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Working Paper No. 4

Bridging the Gender Economic Divide in Cambodia: A Case for MDG Acceleration

By Jamila Seftaoui

December 2013

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Abstract

Cambodia enjoys high labour participation by women. However, Cambodian women are mostly clustered in low-paid, poorly protected and unskilled occupations. Over the last two decades, women have been consistently overrepresented in precarious small-scale businesses in the informal sector and in agriculture and garment manufacturing. Nothing exacerbated this vulnerability more than the global financial crisis, which led not only to a loss of tourism and export-oriented garment jobs, but also to an alarming switch of unemployed young women to even more precarious occupations in the entertainment sector with a high risk of exposure to gender-based violence, human trafficking and exploitation. This situation contrasts with the fact that Cambodia has established gender equality as a national priority and is expecting to meet and exceed its MDG targets on maternal health, child mortality and combating HIV-AIDS and other diseases. Nevertheless, challenges remain for several MDGs, among them MDG 3 on gender equality and women's empowerment.

Conscious not only that falling short of achieving MDG 3 bears the risk of slowing the efforts on most MDGs, but also that women's economic backlashes would also undermine gains and efforts for gender equality and the fight against poverty, Cambodia rose to the challenge of embarking on an MDG Acceleration Framework (MAF) process.

Cambodia has become the first country among 45 worldwide to use the MAF to focus on women's economic empowerment at the national level. This paper locates women in the national economy over the past two decades, analyses the vulnerabilities of their employment patterns and the constraints and bottlenecks that hinder their economic progress, and lists the conclusions that have resulted from an intensive MAF process over 2012. The paper describes Cambodia's MAF Action Plan, led by the Ministry of Women's Affairs, supported by UNDP and drafted in large, participatory consultations. The Cambodia MAF Action Plan brings together the previously scattered efforts of many local and international actors and gives them a coherent and focused framework for action to improve women's economic livelihoods and move MDG 3 closer to the 2015 goal line.

Keywords:

MDG, Cambodian women, economic empowerment, poverty, gender equality, Cambodia, MAF, Post-2015 agenda, South-East Asia, sustainable development

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The Economic Situation of Women

1. The Economic Situation of Women: Making the Case for the Cambodian MAF

Gender equality: an established priority

As reflected in key government development strategies, gender equality and the empowerment of women are key national development objectives in Cambodia.¹

The current country's national gender strategy² for the period 2009-2013 focuses on five pillars: i) economic empowerment of women; ii) education of women and girls, attitudes and behaviour change; iii) legal protection of women and girls; iv) health and nutrition of women and girls and HIV and AIDS prevention; and v) women in public decision-making and politics.

Among many initiatives to achieve greater gender equality, key reforms such as the 'Decentralization and Public Financial Management' are undergoing close assessment and reorientation towards more gender-responsive impacts. Also, an affirmative action guideline for the civil service was adopted to ensure that 30 percent to 50 percent of new recruits in the public service are women.

The achievement of MDG 3 stands therefore on top of the agenda in Cambodia. Detailed targets for its achievement have been defined and their implementation is regularly monitored. Also, a number of gender-related targets have been set under other MDGs, in particular MDG 2 on education, MDG 4 on children's mortality, MDG 5 on maternal health and MDG 6 on combating HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases.

Although MDG 1 on the eradication of extreme poverty and hunger, MDG 7 on environmental sustainability, MDG 8 on forging a global partnership for development, and a special Cambodian MDG 9 on de-mining lack gender-specific targets, it is widely recognized that women's advancement and gender-responsiveness are among the success factors to achieve these MDGs. too.

