



COPENHAGEN  
CONSENSUS  
CENTER

# GENDER EQUALITY

VIEWPOINT PAPER

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

Anja Taarup Nordlund

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

---

Post-2015 Consensus

Anja Taarup Nordlund  
*Nordic Consulting Group Sweden*

|                           |          |
|---------------------------|----------|
| <b>INTRODUCTION</b> ..... | <b>1</b> |
| <b>FOCUS</b> .....        | <b>1</b> |
| <b>RESULTS</b> .....      | <b>2</b> |
| <b>INDICATORS</b> .....   | <b>4</b> |
| <b>REFERENCES</b> .....   | <b>7</b> |

## **Introduction**

First of all, I am happy that the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) are not the only driver for gender equality within the development cooperation. Efforts are taking place all over the world that goes way beyond the little gender expectations that the MDGs have provided us with. Having said this, the MDGs are still important. It is the view of the author of this short paper that MDG goals, but mainly MDG indicators, have set the world agenda (or at least the agenda of the development cooperation) in a manner that is not conducive for good results. Besides having been heavily criticized for NOT reflecting the international legal framework on women's human rights or at least not making the linkage clear (e.g. Fakuda-Parr 2010, Painter 2004, Kabeer 2005, Mohindra and Nikiema 2010), the goals themselves have mainly targeted results or effects of inequalities, but not the causes of the inequalities.

MDGs were also criticised for NOT being developed in an inclusive dialogue with stakeholders, not women nor men, girls or boys affected by the MDGs were actually asked about their opinion (e.g. Amin 2006, Reyben 2006, Richard et al 2011).

Promotion of gender equality within the MDGs has been a challenge, isolating gender to especially MDG 3. Other MDGs where women's rights and gender equality have sometimes (but far from always!) been lifted have been: MDG 4 Reduce child mortality, 5. Improve maternal health and 6. Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases. Also the first goal 1. Eradicate Extreme Poverty and Hunger has a target 1.b that refers to women, but no indicator is formulated to ensure this is also measured.

If we want to improve the gender perspective of the MDGs' successor, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), I believe it to be imperative to work with many perspectives. Cost benefit analysis, detailed in the Post 2015 Consensus paper by Figueras (2014), seems to provide such perspective, but should not be isolated to the instrument upon which we base our priorities! Although the reviewer agrees that economic arguments are important, one cannot (simply from an ethical perspective!) rule out human rights from the equation because they do not pay off according to calculations from a methodology that has clear limitations and is widely criticized (Ackerman 2008).

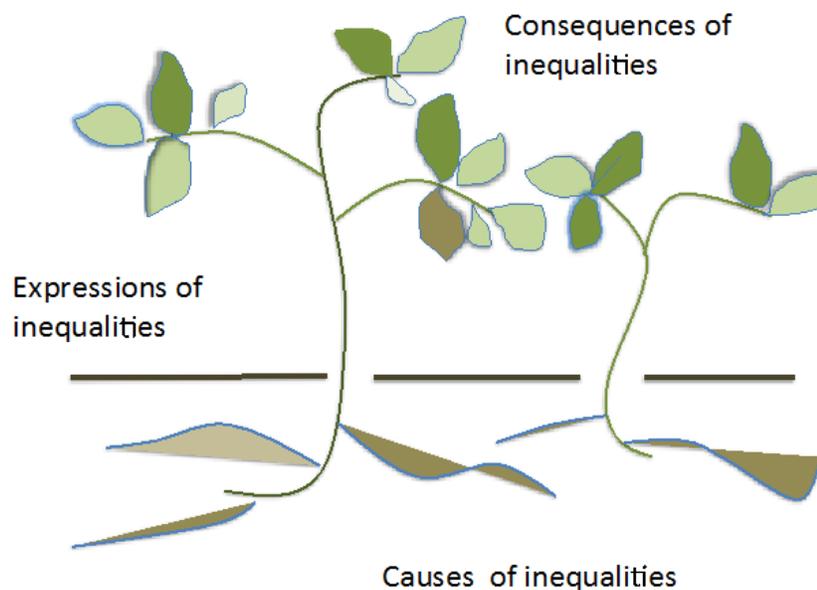
## **Focus**

This paper could be about all the subjects and opportunities that were missed in the MDGs the last time (such as sexual and reproductive rights, gender based violence, gender as a tool to promote business results or how lack of access to safe abortions ruin the lives of women, girls and families). But, I think many others have much better knowledge about each of the subjects and are already promoting goals and indicators that will improve gender equality in the SDGs. Instead I will focus on an overall issue – A discussion on what kind of gender results we are looking for.

## Results

The effects of inequalities can be compared to a weed that spread relentlessly and takes the light and energy from other plants. Gender inequalities hamper positive developments at society, community, relationship, and individual levels. We see these consequences and expressions of inequalities, and we work to eradicate the negative effects – however, in order to eradicate inequalities we need to work with the causes (roots) as well.

