid to developing countries (1)</th>
<th>Share of aid flows that were screened for the gender marker (2)</th>
<th>Gender-focused aid flows (secondary and principal objectives) (3)</th>
<th>Gender-focused aid flows (principal objective only) (4)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>47.5</td>
<td>0.11</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>1.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>53.7</td>
<td>0.16</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>1.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>64.3</td>
<td>0.18</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>1.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>67.7</td>
<td>0.46</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>1.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>75.0</td>
<td>0.51</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>2.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>75.4</td>
<td>0.60</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>3.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>92.2</td>
<td>0.58</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>1.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>92.7</td>
<td>0.65</td>
<td>4.7</td>
<td>2.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>98.8</td>
<td>0.93</td>
<td>6.2</td>
<td>2.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>84.8</td>
<td>0.67</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>2.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Only one-half of this is towards projects with gender equality as the fundamental objective (Table 1, column 4). As Duran (2012) argues, funding for gender equality seems tied to gender mainstreaming rather than standalone women’s projects and women’s organizations. Given the relative stability of total aid flows (Table 1, column 1), volatility of aid for women’s organizations cannot be attributed to the 2001 and 2008 recessions alone. Low and inconsistent financial support for these organizations may be the unintended consequence of narrowly defined goals, insubstantial gender mainstreaming approaches and aid effectiveness measures focused on country ownership. However, the perceptions of women’s organizations and donor policies such as the US “global gag rule” point to the possible role of conservative interests intentionally blocking resources (Clark et al. 2006).

Intentional or not, the USA, which is one of the biggest donors with respect to total volume and share of all official development assistance flows (Sen and Mukherje, 2014), commits far lower shares of its total aid to women’s equality organizations than all DAC donors combined. Poor financial support for women’s rights organizations means poor support for the women’s rights agenda. Wherever institutional mechanisms and finances allow for gender equality advocates’ participation in priority setting processes, gender priorities are integrated more effectively in development plans.

Similarly, technical capacity for gender analysis of macroeconomic policy, along with appropriate targets and indicators in expenditure and results frameworks, is critical to integrate a gendered perspective in development practice and to transform the intangible norms that buttress gender inequalities (Chiwara and Karadeizli 2008; Clark et al. 2006; Duran 2012; UN 2005). That is, gender equality necessarily needs consistent engagement of gender equality activists and experts, which requires institutional and financial support.

The way forward for a Development Agenda on Women

The line of direction proposed by the authors is that which points out targets and indicators of MDG 3 on gender equality and women’s empowerment were unable to galvanize real transformation or mobilize resources effectively, given the lack of attention to the indivisibility and interdependence of women’s human rights. But
how can an interdependent agenda be translated into clear targets and indicators, with sufficient space for substantive civil society engagement as integral to the agenda?

One relatively simple way to do this is to focus on both people and issues. The framework proposed is one that suggests the retention of goals as broad and issue-focused, but targets derived from the goal should be specific to groups of people who are disadvantaged, or marginalized. For instance, the goal of gender equality remains to “Promote gender equality and empower women,” but the targets can relate to particular women who have been historically and/or currently marginalized; for example, uneducated women in polygynous marital relationships and/or uneducated women in purdah and in polygynous marriages in Nigeria (Hussayn, 2017) and dalit and adivasi women in India (Sen and Mukherje 2014).

Evidence on the MDGs shows that, across different goals, certain groups of people recur in the observed achievement gaps for several targets. For instance, in Nigeria, 54% of all children suffered nutrition deprivation compared with the national 23%. Forty-nine percent of all households were deprived of water but more than one-half of all rural households had this problem (World Bank 2011; NPoC 2006). In India, dalits and adivasis are much poorer and more deprived than other Indians, regardless of the metric (Kabeer 2010; Sen and Mukherje 2014). Disaggregation by population group shows that 81% of all adivasis are poor as compared with 65.8% of dalits and one-third of all other Indians (Sen and Mukherje 2014).

Sen and Mukherje (2014) opined that people-focused targets would necessarily imply that the groups of people marginalized, at risk and at the center of such targets would vary across regions and countries. However, national and sub-national identification of groups of people should be based on transparent criteria for indicators, which are globally determined and consistent with human rights standards and the achievement of human development. Therefore target setting to empower chosen groups requires that multiple needs be addressed while cutting across issues and preventing silos.

For women, the key elements include legal empowerment; political participation and voice at multiple levels; access to and control over economic resources for both income earning and managing care work; human development including safe water, sanitation, housing, health and education; and social protection again risks and vulnerabilities (Sen and Mukherje 2014). Thus, to address the goal of gender equality and women’s empowerment with a focus on poor rural women, the targets would have to address women’s land, inheritance and marital rights; participation and voice in local development planning; fair and adequate wages, access to productive inputs including infrastructure that cuts down significantly on women’s time for tasks such as fetching water, fuel and fodder; literacy, education and vocational training; adequate access to healthcare, including sexual and reproductive health services; water, housing, sanitation; and maternity-related benefits that are appropriate to the informal sector. Some of these are areas in which there is ongoing work on developing indicators.

The commitments and obligations set out in the Beijing Platform for Action, and CEDAW, and the seven strategic priorities listed by the Millennium Project is presented below to show the level of concomitance between them.

**Task Force on Gender Equality**

“These interdependent priorities are the minimum necessary to empower women:

1. Strengthen opportunities for post-primary education for girls while simultaneously meeting commitments to universal primary education.
2. Guarantee sexual and reproductive health and rights.
3. Invest in infrastructure to reduce women’s and girls’ time burdens.
4. Guarantee women’s and girls’ property and inheritance rights.
5. Eliminate gender inequality in employment by decreasing women’s reliance on informal employment, closing gender gaps in earnings, and reducing occupational segregation.
6. Increase women’s share of seats in national parliaments and local governmental bodies.
7. Combat violence against girls and women.” (UN Millennium Project 2005)

Bringing these to fruition substantively across line ministries and departments will require institutional arrangements that reflect strong political will, together with effective administrative arrangements, resources (financial and human) and adequate placement and status within national governance machineries (Kabeer and Subramanian 1999).

People-focused targets imply that people themselves are involved in determining what is to be done, and how it should be done. Such a process has the potential to address a major critique of the MDGs, namely the technocratic designing and implementation of targets and indicators. If the post-2015 process is to have a stronger affirmation of human rights, it will have to place basic freedoms of self-determination and autonomy at the heart of its agenda. How the agenda itself is set, and the extent to which people shape it, will be key. The advantages include moving beyond issue silos; addressing people’s needs directly while having an impact on several facets of inequality; and direct involvement of people in determining what will be done on their
behalf. These would be especially pertinent for empowering poor women, who are usually at the junction of several intersecting inequalities. Other advantages include retention of clear goals while tackling processes, participation and accountability (Sen 2013). Therefore, to bring back a strong and effective affirmation of human rights including self-determination and autonomy as integral to the post-2015 Development Agenda, focusing on people and their direct involvement in shaping the agenda can go a long way.

REFERENCES