



# ADVANCING GENDER EQUALITY: PROMISING PRACTICES

Case Studies from the Millennium Development Goals Achievement Fund

## CASE STUDIES

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## FOREWORD

The Millennium Development Goals Achievement Fund (MDG-F) was created with the support of the Government of Spain, continuing the history of multilateral cooperation. In December 2012, the Cabinet of Spain approved the fourth Master Plan for Spanish Cooperation for 2013–2016, contextualizing it in the international development agenda, including the attainment of the Millennium Development Goals by 2015 and the new post-2015 development agenda. The plan also addressed the challenges of the Busan Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation, the European Union agenda for change and G20 development agreements.

In this context, women's rights and the integration of a gender perspective are the hallmarks of Spanish cooperation, thus strengthening the commitment that began with the approval of Law 23/1998 on international cooperation and subsequent development plans.

In a particularly difficult time for the international community, Spain is committed to contributing to human development, assisting in poverty eradication and promoting the full realization of human rights, while strengthening the integration of gender-specific programmes and, when necessary, continuing to support existing programmes serving specific groups of women.

This explains the work performed under the MDG-F Gender Thematic Window, which involved an investment of \$90 million, and the efforts to integrate gender concerns across the Fund's other thematic windows, with lessons learned for consolidating this work in the future. Promoting a dual strategy to ensure access to rights and freedoms for all women also represents Spain's commitment to multilateral cooperation for development.

Gonzalo Robles  
Secretary-General of International Development  
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## Acronyms

AIDS	Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome
ECLAC	Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean
FAO	Food and Agricultural Organization
GBV	Gender Based Violence
GRB	Gender Responsive Budgeting
HIV	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
ILO	International Labour Organization
IOM	International Organization for Migration
ITC	International Trade Centre
MDGs	Millennium Development Goals
MDG-F	Spanish MDG Achievement Fund
NGO	Non-governmental organization
PAHO	Pan American Health Organization
UN	United Nations
UNAIDS	Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS
UNCTAD	United Nations Conference of Trade and Development
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNHCHR	United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNIDO	United Nations Industrial Development Organization
UNODC	United Nations Office for Drugs and Crime
UN Women	United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women
UNWTO	United Nations World Tourism Organization
UN-Habitat	United Nations Human Settlements Programme
VAW	Violence Against Women
WFP	World Food Programme
WHO	World Health Organization





## INTRODUCTION: LEARNING FROM EXPERIENCE TO BUILD A BETTER FUTURE

The collection of case studies on lessons and results for gender equality and the empowerment of women has relevance for the advancement of the next internationally agreed development agenda. In this agenda, there is already much consensus on the need for a stronger focus on gender equality within the overall post-Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) framework. “Already, there are many discussions and debates on what should replace the MDGs and what shape the post-2015 development agenda should take. There are ongoing deliberations on

many different policy models to reduce poverty and inequality, achieve development, foster peace and security, promote and protect human rights, and protect the environment. In each of these, the need to achieve gender equality, women's rights and women's empowerment should take centre stage, supported by a universal normative framework to which governments around the world have committed."<sup>1</sup>

*Advancing Gender Equality: Promising Practices – Case Studies from the Millennium Development Goals Achievement Fund* presents lessons and results of specific relevance to shaping the post-2015 development framework. It contains lessons to enhance knowledge of both why results for gender equality and women's empowerment are critical to advance an overall development agenda, as well as practical examples of how to make this a reality. In many ways the programmes documented here anticipate the gaps that have been identified in relation to the promotion of gender equality in the MDGs. As such, they provide an evidence base that links to many of the key issues currently under discussion and offers opportunities for replicating successes in policy and practice.

Areas addressed by the programmes include overcoming violence against women, access to sexual and reproductive health services, women's asset and property ownership, and participation in public and private decision-making. Programmes also present effective practices to address inequalities through partnership with some of the world's most excluded groups of women and girls: indigenous, Afro-descendant, ethnic minority, rural and young women; survivors of violence and conflict-related sexual violence; and HIV positive women. They represent the unified efforts of many actors and demonstrate how United Nations, government and civil society actors can work together to leverage individual strengths and achieve significant collective results. A hallmark of many of the case studies is that they demonstrate the means to challenge the underlying structures that perpetuate gender-based discrimination and inequality as a key component of programming.