UNDP is the lead development partner for Cambodia on gender equality advancement and has provided over the last decade sustained technical assistance and capacity development to the Cambodian Ministry of Women's Affairs and other institutions. Over the last years, the Ministry of Women's Affairs has been systematically leading the integration of gender issues in a number of key government policies and reform programmes. Cambodia possesses currently a unique institutional structure for mainstreaming gender in governmental action towards sustainable development. Within this context, the Cambodian Ministry of Women's Affairs was able to support 27 sector ministries to establish Gender Mainstreaming Action Groups within their structures tasked with implementing sector-specific gender plans. As a result, ministries such as the Ministry of Labour and Vocational Training, the Ministry of Commerce, the Ministry of Industry, Mine and Energy, the Ministry of



After the harvest: Happy faces from rural Cambodia. Photo: UNDP.

1 See: The Government Rectangular Strategy Phase II, 2009-2013 and The NSDP (National Strategic Development Plan) 2009-2013: 'A Strategy for Growth, Employment, Equity and Efficiency to Reach Cambodia's Millennium development Goals'.

2 Neary Rattanak III

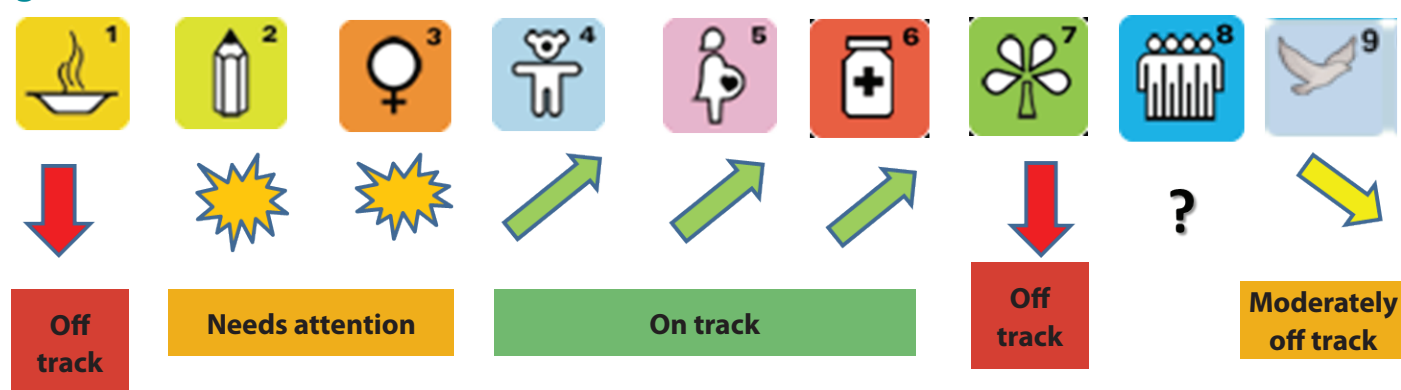
The Economic Situation of Women

Social Affairs, the Ministry of Agriculture, the Ministry of Tourism, the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Planning or the Ministry of Economy and Finance have all embarked on a number of initiatives and processes to redress the situation of women and help integrate their concerns as well as their contributions in Cambodia's development efforts.

MDGs in Cambodia: Quo Vadis?

As per the latest data,³ Cambodia is expected to meet and exceed 2015 targets on three MDGs: MDG 4 (Child Mortality), MDG 5 (Maternal Health) and MDG 6 (HIV/AIDS and Malaria, Dengue Fever and Tuberculosis). However, challenges remain for several other MDGs, notably MDG 1 on poverty and MDG 7 on environmental sustainability, both of which are currently off-track. Most important, and despite the above-mentioned intensive governmental efforts to advance women's status and situation, challenges remain in achieving MDG 3.

Figure 1: MDGs' Status in Cambodia



Source: Author's adaptation of data from Cambodian MDG Report, UNDP (2010).

MDG 3 progress is usually measured against indicators focusing on improvement in education, employment and wage, participation in public administration and decision-making as well as gender-based violence. The Cambodian MDG report of 2010 shows that, especially with regard to employment and women's economic livelihoods, Cambodia is making only slow progress that might not be sufficient to reach MDG 3 by 2015.

