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# GENDER EQUALITY

V I E W P O I N T P A P E R

*Benefits and Costs of the Gender Equality Targets  
for the Post-2015 Development Agenda*

ACDI/VOCA

# Benefits and Costs of the Gender Equality Targets for the Post-2015 Development Agenda

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Post-2015 Consensus

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## Introduction

As the 2015 deadline for the Millennium Development Goals approaches, the international community has been proposing, debating, and advocating for the next set of development goals. While this broad range of involvement of international actors is encouraging, the list of goals and targets has grown so vast that it is at risk of not being taken seriously and becoming impossible to fund. As an indication of this, the July 2014 report released by the United Nations Open Working Group on Sustainable Development Goals included a proposal for 17 goals and 169 targets. In response, the Post-2015 Consensus initiative, led by the Copenhagen Consensus Center, has brought on a team of economists and civil society representatives to review and recommend goals that will yield the largest return for human development. ACIDI/VOCA, a private, non-profit organization that promotes inclusive economic development, is pleased to present our viewpoint paper on post-2015 gender equality development goals in response to the assessment paper, written by economist Irma Clots-Figueras.

Clots-Figueras draws on a large amount of evidence to present proposed priorities for post-2015 development goals regarding gender equality and empowerment of women and girls. In an effort to prioritize goals and targets with the greatest return on investment, the paper uses benefit-cost ratios to analyze the proposed goals and recommend priorities. When benefit-cost ratios are not available, Clots-Figueras evaluates the issue through the lens of other relevant data. This evidence-based approach is excellent for providing realistic, yet ambitious, analysis of the post-2015 development agenda for gender equality.

Clots-Figueras makes a strong and solid case for the adoption of targets related to the following issues: equal right of women to own and inherit property, reproductive and maternal health, working conditions and labor force participation, and educational goals at secondary and tertiary levels. For the first issue, there are no benefit-cost ratio data available, but the author concludes that the tangible nature of the target makes this a priority. For the latter three, she cites strong benefit-cost ratios that support including these in the post-2015 goals and targets.

However, there are some important issues not sufficiently addressed in this perspective paper that will be critical for achieving gender equality as well as other proposed post-2015 goals, including the overarching challenge of eradicating poverty. This viewpoint paper presents ACIDI/VOCA's recommendations for the post-2015 agenda:

- Aim to reduce gender gaps in agricultural sectors as part of economic empowerment targets
- Draw on additional evidence that supports a target related to gender equality in working conditions and labor force participation
- Encourage the use of targets that seek to reduce gender gaps in lieu of zero-targets
- Reconsider targets related to gender-based violence and violence against women

## **Aim to Reduce Gender Gaps in Agricultural Sectors as part of Economic Empowerment Targets**

ACDI/VOCA commends and supports Clots-Figuera's overall conclusion that the post-2015 agenda should focus on women's economic empowerment. However, gender inequality in the agriculture sector must be addressed as part of this focus. According to the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), more than 52 percent of economically active women in developing regions work in the agricultural sector where they face significant gender inequities and discrimination (FAO, 2011). A goal related to women's economic empowerment, food security, and poverty reduction, therefore, cannot ignore the importance of empowering female farmers, workers, business owners, and service providers in agricultural value chains.

The case for including the reduction of gender inequality gaps in agricultural and rural economies as a priority goal in the post-2015 development agenda has already been made. The FAO presented the case for gender equality in agriculture in 2010-2011 with the release of its groundbreaking report, "State of Food and Agriculture: The Status of Women in Agriculture<sup>1</sup>." This report showed the strong link between gender inequality, food production, and global hunger.

*If women had the same access to productive resources as men, they could increase yields on their farms by 20-30 percent. This could raise total agricultural output in developing countries by 2.5-4 percent, which could in turn reduce the number of hungry people in the world by 12-17 percent... Gains of this magnitude could therefore equate to 100-150 million fewer people living in hunger (FAO, 2011)*

This data, pulled from more than 52 countries, show that gender equality, food security, and poverty reduction goals are inextricably linked. Women in the developing world, the majority of whom work in agriculture, cannot experience gender equality unless gender gaps in access to resources are addressed. At the same time, global demand for food cannot be met without also empowering female farmers with the resources and opportunities they need to increase agricultural productivity.