<sup>1</sup> UN Women, 2013, *A Transformative Stand-Alone Goal on Achieving Gender Equality, Women's Rights and Women's Empowerment: Imperatives and Key Components*, p. 7.

## Background and Methodology

The MDG Achievement Fund (MDG-F, [www.mdgfund.org](http://www.mdgfund.org)), established in 2007 through an agreement between the Government of Spain and UNDP on behalf of the United Nations system, is one of the largest and most comprehensive development cooperation mechanisms devised to support MDG attainment. Through its 130 joint programmes in 50 countries and eight different thematic areas, the MDG-F has gathered valuable and unique knowledge on how countries can advance in development goals through joint efforts that engage in different UN agencies, governmental institutions, the private sector, communities and civil society entities.

The MDG-F's approach, anchored in the principles of national ownership, the coordination of efforts by UN agencies and a multidimensional perspective in its development programmes, has proved to have an impact on people's lives throughout the world. Some indicators validate this: 840,000 children have better nutrition, 300,000 people have safe, affordable drinking water, 100,000 people received job training, 625,000 women and girls gained access to violence prevention and protection services and 14.3 million young people were helped by new youth employment laws. All this thanks to the joint efforts through the United Nations.

MDG-F has been an outstanding supporter of programming to advance gender equality. Stemming from the commitments established in 1995 at the United Nations' Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing, the MDG-F adopted a dual strategy for advancing gender equality with a portfolio of 13 targeted joint programmes promoting gender equality as a central goal, and gender-mainstreaming guidance<sup>2</sup> for 117 joint programmes targeting other development areas in eight funding windows

<sup>2</sup> MDG Achievement Fund, 2006, "Guidance for the Development of Gender-Responsive Joint Programmes", available at: [www.mdgfund.org/sites/all/themes/custom/undp\\_2/docs/MDGF-JP-Gender-Guidance.pdf](http://www.mdgfund.org/sites/all/themes/custom/undp_2/docs/MDGF-JP-Gender-Guidance.pdf).

that are aligned to the MDGs.<sup>3</sup> To capture promising practices in how successful gender equality results were achieved, the Gender as a Cross-Cutting Issue Knowledge Management Initiative was launched in 2010 under the coordination of UN Women to facilitate knowledge sharing across the eight joint programming windows established through the MDG-F. A call for proposals on Effective Practices in Promoting Gender Equality for MDG Achievement (the Documentation Initiative) was launched in September 2011 to identify and document innovative, promising and potentially replicable practices. After a careful review with UNDP and the MDG-F Secretariat, 14 proposals were selected to document promising practices with a high potential to contribute to the advancement of women's rights and gender equality.

The following cases studies were developed with support from the Documentation Initiative:

- One from the Children, Food Security and Nutrition Window (Bangladesh);
- Two from the Conflict Prevention and Peacebuilding Window (Bolivia and Democratic Republic of the Congo);
- Two from the Culture and Development Window (Ecuador and State of Palestine);
- Two from the Democratic Economic Governance Window (Mexico and Panama);

- Four from the Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment Window (Colombia, Ethiopia, Timor-Leste and Viet Nam);
- Two from the Private Sector and Development Window (Egypt and Viet Nam); and
- One from the Youth, Employment and Migration Window (Honduras).

In addition, the MDG-F Gender Window Community of Practice Knowledge Transfer Initiative was launched in July 2011 by UNDP to facilitate the generation, exchange and application of knowledge on joint programming for gender equality based on the experiences of the funding window on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment. As part of this initiative, the UNDP Gender Team contributed submissions from joint programmes in this window that did not participate in the Documentation Initiative, including from Bangladesh, Bolivia, Guatemala, Morocco, Namibia, and Nicaragua.

As a result of these joint efforts, 20 promising practices have been included. With a view to inform evidence-based policy and programming in support of women's rights and gender equality, this Global Compendium presents the main findings of such analyses, including progress and results achieved, lessons learned from each programme and its sustainability, scaling up and replication potential.