Female employment and economic situation: A serious concern with a multiplying factor

The impact of the global financial crisis 2008-2009 was severe for Cambodia. Growth declined from 6.8 percent in 2009 to -2.6 percent in 2010.⁴ The shock resulting from the crisis showed several structural weaknesses of the Cambodian economy and made female employment vulnerabilities visible.

Women represent a large part of the Cambodian workforce, with 80.4 percent of Cambodian women aged 15 and over participating.⁵ However, they constitute a small part of the wage employment in the formal sector, which is seen as stable, offers more social and legal benefits and generates comparatively higher incomes. Twenty-seven percent female vs. 73 percent men are employees of the formal sector. By contrast, the proportion of women among the category of 'informal or unpaid family worker' has been invariably higher than 60 percent since 2004.⁶

³ Cambodian MDG Report. UNDP. 2010.

⁴ Case Study for the MDG Gap Task Force Report, ODI, May 2010.

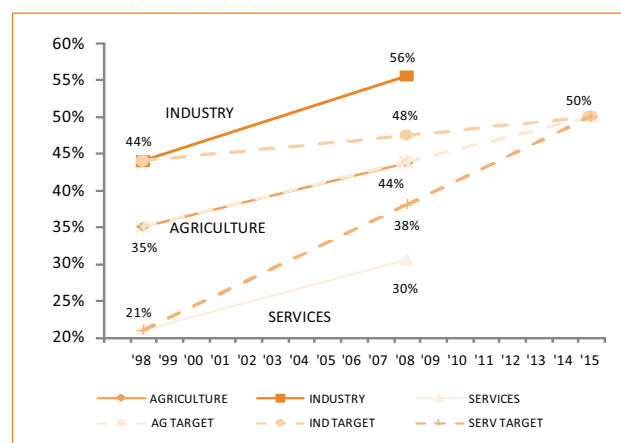
⁵ Cambodia Socio-Economic Survey 2009.

⁶ Cambodia Socio-Economic Survey 2010 – Ministry of Planning, National Institute of Statistics, 2012.

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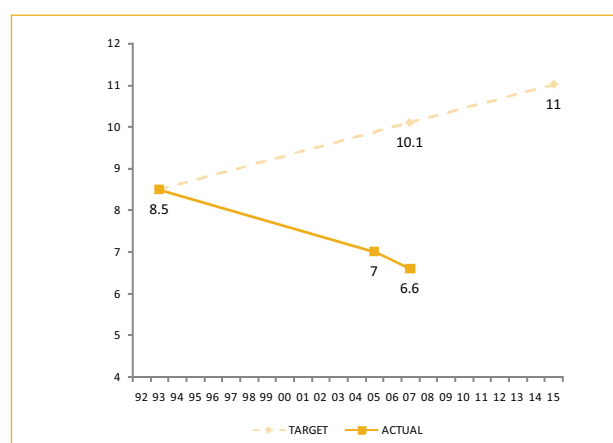
Women make up currently 75.3 percent of the active group in the informal sector – a situation that leaves them facing low-earning, discriminatory, unprotected working conditions. One of the underlying factors is education: a high proportion of women in the workforce (those aged 25 and above) has received no education, and gender differences in literacy rates are much higher for this age group, with 67.85 percent of women being literate, compared to 81.86 percent of men.

Figure 2: Gender Divide and Poverty in Cambodia



Latest data points: 2008

Deviation from path:	Agriculture: 0%	On track
	Industry: +18%	On track
	Services: -21%	Slow



Latest data point: 2007

Deviation from path:	-35%	Off track
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Source: Author's adaptation of data from *Cambodian MDG Report*, UNDP (2010).