*Explanatory model – the ‘weed of inequality’<sup>1</sup>*



***Consequences of inequalities*** – lack of economic development, lack of human security, lack of democracy, deteriorated health, educations and social developments etc.

***Expressions of inequalities*** – Gender based violence, early marriage, trafficking, lack of equal pay for equal work, etc.

***Causes*** – patriarchic norms and practices, perceptions of the role of men and the role of women, drug abuse, mental illness, etc.

Figurearas' cost benefit analysis seeks to measure the ***consequences of the inequalities***, which is a good intention, as we need all the arguments we can get. But cost-benefit seeks to measure the financial effects, which is problematic from a human rights perspective, as this requires quantifying human lives. This potentially leads to calculations that a rape of a child in a developed country will cost more than a child raped in a developing country, which becomes an absurdity, or calculations that suggest that it is a better financial move not to help victims/survivors of trafficking as the immediate financial benefits are difficult –

---

<sup>1</sup> Inspired from a gender based violence training and manual developed for Sida, 2010, Wennerholm, Nordlund and Förberg.

if not impossible - to measure.

I do not argue that cost-benefit is not useful to produce arguments for interventions, however, they should not be a standalone tool for assessing what to finance and not in the development cooperation.

The MDGs track some *expression of inequalities* (a selected few). The visible debate on SDGs seems mainly to be focused on what expressions of inequalities should be put into the new set of goals and indicators, e.g. that Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights should be added.

Nor the MDGs or the cost-benefit perspective applied to the SDGs seek to develop goals for and/or indicators in relation to the *causes of inequalities*. Maybe it is viewed as too difficult or too political? If the SDGs would include analysis of causes and indicators on norms, practices and perceptions, I would argue that this would also lead to recognition of the need for pro-active and preventive work – something that many are working with on a daily basis.

Today the MDGs measure e.g. how many girls and boys are enrolled at school. But it does not track the perceptions that lead to a decision to keep either one of them from primary, secondary or tertiary level of enrollment, nor does it track how girls/boys can/cannot move to and from school due to social restrictions (such as risk of violence). Another example is that MDGs measure women in the labour market (indicator 3.2 Share of women in wage employment in the non-agricultural sector), but it does not, inter alia, track attitudes of women and men to female inclusion in labour market to mention one.<sup>2</sup>

Discriminatory and conducive norms can be measured, tracked and reported, but it requires a mind-shift from a need to tick boxes on immediate results (output level) to tracking knowledge, behavior and attitudes at individual, group and organizational levels in projects and programmes (outcomes) and performing social studies at societal level on norms (impact).

A mind shift is already taking place (see for instance [www.idrc.ca](http://www.idrc.ca) and communication in the outcome mapping community in relation to results, methodologies and approaches). Tracking human behavior is also increasingly being done at the NGO level, as well as being incorporated into development cooperation agencies (e.g. at Sida, CIDA, Norad, DfID). However, none of the International Finance Institutions (IFI) such as World Bank (WB), EBRD, ADB, AfDB have systems that allow for such change. As an example WB overall project development objective indicators in any intervention are always how many were trained (men and women), but never about if they learned anything or changed behavior. Why? Well, it is argued that this cannot be objectively verified, the causal relation is too weak between the activity and these kinds of results.

---

<sup>2</sup> All MDG indicators referred to are from the official list of indicators of the United Nations Statistics division, <http://mdgs.un.org/unsd/mdg/Host.aspx?Content=Indicators/OfficialList.htm>

Focusing on norms requires an acceptance that we cannot attribute changes to a specific intervention, but that we can only contribute to outcome and impact level changes. Consequently, we can seek to prove correlations, but we cannot prove causality as intervention and result at outcome/impact level is affected by a multitude of other factors beyond our control. As an example, we cannot have a gender training and then attribute changes in the participants behavior to that intervention only. Other aspects such as more funds suddenly making gender work feasible, a new boss or simply lack of employee motivation can affect positively or negatively that participants start to prioritize differently. The training – if good – could influence change of priorities, but it does not control the result. And in the end what is it we want to know? Do we want to know how many girls and boys went to school only? Or do we also want to know if they had equal access to knowledge and equal opportunities to learn?

## Indicators

If we assume that the new set of SDGs will be structured in the same way as the previous MDGs, and we need to adjust to this reality, gender would probably best be promoted via formulation of goals and indicators that obligate decision-makers to prioritise gender. First of all none of the indicators today are disaggregated by sex, which would seem to be a minimum requirement in order to obtain better data as well as ensure that funds are directed towards improving opportunities and equality in results for both women, men, boys and girls. This is also pointed out by Holmes and Jones (2010) who state: “...An additional constraint is the limited routine use of gender-sensitive indicators”.