<sup>3</sup> United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and UN Women, 2013, *Two Roads, One Goal: Dual Strategy for Gender Equality Programming in the Millennium Development Goals Achievement Fund*, available at: [www.unwomen.org/-/media/Headquarters/Attachments/Sections/Library/Publications/2013/3/f2\\_MDGF\\_TwoRoads\\_Web.pdf.pdf](http://www.unwomen.org/-/media/Headquarters/Attachments/Sections/Library/Publications/2013/3/f2_MDGF_TwoRoads_Web.pdf.pdf). Two Roads presents the initial findings of parallel UNDP and UN Women analyses of the effectiveness of the dual strategy to promote gender equality through a joint programming modality.







## OVERVIEW OF THE PROMISING PRACTICES

This publication is organized according to three major areas identified by UN Women for inclusion in the post-2015 framework:

- 1) **Freedom from violence** against women and girls, including experience related to concrete actions to eliminate or respond to violence. This issue is addressed by seven of the studies included in this Compendium. Five of them derive from programmes within the Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment Window (Bangladesh, Colombia, Morocco, Timor-Leste and Viet Nam); and two from the Conflict Prevention and Peacebuilding Window (Bolivia and Democratic Republic of the Congo).

- 2) **Improved capabilities and resources** include improved knowledge and health—including sexual and reproductive health and rights; and access to resources and opportunities to build women’s economic and social security. These issues are addressed by ten of the promising practices: four from the Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment Window (Bolivia, Ethiopia, Namibia and Timor-Leste), two from the Development and the Private Sector Window (Viet Nam and Egypt), one from the Conflict Prevention and Peacebuilding Window (Democratic Republic of the Congo), one from the Children, Food Security and Nutrition Window (Bangladesh), one from the Culture and Development Window (Ecuador) and one from the Youth, Employment and Migration Window (Honduras).
- 3) **Increased participation in decision-making** in public and private institutions, and in families and communities. This theme is analysed in nine of the studies: four from the Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment Window (Bolivia, Guatemala, Nicaragua and Timor-Leste), one from the Conflict Prevention and Peacebuilding Window (Bolivia), two from the Culture and Development Window (Ecuador and State of Palestine) and two from the Democratic Economic Governance Window (Mexico and Panama).

Many programmes adopted strong holistic and multi-sectoral approaches, and therefore addressed more than one thematic area.

## Freedom from violence

MDG-F programmes’ emphasis on eliminating gender-based violence reflects the growing recognition of it as “a pervasive violation of human rights and a major impediment to achieving gender equality”.<sup>4</sup> MDG-F programmes address various types of gender-based violence, including intimate partner violence, trafficking in women and girls, violence against women and girls in armed conflicts, violence against women in politics, violence against sex workers and harmful traditional practices, among others. Based on a clear understanding of the multifaceted nature of gender-based violence, the MDG-F has called for comprehensive, holistic and multisectoral responses—from developing legal and policy frameworks to prevent and eliminate violence against women to providing quality support services to survivors and balancing the unequal gender power relations that are the heart of violence.

Reliable **data and knowledge** on the extent, patterns, causes and consequences of gender-based violence is essential to raise awareness and clarify misconceptions, as well as to guide evidence-based national policies and programmes and to monitor States’ progress in addressing the problem. Launched in 2010, the first-ever national study on domestic violence in **Viet Nam** has yielded a solid body of data on the prevalence and forms of domestic violence, its impact on women’s health, protection and risk factors, perceptions related to domestic violence, and strategies and services used to address it. With advocacy efforts backed by evidence, the issue of domestic violence has entered the national public dialogue. Viet Nam plans to repeat the study in 2015, which will allow assessing progress.

In **Bolivia**, the Bolivian Association of Councilwomen is maintaining a record of cases of harassment and political violence against elected women. Documenting such cases has made it possible to define acts of harassment or political violence, which influenced the crime-classification structure of the ground breaking Law against the Harassment

4 United Nations General Assembly, 2006, In-depth study on all forms of violence against women: Report of the Secretary-General, 6 July, A/61/122/Add.1. Available at: <http://daccess-ods.un.org/TMP/5826715.82698822.html>.