With the crisis, even the informal sector, which has traditionally been a vital survival sector for masses of women in Cambodia, has experienced serious shrinkages due to the low market demand and the erosion of local purchasing power. Growth in Cambodia has been driven mostly by demand for textiles and clothing, tourism and construction. On the one hand, the Cambodian garment sector provided an opportunity for young rural women to enter the wage economy, with 90 percent of employees in this sector being women. On the other hand, taking into consideration the low payment rates in the sector even before the crisis, garment workers used to work long overtime in order to secure income for their families, resulting in poor health and working conditions.⁷

Due to their low level of education and the lack of training, female garment workers have always had few opportunities to advance within the sector or to find better alternatives outside it. Furthermore, the quasi absence of a comprehensive social protection system in the informal sector burdens working women more than men, considering that they are the ones who take care of the sick, the disabled, the young and the old in their families. Since Cambodian women are traditionally responsible for meeting or at least managing basic family needs, rising fuel and food prices are major contributors to the fact that considerable proportions of them are drifting towards poverty.

When the garment and other export-oriented sectors suffered the first cuts with the economic downturn, women faced severe deterioration of employment quality and a significant loss of their livelihoods.

A serious concern is that women who lost their jobs are being drawn into riskier occupations to compensate for their loss of income. The consequences of job loss for women and their vulnerability to trafficking and other vulnerable employment in the

⁷ Human Capital Implications of future Economic Growth in Cambodia, UNDP Discussion Paper no. 8, 2011.

The Economic Situation of Women

Box 1. Deteriorating labour conditions for women workers in Cambodia

To understand the financial and human impact of the global economic downturn on workers in the garment sector, which was hardest hit by the global crisis, the ILO and UNDP collaborated with the Cambodia Institute of Development Study on a comprehensive tracking survey of 2,000 workers – 90 percent of them female. The benchmarking survey, conducted from September to December 2009, asked the 1,200 garment workers who were still employed (the other 800 respondents were recently laid off workers) to compare the situation in 2009 with that in 2008. The hardships they had encountered since January 2009 were listed as:

- Reduced overtime and consequently a reduction of effective income
- Reduction of regular working hours in the form of compulsory paid leave, work suspensions, shorter working week, compulsory unpaid leave
- Difficulty in taking days off compared to before. This could reflect the fact that, due to layoffs, employers had less flexibility and found it harder to adjust their production process
- Deterioration of safety and health services at the factory, including fewer functional bathrooms in the factory; worse ventilation with no air conditioning; and less medicine disbursed at the factory's clinic
- Delays in salary payments and no or fewer bonuses
- Decline in income, which was identified as the most severe hardship experienced by the workers
- Lacking sufficient resources to cover basic needs: More than half reported having difficulties covering food expenses, financing children's education, transport and health care as compared to a year ago; and not having enough money for remittances to families back home. The majority also said they had no savings in the event of being laid off.

Source: Chandararot and Dannet 2010a. Cited in: 'Women and Labour markets in Asia—Rebalancing for Gender Equality'. ILO & ADB, 2011.

entertainment sector are increasingly alarming. "The entertainment industry, including prostitution, and sex or the promise of sex is often used to sell products [such as] beer, cigarette and waitressing services."⁸ This has been attracting vulnerable young women since the mid-2000s and this trend has been significantly on the rise during and after the crisis.

The employment conditions of women, already poor and vulnerable prior to the crisis, became even more exacerbated as the Cambodian economy suffered shrinkage and slowdown in the crisis, leaving the country to face serious challenges in sustaining or advancing its achievements on sustainable development in general and on gender equality in particular.



Training for beer promoters in Siem Reap and Phnom Penh. Photo: UNDP.

8 Decent work for men and women in the informal economy: Profile and good practices in Cambodia, ILO, 2006.

Cambodia MAF Action Plan

In 2011, during a high-level dialogue meeting co-organized by UNDP, the Cambodian Ministry of Women's Affairs, together with several other Cambodian ministries and development partners, concluded that, unless focused and coordinated action on advancing women's economic situation is accelerated, MDG 3 might not be achieved and previous efforts to achieve gender equality through education, participation in the public and decision spheres, better health and protection against gender-based violence will be seriously undermined.

