

What's Next?

The work the Panel did was tremendous—we can now talk of the possibility of a new fully-fledged UN women's agency. But to bring this to life, the real work begins now.

At the UN, the General Assembly member countries will begin the long process of deciding whether or not to adopt what the Panel recommended. It is expected that they will start their discussions in early 2007; however, there is no set timetable and it is difficult to speculate how long it will take.

Activists are still worried that some of the recommendations will be watered-down, which is why we will have to develop strategies to ensure that they are adopted in full force. We will have to make sure governments and influential decision-makers know what's at stake and just how important—and historical—the creation of the new agency for women really is.

Actions You Can Take

1. Get the Facts. Subscribe to our listserv, receive future advocacy statements, and stay involved: email unreform@wedo.org.
2. Network. Build coalitions or become part of our growing network of UN Reform advocates.
3. Know where your government stands. Find out what their position is on the report as a whole and on the "gender recommendations" in particular. Do they support it? Why or why not?
4. Put pressure on your government. Key people to talk to would be your Minister for Foreign Affairs and, if there is one, the Ministry for Women's Affairs. Tell them about our key demands.
5. Send a letter to Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon. Tell him about our key demands. The more we send him, the more likely we make sure he's on board.
6. Spread the word. Distribute this factsheet. Use it to educate others and influence leaders and decision-makers. Write letters to your local and national media.

¹600 million women are illiterate as compared to 320 million men. UNFPA, "State of the World's Population 2005: The Promise of Equality: Gender Equity, Reproductive Health and the Millennium Development Goals", 2005, p.10.

²"The Integration of the Human Rights of Women and the Gender Perspective," UNAIDS Statement at the 61st UN Commission on Human Rights, 6 April 2005; www.unaids.org.

³UNFPA, "State of the World's Population 2005: The Promise of Equality: Gender Equity, Reproductive Health and the Millennium Development Goals", 2005, p.34.

⁴UNICEF, "Women and Children: The Double Dividend of Gender Equality", 2006, p. 56.

⁵Investing in the education of girls is one of the most effective ways to reduce poverty. One World Bank study estimates that countries that fail to close the gender gap in primary education are at risk of losing 0.1 to 0.3 percentage points annually in per capita growth. The World Bank, "Gender Equality and the Millennium Development Goals," 2003.

⁶Gender equality produces a "double dividend"—it benefits women, but also saves children's lives. For example, there would be 13.4 million fewer undernourished children in South Asia if men and women there had equal influence in decision-making. UNICEF, "State of the World's Children 2007: Women and Children: The Double Dividend of Gender Equality" 2006, p. 24.

⁷See www.unaids.org.

⁸See www.womenwarpeace.org and www.peacewomen.org.

⁹Beijing Betrayed: Women Worldwide Report that Governments Have Failed to Turn the Platform into Action, Women's Environment and Development Organization, 2005, p. 24-26.

¹⁰Secretary General Address to Commission on the Status of Women, UN Press Release SG/SM/9738, WOM/1489, Feb 28, 2005.

¹¹From the Decade/Year of Women in 1975, to the adoption of the Convention of the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) in 1979, to the World Conferences on Women that began in Mexico City thirty years ago culminated in the Beijing Platform for Action in 1995, there have been numerous commitments to women's rights.

¹²See UNIFEM Assessment: A/60/62 - E2005/10; UNDP Evaluation of Gender mainstreaming. http://www.undp.org/eo/documents/EO_GenderMainstreaming.pdf.

¹³For more information, including names of Panel Members, see <http://www.un.org/events/panel/html/page1.html>.

¹⁴Report of the Secretary-General's High-Level Panel on System-Wide Coherence, "Delivering As One," General Assembly: A/61/583, p.6.

¹⁵The Center for Women's Global Leadership (CWGL) and Women's Environment and Development Organization (WEDO) made recommendations on UN Reform in a paper submitted to the Coherence Panel. It is signed by over 100 organizations worldwide: <http://www.wedo.org/library.aspx?ResourceID=122>.



UN Reform:

What's at Stake for Women?

The statistics are staggering:

two-thirds of the world's poor are women. Illiteracy among women occurs twice as often as among men.¹ In sub-Saharan Africa, 57% of those living with HIV are women, and young women are at least three times as likely to be infected than men of the same age.² Every minute, a woman dies needlessly in childbirth or pregnancy.³ But for a few notable cases, women are mostly absent from parliaments: they hold just under 17% of seats worldwide.⁴

And yet, research and experience have proven that if you educate girls, you can make a big dent in reducing poverty, increasing economic productivity⁵ and improving family nutrition.⁶ If you give women the power to make decisions, you can strengthen family healthcare, stem the spread of HIV/AIDS,⁷ and promote long-lasting peace.⁸ And, if you include women in decisions about natural resource use, you will take a big step towards conserving the environment.⁹

“Study after study has taught us that **no tool for development is more effective than the empowerment of women.**”

UN Secretary General Kofi Annan¹⁰

When there is so much compelling evidence showing that women's rights and needs are important for *all* of us, why are the odds still stacked against changing women's daily realities? Why do women's rights activists still find it an uphill battle?

Global institutions like the United Nations (UN) have been set up to grapple with just such challenges. And while the UN has taken some important steps, it continues to shortchange women. The UN simply isn't structured to address women's rights and needs effectively. The UN needs reform. Now.