Case study country	MDG-F funding window	Issues addressed by the promising practice		
		Freedom from violence	Improved capabilities and resources	Increased participation in decision-making
Bangladesh	Children, Food Security and Nutrition		Women's access to land and productive assets	Women's empowerment within families
Bangladesh	Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment	Data on violence against women Community outreach to change attitudes Strengthened support services available to violence survivors Government capacity building		Policy adoption and implementation
Bolivia	Conflict Prevention and Peacebuilding	Political violence against elected women and candidates		Data on political violence against elected women Law on political violence against elected women Protocol on cases of violence
Bolivia	Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment		Income-generating activities: training and advisor services, non-reimbursable monetary transfer	Improved services for identification documents Women's participation in citizenship education programmes
Colombia	Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment	National media campaign for prevention of violence		
Democratic Republic of the Congo	Conflict Prevention and Peacebuilding	Holistic support services to survivors of sexual violence	Income-generating activities: technical and financial assistance Secured land tenure Savings and credit mechanisms Health/hygiene and education services	Women's empowerment within families and communities
Ecuador	Culture and Development		Culturally and environmentally sustainable income-generating activities Culturally appropriate childbirth models	Gender and Interculturality Heritage Policy
Egypt	Development and the Private Sector		Gender sensitization of Farm Associations Capacity building of female workers Challenged stereotypes regarding women's employment	Participation and leadership in Farm Associations
Ethiopia	Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment	Community mobilization to change harmful behaviours	Literacy Community sensitization on reproductive health, including HIV/AIDS Strengthening of reproductive health services Income-generating activities: Technical assistance and access to credits	Women's empowerment within families and communities

Case study country	MDG-F funding window	Issues addressed by the promising practice		
		Freedom from violence	Improved capabilities and resources	Increased participation in decision-making
Guatemala	Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment			Strengthening of women's machineries
Honduras	Youth, Employment and Migration	Community-based training on violence against women	Income-generating activities: technical and financial assistance Vocational training	
Mexico	Democratic Economic Governance		Improvement of access to water and sanitation	Women's participation in water management
Morocco	Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment	Holistic support services to survivors	Income-generating activities for survivors	
Namibia	Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment		Community dialogues around HIV/AIDS	
Nicaragua	Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment			Gender-responsive Budgeting and Planning at national and local level
Panama	Democratic Economic Governance		Improvement of access to water and sanitation Community education on water management	Women's participation in water management
State of Palestine	Culture and Development		Enhancement of cultural capabilities	Gender mainstreaming at Ministry of Culture Culture policy analysis and formulation
Timor-Leste	Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment	Community based awareness campaigns on human trafficking, gender-based violence and the Law against Domestic Violence Strengthening of support-service providers and coordination mechanisms	Strengthening of Conditional Cash Transfer programme Institutional resource allocation Institutional capacity buildings	Enhanced policy framework on gender-based violence and human trafficking Gender-responsive budgeting
Viet Nam	Development and the Private Sector		Income-generating activities: strengthening of a cooperative of women weavers Strengthening local support services	Women's leadership in cooperatives
Viet Nam	Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment	National data collection on domestic violence		

of and Political Violence against Women, enacted in 2012 and the first of its kind in the world.

To improve services in six **Bangladesh** districts, data collection activities have focused on the number and type of incidents (such as acid attacks, rape, murder, physical abuse, dowry related disputes, early marriage, family conflict and suicide) and types of support provided (such as court cases, counselling and legal aid). From September 2012 to May 2013, 44 sub-districts reported a total of 811 incidents that have been included in the pilot database. Discussions are underway to expand data collection nationally.

The Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women describes violence against women as “a manifestation of historically unequal power relations between men and women, which have led to domination over and discrimination against women by men”.<sup>5</sup> Consequently, eliminating gender-based violence demands transforming the social and cultural norms regulating power dynamics between men and women.