The enhancement of women's economic opportunities, in particular targeting women in the rural areas and women in the vulnerable informal sector, helps reduce poverty. Keeping in mind the prominent presence of women in the informal sector, which generates 60 percent to 65 percent of Cambodian GDP, and the fact that, by mid-2000s, about 13 percent of all rural households in Cambodia lived on remittances received from female garment workers,⁹ investing in women's economic development emerges as a key factor to move families and communities out of poverty and to maximize benefits for MDG 3 and MDG 1, which is currently off-track.

An MDG 3 acceleration process focused on women's economic empowerment was launched by the Cambodian Ministry of Women's Affairs and its partners in 2012.



Silk and cotton weaving, Cambodia. Photo: UNDP.

2. Cambodia MAF Action Plan: Solutions to Accelerate MDG 3 Achievement

As per the MDG Acceleration Framework (MAF) methodology, developed by UNDP,¹⁰ consultations, workshops and a thorough analysis of available data took place in order to develop a MAF Action Plan based on the most relevant bottlenecks and proposing realistic and strategic solutions.

From its inception, the Cambodian MAF was characterized by its participatory approach and the will to use the momentum also to strengthen partnerships, governmental ownership and a coherent programme-based mode of planning and delivery.

In addition to the high-level dialogue meeting of October 2011, two major MAF gatherings took place in July and in September 2012. The workshops, with more than 80 participants, brought together key policy makers from 27 ministries, Cambodia's main development partners, members of the UN country team, representatives from the private sector and NGOs, and individual experts.

The work of the MAF workshop participants was supported by a group of experts belonging to various ministries who worked closely with UNDP advisers in the period between the two workshops, helping to verify and refine identified bottlenecks and solutions and gather elements for the MAF Action Plan that was finalized, debated and endorsed in September 2012.

⁹ Economic policies and employment – Recovering from crisis: Cambodia Policy Brief, ILO, Bangkok, 2011.

¹⁰ MDG Acceleration Framework. Operational Note. UNDP (October 2011).

Cambodia MAF Action Plan

Through the various consultations, 18 solutions for accelerating progress on MDG 3 in Cambodia were identified and prioritized based on their impact on the bottlenecks and their feasibility. Within the MAF Action Plan, the solutions are operationalized through specific priority activities.

The cost, responsible ministries, NGOs, private-sector institutions or development partners have been identified for each specific activity. A set of indicators and a monitoring plan for 2013 to 2015 has been equally developed.

There was a broad consensus among the participants that the successful implementation of the MAF Action Plan is based on principles including:

- A continuous high level of ownership by Cambodian authorities and their development partners
- A strong commitment on the part of partners identified under the Action Plan in mobilizing the necessary technical and financial resources for implementation
- A close monitoring and evaluation as per the system approved for the Action Plan
- The ability of all relevant stakeholders on women's economic empowerment in Cambodia to set the MAF Action Plan as a priority as of 2013 and to implement the interventions identified within it
- (Re)positioning of national strategies, notably the National Strategic Development Plan (2014-2018), in order to take into account the priorities defined in the MAF Action Plan and accelerating progress on gender equality and women's empowerment in Cambodia



*Running off-farm income-generating activities in rural touristic areas, Cambodia.
Photo: UNDP.*

The solutions identified are listed in the table below. They all have been formulated for accelerated implementation by 2015, but are expected to evolve and continue beyond 2015.

They target each of the following three key interventions:

1. Providing training for jobs for women that are consistent with market demands
2. Promoting the enhancement of micro/small/medium enterprises (MSMEs) led by women to ensure that women have the capacity to lead and grow their enterprises and move from the informal to the formal sector
3. Improving the livelihoods of rural communities, especially poor women.