Recognizing the purpose of the Post-2015 Consensus process to prioritize goals based on what will lead to the greatest impact, it is necessary to also highlight the growing research on the types of programs and interventions that are proven to empower women and, when implemented at broad scale, can have significant impact. The World Bank Group's 2014 report "Levelling the Field: Improving Opportunities for Women Farmers in Africa<sup>2</sup>," for example, cites emerging and promising evidence for interventions in six key areas: land rights, access to labor-inputs, access to non-labor inputs, access to information, access to markets, and human capital. Another report, "Roadmap for Promoting Women's Economic

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.fao.org/docrep/013/i2050e/i2050e00.htm>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.worldbank.org/en/region/afr/publication/levelling-the-field-improving-opportunities-for-women-farmers-in-africa>

Empowerment<sup>3</sup>” published by the UN Foundation and ExxonMobile Foundation, draws on a series of studies to identify evidence of program interventions aimed to empower women from multiple economic contexts: very poor and poor entrepreneurs, very poor and poor farmers, and young women. Among these conclusions are the following evidence-based program implications for empowering female farmers:

*The widely accepted ingredients for success include reforming legislation, so that women have equal rights under the law; strengthening rural institutions to work for women, including accessible infrastructure (roads and electricity); providing agricultural training, extension, and financial services; freeing women’s time through labor-saving technologies; closing the information and technology gaps by providing women with access to improved seeds, fertilizer, and mobile technologies; and supporting women’s collective action (e.g., self-help groups and cooperatives) to help them diversify production, access markets, and achieve scale. (Buvinic et al., 2013)*

While the availability of benefit-cost analysis is limited for programs and interventions that empower female farmers, this growing body of evidence about what constitutes success, combined with the clear data from the FAO that links women’s empowerment with poverty reduction and food security, makes it clear that a target to reduce gender gaps in access to agricultural resources and opportunities is a necessary post-2015 development priority.

## **Draw on Additional Evidence that Supports a Target for Working Conditions and Labor Force Participation**

The assessment paper recommends a post-2015 target related to women’s economic empowerment, particularly with regards to working conditions and labor force participation. This is based on a study demonstrating the high benefit-cost ratio for a certain type of economic empowerment program for young women that combines vocational, entrepreneurship, and life-skills training, which includes reproductive health and skills for negotiating and making decisions about their personal and sexual lives. Clots-Figueras recommends that programs such as these, which enable young women to address both social and economic gender constraints, should be replicated and scaled up as part of the post-2015 agenda. ACDI/VOCA fully supports a focus on economic empowerment and opportunities for women and girls, especially those that also address the underlying socio-cultural constraints that women face due to gender norms and discrimination.

There is additional benefit-cost ratio research from other types of programs that should be incorporated into this recommendation for women’s economic empowerment targets. First, there have been five studies since 2008 that use benefit-cost analysis of capital or asset transfers programs to analyze the impact of these transfers to very poor women on their transition to higher-earning work. These studies show that capital transfers combined with technical training and support can “transform occupational choices of very poor women” (so that they transition from subsistence agriculture or wage employment to self-

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<sup>3</sup> <http://www.womeneconroadmap.org/>

employment where they have higher earnings) “and can be cost-effective” (Buvinic et al., 2013).

Second, there is a growing emphasis on the importance of child-care availability as a precondition for increasing women’s labor force participation. In a recent paper<sup>4</sup> published by the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), economist Caren Grown recommended the availability of child care as a core feature for increasing women’s participation and income through employment (Grown, 2014). Similarly, the “Roadmap for Women’s Economic Empowerment” report highlighted studies in Guatemala City and rural Colombia that suggested high benefit-cost ratios of community day-care programs because of both their increases in women’s employment as well as the “positive effects on the nutrition and development of young children participating.” (Buvinic et al., 2013). It is critical that benefit-cost analysis look at cross-sector benefits such as this one, which has gender equality, child nutrition, and education benefits.

Finally, also relevant is Clots-Figueras’s point, made regarding the goal to ensure equal rights to open a bank account, that evidence about microfinance impacts—at least from a gender equality perspective—is still limited. However, it is certainly worth noting that evidence regarding the importance of savings products to women and girls’ empowerment is not limited. In fact, the “Roadmap for Women’s Economic Empowerment” report describes several empirical studies that demonstrate the “growing consensus that providing women and girls with access to reliable savings products is a smart investment” (Buvinic et al., 2013). This finding further supports a need to prioritize equality in a woman’s ability to open a bank account as part of economic empowerment initiatives.