Clearly, gender mainstreaming has not been promoted by the MDGs as such. The MDGs were not conducive for gender mainstreaming, simply because what is not counted tends not to be there, and the 7 other MDGs (apart from MDG 3) do not currently have indicators that require looking at both men and women or disaggregate statistics by sex.

Besides disaggregating all indicators, indicators that track *causes of inequalities* should, in argue, complement indicators that track *expressions and effects of inequalities*:

Indicators that would say something about boys and girls educational access as an example of what could provide ‘cause level’ tracking of results:

% of parents who prioritize girls and boys access to education at primary, secondary and tertiary level equally (could be measured both in time allowed for school work as well as funds prioritized to one another).

% of teachers who consider boys and girls education as equally important.

% of boys and girls who report safe passage to school.

% of boys and girls who report equal treatment at school.

Indicators that would say something about equal access to economic opportunities, as an example of what 'cause level' tracking of results:

% of girls, boys, women and men considering that women are good business managers equal to men.

% of girls, boys, women and men considering that women's income is equally important to men's income.

% of girls, boys, women and men considering that men should be the primary breadwinner of a family.

Indicators that would say something about gender based violence as an example of what could provide 'cause level' tracking of results:

% of girls, boys, women and men considering that a sexual harassment, assault and rape are the fault of the victim.

% of girls, boys, women and men considering that domestic violence is the fault of the survivor.

% of girls, boys, women and men considering that sex in a partnership is a duty.

Indicators that would say something about sexual and reproductive health and rights as an examples of what could provide 'cause level' tracking of results:

% of girls, boys, women and men considering that reproductive health is a 'woman's issue'.

% of girls, boys, women and men considering that child care is a 'woman's issue'.

% of girls, boys, women and men considering that men should have multiple partners to be a 'real man'.

Indicators that would say something about political rights and participation as examples of what could provide 'cause level' tracking of results:

% of male and female voters who consider women to be good leaders equal to men.

% of political parties who promote women on electable lists positions.

% of women and men considering that all individual family members should decide themselves who to vote for.

In short using such indicators requires:

1. Accepting that expressions and consequences of inequalities are linked to norms carried and reproduced by all actors in a society, indifferent to social status, sex, age, ethnicity, religion and other parameters. Norms will vary between cultures, groups and even individuals in a household, but they exist in all and questioning norms is part of the work to improve gender equality.
2. Accepting that qualitative and quantitative methodologies must complement each other, i.e. using tools such as the ones presented by World Values Survey used by United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).
3. Accepting that we contribute to results, but we do not control outcome and impact level results.
4. Accepting that norms and stereotypes are not easily measured nor changed, but being consciousness about them are imperative to reach gender equality (Ridgeway 2011).

## References

Ackerman, F (2008) Critique of Cost-Benefit Analysis, and Alternative Approaches to Decision-Making. A report to Friends of the Earth England, Wales and Northern Ireland

Amin (2006) The millennium development goals – A critique from the South. Monthly Review-an Independent Socialist Magazine. 2006;57

Eyben (2006) The road not taken: International aid's choice of Copenhagen over Beijing. Third World Quarterly. 2006

Richard F, Hercot D, Ouédraogo C, Delvaux T, Samaké S, van Olmen J, Conombo G, Hammonds R, Vandemoortele J (2011) Reproductive Health Matters. Nov

Mohindra KS, Nikiéma B. (2010) Women's health in developing countries: beyond an investment?

Genevieve Renard Painter (2004) the Millennium Development Goals, and Human Rights in the context of the 2005 review processes. Report for the Gender and Development Network

Kabeer N (2005) The Beijing platform for action and the millennium development goals: Different processes, different outcomes.

Fakuda-Parr S (2010) Reducing inequality – the missing MDG: a content review of PRSPs and bilateral donor policy statements. Ids Bulletin-Institute of Development Studies.

Virgi Z S (2012) Gender Inequality & Cultural Norms & Values: Root Causes Preventing Girls from Exiting a Life of Poverty. Accepted under the "Addressing Inequalities" Global Thematic Consultation - Call for Proposals for Background Papers, Oct 2012, McGill University, Canada

Wennerholm, Nordlund, Förberg (2010) GBV training modules and manual for Sida.

Holmes, Jones. (2010) No. 42, 'Gender and the MDGs: a gender lens is vital for pro-poor results', (<http://bit.ly/odibp42>); ODI Briefing Paper

Ridgeway C (2011) Framed by Gender: How Gender Inequality Persists in the Modern World, Oxford University Press

UNDP (2013) Humanity Divided: Confronting Inequality in Developing Countries

This paper was written by Anja Taarup Nordlund, Sr. Gender Consultant at Nordic Consulting Group Sweden. 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.

For more information visit [post2015consensus.com](http://post2015consensus.com)

## COPENHAGEN CONSENSUS CENTER

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.