Box 2. Cambodia MAF Action Plan: Overview of Solutions

1. Provision of training for jobs for women that are consistent with market demands

- a) Enhance and strengthen the institutional capacity of Women Development Centres
 - Expand the role and the responsibilities of the Women Development Centres
 - Identify local market needs for training as they pertain to women
 - Improve the capacity and the skills of trainers that are consistent with market demands
 - Enhance the monitoring and follow-up system of Women Development Centres to assess the impact of the skills training
 - Improve the coordination between training centres of line ministries and the Women Development Centres
 - Promote public-private partnerships to provide vocational training for women
- b) Strengthen and expand the role of vocational training centres and programmes offered by other line ministries to address the unique needs and challenges of women; enhance partnerships with these centres and increase the participation of women in their programmes
 - Expand the role of the National Training Board Secretariat to strengthen the coordination among LMs that provide vocational training
 - Coordinate with the Ministry of Tourism to accelerate the establishment of the National Tourism Professional Institute and national tourism education establishments to ensure that they will address the needs and challenges faced by women in accessing admission to the Institute and the national tourism education establishments

2. Promoting and enhancing MSMEs led by women to ensure that they have the capacity to lead and grow their enterprises and move from the informal to the formal sector

- a) Improving the enabling environment to support women entrepreneurs
 - Integrate women's issues and challenges in business in the agenda of the Government/Private-Sector Forum and the National Development Strategy Plan 2014-2018
 - Strengthen the capacity and expand the role of women's business associations
 - Improve communication and understanding between the public and private sectors
 - Provide business development services, including the establishment of an annual women's trade fair to facilitate access to relevant market information
 - Strengthen public-private partnerships for women's economic empowerment.
- b) Enhancing women's skills and capacity to lead and upgrade their MSMEs
 - Strengthen the entrepreneurship capacity for women in MSMEs
 - Expand opportunities for women entrepreneurs to access credit

3. Improving livelihoods of rural communities, especially poor women

- Expand income generation for poor rural women in 'off-farm' activities (i.e., handicrafts, micro-businesses and services, food processing)
- Expand opportunities for women-headed households to access credit.

Source: Prepared by author based on: Cambodia MAF report, final version, 18 December 2012.

3. Particularities of the Cambodian MAF Process and Action Plan

A number of aspects are quite special to the Cambodian MAF and are therefore worth highlighting, including the following:

1. There are currently some 45 countries worldwide engaging in a MAF process. Cambodia has become the first country to use the MAF to focus on women's economic empowerment at the national level.
2. The lessons from Cambodia's structural weaknesses as they have been uncovered by the economic crisis call for reconsidering growth strategies and diversifying the sources of growth in order to sustain achievements while combatting gender inequalities. The growth in the female-dominated garment sector has benefited in the past from special circumstances that are fast eroding with the rise of competition in the region, notably from India and China. The MAF Action Plan therefore targeted solutions to open more economic opportunities for women in the tertiary sector of services in private and public institutions (MDG 3 Target 3.7). It also targets initiatives that consolidate and emulate new opportunities in the agriculture and in particular in connection with green economy and eco-tourism (Target 3.5).¹¹
3. Given that the informal sector is the major reservoir for the female work force, due attention was given to strongly involve the private sector in the MAF Action Plan formulation. The Action Plan contains specific activities to embark on public-private partnerships to boost new economic livelihoods for women and to improve their quality of employment. It was emphasized through the workshops that the private-sector involvement is not only a guarantee to keep close to market demands and trends, but it is also a way to ensure that economic recovery reaches down to masses of women in the lowest end of the informal economy and to poorly employed rural women. This is expected to accelerate not only MDG 3, but MDG 1 and MDG 7 as well.
4. Women exiting the informal sector and entering wage employment or those looking for the creation of better businesses in the informal sector often are hampered by several constraints. They lack business literacy, are poorly exposed to innovative business ideas and are often disconnected from promising national as well as global markets. Furthermore, not only are their negotiation skills poor, but they have heavier reproductive burdens and more limited access to market information than their male peers. Added to this, the lack of gender-responsive policies and collective bargaining institutions and processes call for the mainstreaming of a sound gender analysis in macroeconomic policies from their inception and for the encouragement of business associations of female entrepreneurs. The MAF Action Plan contains interventions to promote the employability of women and their networking capacities as well as gender-sensitive trade and economic policies.
5. Despite the proliferation of vocational training programmes for women, many are of low quality and geared towards literate women, leaving out a large percentage of women who are rural or illiterate and reinforcing gender stereotypes. Often, this kind of training ends up locking women into low-income, traditional-gender occupations: sewing and knitting as opposed to, for example, computer sciences or new occupations in the green sector, such as eco-tourism. Also, many vocational training programmes are conceived without market assessments and data about future market demands. Hence, the MAF plan focuses on developing targeted capacity derived from needs and demands of the private sector and the market and served by high-quality training.
6. Despite a good policy framework and different solid mechanisms to promote women's economic empowerment, Cambodia still faces many challenges to put those policies and strategies into action and to properly use the existing structures and resources for effective implementation. Different initiatives and interventions by governmental institutions, development partners and NGOs have been or are currently being carried out to empower poor women and increase