The Millennium Development Goals

The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) recognize the fact that improving women's lives is essential to development. It sets out 8 global targets to be achieved by 2015. Ambitious but realistic, they include:

- Goal 1: Eliminate extreme poverty and hunger
- Goal 2: Achieve universal primary education
- Goal 3: Promote gender equality, empowerment of women
- Goal 4: Reduce child mortality
- Goal 5: Improve maternal health
- Goal 6: Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases
- Goal 7: Ensure environmental sustainability
- Goal 8: Develop a global partnership for development



The Challenge:

A Dysfunctional UN for Women's Issues

We can only change women's status on a worldwide scale if global leadership mobilizes, inspires and in turn, learns from and supports grassroots movements. Global agreements are important because they put pressure on governments to change their policies and create guarantees for women's equality in their Constitutions, laws and policies. As we all know, it's easy for countries to make promises, but unless those promises become reality, they will remain empty.

The UN—the only democratic world body in which each country gets one vote—is still seen as the most important actor in the struggle to advance women's equality. The UN has been instrumental—from Mexico City to CEDAW to Beijing¹¹—in getting governments to commit to promoting gender equality. Most activists will agree that we've made progress, But where are the results? Why have women's day-to-day lives not changed all that much?

The UN may be the only global institution with the legitimacy to create change for women's rights on such a massive scale. But how can the UN lead this process if it doesn't have its own house in order?

Right now, the UN has several fragmented units to tackle women's issues. They have miniscule budgets in comparison to other UN programs and agencies, and inadequate staff. No representative from any of these bodies sits at the highest-level UN decision-making tables, which means that gender equality and women's rights are marginalized when allocating resources or devising aid plans. Worse still, they have little in-country presence, and only a handful of sub-regional offices.

Women's issues are severely shortchanged. Contrast women's and children's issues: children's rights are championed by UNICEF, a fully-fledged, \$2 billion-dollar-a-year agency with a high public profile and offices all over the world. Even the UN Population Fund (UNFPA), which is dedicated to reproductive health, has an annual budget of over \$400 million a year. The three women's units have a total budget of \$65 million. What can you achieve with that??

In the 1990s, gender mainstreaming, which is about incorporating a gender perspective into all programs, organizations and approaches without having separate programs created specifically for women, was widely believed to be the miracle solution to combating gender inequalities. But instead of making gender equality an essential part of everything, in practice it "mainstreamed women into invisibility" and proved to be a failure.¹²

It's no wonder the UN has consistently failed to deliver on its promises to women, particularly at the grassroots. It can't even show leadership by modeling the standards it sets.

Where is the Money?

Women's Architecture v. Other Agencies at the UN

UN Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) +
Office of the Special Advisor on Gender Issues (OSAGI) +
Division for the Advancement of Women (DAW) =

Three Women's Units
= \$65 million

Compare that with:

UNICEF Annual Budget
= \$2 billion

UNFPA Annual Budget
= \$450 million

Reforming the UN

An Opportunity for Change

It isn't everyday that an opportunity to overhaul the UN comes along. But today, 60 years after it was formed, we have that rare chance.

In September 2005 the World Summit was held. The largest gathering of heads of states ever, it was organized to examine the question of how to eliminate poverty, and to scrutinize the lack of progress so far in achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). One of the recommendations that came out of the Summit was that the UN itself needed to change. Organized more effectively, the UN could actually steer the world towards meeting the MDGs by 2015. Most importantly, world leaders called for the UN to reform its on-the-ground operations.

In response, Secretary-General Kofi Annan appointed a High-Level Panel on System-Wide Coherence in February 2006, composed of heavyweights including Prime Ministers and Presidents.¹³ Charged with figuring out how to revamp the UN, they looked into the broad areas of development, humanitarian affairs and the environment. Women's rights activists pushed hard to make sure the Panel also looked at gender equality as a theme that affected all areas of UN work.

The High-Level Panel released its 52-page report entitled "Delivering As One" on November 9, 2006.¹⁴ The conclusion: the UN system is weak and fragmented and as currently structured cannot properly meet country needs. The Panel envisioned some radical changes to help the UN become unified and stronger, including consolidating UN agencies in countries—one country, one UN program. Among the many far-reaching recommendations, one of the breakthroughs was on gender.

The Secretary General's Panel recommendations include:

- A new mandate to work at both the global level and on-the-ground (it can still set policy, but will also be able to get down to the nitty-gritty to get results).
- Appoint an Under-Secretary General as its head (to give the agency more power).
- Increase its resources—budget and staff—dramatically.

A New Women's Agency at the UN

In their final report, it was clear the Panel saw gender equality as central to the UN's work and "a key to effective development." One of the Panel's boldest recommendations was the creation of a new women's agency. For the most part, the Panel's proposals mirrored the recommendations of the global women's movement.¹⁵

“As we told the Panel members, there is a tremendous gap between the rhetoric at the UN on gender equality and the reality of women's lives. We need change now.”

June Zeitlin, Executive Director, WEDO

Of course, real change will only happen if the Panel's recommendations and women's key demands are strongly instituted. If the UN fails, we could end up with yet another ineffective agency unable to deliver its commitment to women.

Women's Key Demands

- The new Under-Secretary General must be an expert in women's issues and must be recruited after an open, worldwide search.
- The new agency must be fully funded—donors should make sure it is not shortchanged (\$\$\$)
- The new agency must have in-country programs across the world. If not, how will it make sure the work is really being done?