In order to advance in this direction, several MDG-F programmes developed **prevention strategies** aimed at challenging gender-based stereotypes and sociocultural patterns of behaviour that legitimize, exacerbate or tolerate violence against women. In **Colombia**, a large Educational Communication Strategy was designed based on the findings of a study that examined the country’s social and institutional tolerance of gender-based violence. Aiming to raise public awareness of the problem, to educate and mobilize institutional and social actors in preventing violence, and to sensitize audiences and build new patterns of masculinity and femininity, large-scale campaigns demystifying and condemning violence were disseminated through mass and alternative media and social mobilization activities. The strategy had both national and local coverage, with specific lines of communications adapted to the territorial and ethnic characteristics of the pilot areas.

5 United Nations General Assembly, 1993, Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women, 20 December, A/RES/48/104, available at: <http://www.un.org/documents/ga/res/48/a48r104.htm>.

In **Timor-Leste**, sensitization on human trafficking was carried out through drama performance and music in order to reach illiterate populations. Moreover, the 16 Days of Activism Campaign was a vehicle to disseminate the recently approved Law against Domestic Violence, particularly to challenge the misperception that that the law was conceived to separate families rather than to keep them together. Community theatre was also used to engage villagers in **Bangladesh** with information on gender-based violence, human rights and women’s empowerment: key messages on how to respond to gender-based violence reached 178,629 community members.

Survivors of gender based violence require timely access to shelter and medical, psychological, legal, economic and other counselling and **support services** in order to overcome the multiple consequences of abuse and rebuild lives. Established in 2009 in **Morocco**, the Batha Centre is managed by a local women’s association and empowers women-survivors of violence. The multifunctional centre provides a chain of services that range from crisis intervention (i.e. shelter, psychological counselling, clinical services) to support designed to empower survivors through training and provide access to economic opportunities. The centre has become a recognized model for Morocco and other countries in the region. In the **Democratic Republic of the Congo**, three Multipurpose Community Centres provide holistic support services for the entire community, and particularly for survivors of sexual violence. With a focus on empowerment, the centres provide health and psychosocial assistance, literacy courses, childcare and support for income-generating activities.

All partners engaged in combating gender-based violence—such as law enforcement officials, judicial officers, medical personnel and social workers—require **capacity development** support to ensure the effectiveness and appropriate sensitivity of assistance they provide to survivors. A system that unites mandatory and systematic training, clear guidelines and protocols greatly improves response. Women’s knowledge of existing protections and remedies is equally critical.

In **Timor-Leste**, the joint programme developed a manual on investigating gender-based violence and subsequently trained police officers in a very broad range of issues related to gender-based violence and human trafficking. Such training has since become institutionalized, ensuring sustainability of the results attained and continuity of the work that began under the auspices of the joint programme. Such work also included developing standard procedures, protocols and guidelines—for support services and procedures such as data collection, forensic medical examination, and child referral and protection—and distributing these to various local partners who provide such services. The joint programme also strengthened the country's district-level coordination mechanisms, improved communications among service providers and enabled timely support to survivors.

In **Bolivia**, a Protocol for Attending to and Processing the Victims of Harassment and Political Violence in the Electoral Jurisdiction has been developed, aimed at officials of the Supreme Electoral Tribunal and Departmental Electoral Tribunals. The gender joint programme in **Bangladesh** trained sex workers to improve their knowledge of HIV and AIDS, gender-based violence and available support services, such as legal aid.

Case studies also demonstrated that the participatory development of a sound **policy and legal framework** provides a solid foundation for preventing violence against women and improving survivor support. In **Timor-Leste**, a wide multisectoral, multi-stakeholder consultative process underpinned the formulation of the national plan on gender-based violence and led to the plan's approval in May 2012. Estimating costs involved in future implementation of the plan was instrumental to advocating for and obtaining an allocation of funds from the national budget. The Timor-Leste national action plan to combat human trafficking was drafted using similarly wide stakeholder consultations with community leaders, service providers, teachers and students. **Bolivia** also enacted the Law against the Harassment of and Political Violence against Women in 2012, as the final result of a cumulative process that began in 2000.