11 See description and values of targets 3.5 and 3.7 under MDG 3 in: CMDG Report, 2010, UNDP, Annexes.

From the MDGs to Post-2015 Goals

their skills and capacities. However, most of these initiatives are nascent, scattered or standing alone and none has truly been evaluated as a full-fledged programme. The lack of coordination among the development partners and the national institutions on a complex, cross-cutting issue such as gender equality undermines many of the good initiatives and does not promise the clear achievement of MDG 3. Against this background, the Cambodian MAF exercise started in 2012 with a large mapping of programmes and plans of major national and international organizations involved in the field of economic empowerment of women. The MAF Action Plan significantly builds on the mapping and the work done. It features several of the strategic, but as yet unfinished, scattered or loose initiatives and puts them into a coherent framework and in synergy to each other.

7. Major bottlenecks identified in the MAF workshops were known or scrutinized and some of them are being addressed or will be addressed in the future plans of government and development partners, albeit without coordination. This logically led the Cambodian MAF exercise into a programme-based effort to strengthen synergies, development and aid effectiveness, national ownership, coordination and monitoring mechanisms for tangible results – all of which are declared goals of Cambodian authorities and the UN. Subsequently, the Cambodian MAF process was consciously embraced from the outset as a source of momentum to put the programme-based approach in practice rather than use the MAF as a fundraising instrument.
8. The budget necessary to implement the MAF Action Plan was estimated at US\$4.9 million, of which one third is available. Financing for the remaining actions approved under the MAF will also be sourced from many diverse, but complementary stakeholders. Together, the Cambodian Government, which has displayed great awareness and ownership over the whole process, and the development partners involved in the implementation of the plan are expected to earmark sufficient funds to cover the total implementation.

4. From the MDGs to Post-2015 Goals

As we gather for a global conference to look back on the MDGs breakthroughs and challenges and reflect about the post-2015 agenda, some learned lessons and considerations emerge:

1. The Cambodia MDG process and its acceleration confirm the accuracy of the four core dimensions recommended by the UN task team for the post-2015 agenda:¹²
 - Inclusive social development
 - Inclusive economic development
 - Environmental sustainability
 - Peace and security.
2. The MDGs have set crucial targets with women and girls at the centre, such as maternal health, political representation, or education, all of which are directly affecting the lives of millions of women worldwide.

However, the practice shows that achieving satisfactory average rates on school enrolment or maternal health prevents neither the severe exclusion of women nor the violation of their fundamental rights. As illustrated in the Cambodian case and in many other examples globally, this fact seriously undermines the effectiveness of MDG programmes and hampers their progress. Matters of poverty and livelihoods, environment, security, rule of law and governance, reproductive rights, a life free from violence and discrimination – to name but a few structural pillars for sustainable development – should be founded upon women's rights and the widespread inclusion of women at the outset. Given the central role that the

¹² Realizing the world we want, UN, June 2012.

From the MDGs to Post-2015 Goals

female half of humanity plays as primary victims of economic hardships, wars and disasters and given their potential as prominent drivers of growth, environmental preservation, social prosperity and security, post-2015 agenda would be flawed if the full range of women's rights and participation, as enshrined in international conventions, UN resolutions and strategic plans, were not explicitly accounted for.