## **Encourage the Use of Targets that Seek to Reduce Gender Gaps in Lieu of Zero-Targets**

One of the core aims of the Post-2015 Consensus effort is to avoid zero-target goals. This is because of their potentially large costs and diminishing marginal returns. The assessment paper also avoids recommending zero-goal targets; however, the latest list of targets identified by the Open Working Group lacks quantifiable ways to measure changes in gender equality. ACDI/VOCA encourages post-2015 goals to use reduction in gender gaps as a means for setting targets related to gender equality, in lieu of zero-targets. ACDI/VOCA, like many other development agencies, has put in place a gender policy in all of their programs that seeks to reduce gender gaps between women and men in their ability to access, control, and benefit from resources, wealth, opportunities, and services.

This gender focus, in many ways, was modeled after USAID’s recently revised policy on gender equality and female empowerment, which includes an objective focused on reducing gender gaps between men and women. There has been a growth in indices and measurements that track gender inequality gaps between men and women at national and

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<sup>4</sup> <http://usaidlearninglab.org/library/missing-women-gender-and-extreme-poverty-debate>

global levels, such as the World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap<sup>5</sup> project and the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) index of Social Institutions and Gender Inequality<sup>6</sup> (SIGI). While these indices still lack sufficient nationally collected data and exclude important indicators, they are nonetheless useful for tracking and comparing data on gender equality at a global scale. Using quantified gender gaps as a form of targeting and measurement would have the added benefit of incentivizing the international community to increase and improve its collection of sex-disaggregated data on a larger list of indicators and to compile and test them in more comprehensive gender equality indices. Having more readily available and comparable data about gender inequalities provides an incentive for policymakers to act and a means of accountability if they don't.

## **Reconsider Targets Related to Gender-Based Violence and Violence Against Women**

The experience or threat of gender-based violence restricts women—disproportionately more than men—of their agency to be active participants, leaders, and players in economic, political, public, and personal life, as well as in their ability to realize their human rights. The assessment paper concludes that a goal that aims to eliminate all forms of violence against women should not be included because it is a zero-target goal that is too difficult to measure. Clots-Figueras makes this recommendation in part because of the fact that increased reports of violence against women is often a sign that more people are reporting violence, not necessarily that incidents of violence are increasing. This is a valid point. However, the author also bases this recommendation on evidence from programs in low-income countries that show increased economic empowerment and educational attainment for women and girls leads to a reduction in violence against women. While this may be the case in developing countries, rates of violence against women in developed countries where women have achieved higher rates of educational attainment and economic opportunity show that this point has its limitations. In the United States, for example, women have achieved parity in education and near-parity in economic indicators in comparison to men.<sup>7</sup> Yet the Center for Disease Control reported in 2014 that one in five women in the U.S. experience rape at some point in their lifetime (CDC, 2014). This suggests that violence against women is not a natural outcome of educational attainment and economic empowerment and calls for targeted efforts to prevent and address gender-based violence.

## **Conclusion f**

With this in mind, ACIDI/VOCA would support a post-2015 development target related to reducing gender-based violence by placing the burden on governments to ensure that there

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<sup>5</sup> <http://www.weforum.org/issues/global-gender-gap>

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.oecd.org/social/poverty/theoecdsocialinstitutionsandgenderindex.htm>

<sup>7</sup> The World Economic Forum's 2013 Global Gender Gap report showed that the United States has a gender parity score of 1.0 in education - where 1.0 equals equality and 0 equals inequality - and a ranking of 1 out of 110; and a score of .81 and ranking of 6 in economic participation and opportunity.

are policies and implementation procedures to prevent, mitigate, and address violence against women in business, government, public, and personal spaces. Therefore, the measurement would be of the laws and policies put in place to prevent, report, and adjudicate cases of violence against women and protect recipients of such violence. This reduces the unrealistic measurement burden that comes with a target to eliminate all forms of violence against women.

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This paper was written by Lindsey Jones, Director, Gender Mainstreaming and Women's Empowerment at ACDI/VOCA. The project brings together 62 teams of economists with NGOs, international agencies and businesses to identify the goals with the greatest benefit-to-cost ratio for the next set of UN development goals.

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Copenhagen Consensus Center is a think tank that investigates and publishes the best policies and investment opportunities based on how much social good (measured in dollars, but also incorporating e.g. welfare, health and environmental protection) for every dollar spent. The Copenhagen Consensus was conceived to address a fundamental, but overlooked topic in international development: In a world with limited budgets and attention spans, we need to find effective ways to do the most good for the most people. The Copenhagen Consensus works with 100+ of the world's top economists including 7 Nobel Laureates to prioritize solutions to the world's biggest problems, on the basis of data and cost-benefit analysis.