## Improved capabilities and resources

There is increasing recognition that the often skewed distribution of capabilities, such as knowledge and health—encompassing sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights for women and adolescent girls, as well as resources and opportunities, such as productive assets, decent work and equal pay—needs to be addressed with renewed urgency to build women's economic and social security. Economically empowering women is critical to both realizing women's rights and achieving broader development goals of economic growth, poverty reduction, health improvement, access to education and improved social welfare. However, women around the world continue to face social and legal barriers to owning and inheriting property, land and other resources; accessing assets, credit and other services; or obtaining decent employment. Conscious of these numerous obstacles, the MDG-F has actively promoted improving women's capabilities and resources as a way to advance women's rights and to attain the MDGs.

Support to **income-generating activities**—via small-scale businesses or cooperatives that create an income source for women—has been a prominent MDG-F strategy of improving women's economic autonomy. In **Viet Nam**, a weaving cooperative enhanced its productivity and profitability by improving its managerial, organizational, technical and marketing skills, as well as gaining access to and benefitting from the increased availability of local raw materials. This has resulted in higher member income, new employment opportunities for women in the community and, ultimately, women's improved confidence, social standing and family or community support.

In the **Democratic Republic of the Congo**, 627 persons (largely women-survivors of violence) received technical training and start-up equipment and supplies to initiate income-generating activities. In addition, 43 land-cession contracts were executed to secure land tenure for 3,124 households, of which 1,643 were headed by women. Such programmatic interventions helped economically empower

vulnerable women and improved food security and nutrition for all household members.

In **Ecuador**, the MDG-F supported income-generating activities on the basis of their viability, environmental sustainability, potential for cultural revitalization of the indigenous and African-Ecuadorian peoples, and potential to advance gender equality. The joint programme facilitated the creation of 1,500 new income-generating positions, with women filling 800.

Collateral and other requirements by traditional financial institutions often exclude poor women from access to credit to start new or improve existing businesses. To overcome this barrier, the MDG-F supported the adaptation of **financial mechanisms** to women's needs and national contexts. In **Bolivia**, 4,445 poor indigenous women received an average of \$1,000 in financial assistance to engage in income-generating activities in fields such as agriculture, livestock farming and artisanal production. In **Honduras**, financial assistance provided to 1,071 vulnerable urban and rural youth, including 502 girls and women, allowed them to start small businesses. Young people also received gender-sensitization and vocational training, as well as technical assistance to implement their business plans.

In the **Democratic Republic of the Congo**, the MDG-F facilitated the creation of 200 Mutual Societies for Solidarity for savings and credit. More than 75 per cent of their members are women, who can now access small credit lines to support household needs including home construction, acquisition of small livestock and educational expenses.

**Conditional cash transfer** programmes are increasingly recognized as pathways to both shorter-term poverty alleviation and longer-term prevention of intergenerational poverty transmission through investing in human capital, including education, healthcare and nutrition. In **Timor-Leste**, the Bolsa de Mãe programme provides a set amount of cash to select vulnerable populations, particularly women-headed households, with conditions for receiving funds linked to children's immunization and educational attainment. In order to support

more efficient and effective social reintegration of vulnerable groups, the MDG-F has also supported processes that identified and clarified vulnerability criteria, while strengthening the monitoring system for recipient compliance with cash-transfer conditions. The programme has allowed vulnerable women to have a measure of social protection, namely access to cash, as well as provided access to education and health services for their children.

Because women across the world play a key role in both **food security** and child nutrition, many programmes under the MDG-F Window on Children, Food Security and Nutrition target women as key change agents. In **Bangladesh**, rural women have received support to improve the yields and efficiency of homestead vegetable gardening and livestock rearing, becoming economically empowered as a result. Women's self-esteem and their roles in families are changing as well, as demonstrated by women's increased mobility and participation in family decision-making. The programme has also challenged and succeeded in changing certain traditional practices and beliefs that are detrimental to the health of women and their children, particularly those related to maternal nutrition and newborn feeding practices. As a result, women are now prioritizing and valuing their own food and nutritional needs.