3. In gathering elements and setting the goals for the post-2015 agenda, high-ranking female policy makers and established development experts as well as gender professionals from the North and the South should be regular members to the discussions and decisions. Of course, this is not a sufficient guarantee to produce gendered post-2015 goals, especially considering the necessity of large consensus and endorsement by the world's nations.

Notwithstanding, and precisely because of the tremendous importance of nurturing the process of drafting gender-responsive and adequately informed goals based on established evidence, the participation of gender experts and female decision makers should be systematically sought and guaranteed.

4. While the post-2015 goals should not be a blueprint and a one-size-fits-all solution,¹³ they should, once adapted to the local situation and priorities, be considered as the agenda for sustainable development of the nations endorsing them and cohere with the national development strategies and the global and regional settings, fitting in a unified framework. Nations should not be driving several separate sustainable development strategies, loosing focus and scattering resources.

This calls at least three aspects to attention:

- a) The post-2015 goals and means have to be highly owned by the individual countries and be implemented accordingly, not as an additional agenda driven by external donors or international organizations.
- b) Countries should adopt an efficient mode of delivery suitable for large groups of stakeholders and collective accountability such as the programme-based approach. Harmonizing and coordinating all international and local stakeholders that are advancing post-2015 goals within their boundaries is a major responsibility of national entities that is also based on lessons learned from the MDGs.

As highlighted by a number of international calls for global partnerships for development¹⁴ and better effectiveness, the alignment with country systems, better coordination, results-based mutual accountability, and the unity of monitoring and evaluation are all powerful enablers to accelerate sustained development. The Cambodian MAF is an excellent example that shows how a process of focusing scattered actions and actors became unavoidable and central to progressing on MDG achievement.

- c) Given the lessons learned from the global economic and financial crisis and the prominent role that the private sector and civil society play in any development setting, NGOs and private businesses in the formal as well as informal sectors should be consulted and involved in post-2015 decisions and plans, especially with regard to economic and development initiatives supportive of green growth, sustainable tourism and jobs creation for underemployed women, youth and the most excluded.
5. One of the key strengths of the MDGs is undeniably their format based on concrete targets and measurable indicators. It is widely recognized that such strengths should be retained for any post-2015 goals. However, general indicators articulated in average rates and targets generally reflect improvements for a portion of the population. They measure aggregated improvements, but fail to inform about equity and distribution of benefits of any initiative engaged. Eighty percent of obstetric coverage, for example, might sound acceptable as a national indicator. However, the same indicator

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Notably, the Paris, Accra and Busan declarations.

From the MDGs to Post-2015 Goals

would be a gross distortion if the regions that were taken into account did not include the rural, landlocked and poor ones, as those are precisely the ones most in need of attention and resources.

Post-2015, regular indicators and targets as used in the MDGs should be complemented by a set of indicators and targets reflecting basic structural and human improvements as minimum, non-negotiable “essential levels of rights”¹⁵ and development goods for everyone. This would include, for example: access to drinking water and nutrition, protection from violence (highly crucial for women and girls who make the absolute majority of victims of violence worldwide), the right to fair justice, minimum social security for every citizen, etc.

6. Finally, gender equality and the advancement of women have proved to be a powerful driver for the MDGs, although this reality has not always been visible in targets and indicators. In many countries, the sole existence of MDG 3 among the MDGs as the global leading development framework has given a precious basis for advocacy of women’s rights and has pressured governments to be accountable and to deliver.

Post-MDGs discussions offer a new opportunity to bring gender equality and women’s rights to the forefront of debate and to anchor them in post-2015 goals not only as excellent enablers to achieve progress towards each of the four suggested pillars of social and economic development, environmental sustainability, peace and security, but also to sustain them.

¹⁵ See M. Langford: A poverty of rights: Six ways to fix the MDGs. 2010.

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