Recognizing the multifaceted of women's poverty, a number of MDG-F programmes applied a **holistic** approach that combined women's economic empowerment with political empowerment, access to health and education, and community-level social mobilization. In **Ethiopia**, women-participants of the Leave no Women Behind programme improved their incomes and household food security through capacity building and access to credit. They also received training on reproductive health, literacy, health and hygiene, and other life skills. Participating women were targeted by all the intervention areas, which resulted in all around improvement of their lives. MDG-F programmes also actively engaged male community members, educators, health staff, associations and cooperatives in activities ranging from trainings to community dialogues and service provision. Increased access to and control over

resources and improved self-esteem led to significant improvements in women's status within their families and communities. Key behavioural changes included: reduced prevalence of child marriage and other harmful traditional practices, including female genital mutilation; reduced stigma and discrimination against women living with HIV and AIDS; increased school attendance, particularly among girls; and more equitable division of labour at household level.

In **Bolivia**, disadvantaged indigenous women augmented their incomes with the technical support and financial assistance provided by MDG-F programmes. Women's self-esteem and their participation in decision-making increased as a result of participating in citizenship education programmes. At the same time, 1,887 women obtained identification cards, making it possible for them to claim and exercise their political and civil rights and to access financial services.

**Sexual and reproductive health** is increasingly recognized as a cornerstone of women's autonomy and, therefore, as central to sustainable development. The right to sexual and reproductive health implies that people, both men and women, are able to make free and informed decisions about their body, health, relationships, marriage and childbearing, free from coercion or violence. Such rights are closely linked to development priorities such as preventing child marriage and sexual violence, and halting transmission of HIV and AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases.

In **Namibia**, communities are taking action around HIV and AIDS through a methodology based on trust, accountability and participation. Results include a rise in the number of people opting for voluntary counselling and testing services, increased condom use, improved understanding of gender inequalities in the context of HIV and AIDS, and breaking new ground for discussing the previously taboo subjects of sex, child abuse, gender-based violence, early pregnancy, and HIV and AIDS stigma.

In **Ethiopia**, public discussions were used to sensitize community members on reproductive health, family planning, gender-based violence, HIV and AIDS, maternal health and harmful traditional practices. Parallel to interventions to increase demand, the programme also strengthened the supply side of reproductive health service delivery by providing drugs, obstetric equipment and other reproductive health materials to local health centres. This holistic approach contributed to an increase in the number of deliveries attended by trained health professionals and the number of those seeking voluntary counselling and testing for HIV and AIDS.

In **Ecuador**, the Ministry of Public Health has designed an innovative intercultural health system, including a culturally appropriate childbirth model that respects indigenous ancestral traditions. The implementation of this model has motivated a higher number of women from different communities to seek assistance in healthcare facilities, not only for antenatal care, but also for childbirth.



## Increased participation in decision-making

The low numbers of women in public decision-making, from national parliaments to local councils, must be remedied to ensure that women feature prominently in democratic institutions and that their voices are heard in public and private deliberations. This has its roots in unequal power relations in the family and community. In some cases, even threats of violence prevent women from seeking or effectively carry out their public service roles, as was the case in **Bolivia**.

Participatory and gender-responsive **local planning processes** have great potential to bring women's voices into decision-making. In **Mexico**, three southern states have conducted gender-sensitive evaluations of water management mechanisms to identify women and men's needs and challenges related to water management and access. MDG-F programmes have also strengthened key sectoral institutions—responsible for water management, access to public information and civil protection—to integrate culturally and gender-sensitive approaches into their work, and facilitated civil society organizations' participation in water management decisions and activities. Similarly, women's participation in the administrative boards that manage rural aqueducts in **Panama** has been identified as key to the sustainability of MDG-F interventions, because women migrate less and hence maintain greater permanence in the community.

Some practical barriers to participation are relatively easy to surmount given political will. In **Bolivia**, only 22 per cent women participants of the MDG-F joint programme voted, for **lack of identity documents** and information. Now, 12,817 women are enjoying full citizenship and rights for the first time, having obtained the birth certificates and identification cards required to vote or access credit. Today, 97 per cent of participating women take part in local and national electoral processes and can also register organizations authorized for political participation. Of women-participants in the MDG-F-supported training sessions on exercising citizen rights, 30 per cent have been nominated for elected community

and productive organizations' leadership posts—and more than half of the nominees have been elected.

A strong **women's machinery** is instrumental to improving the consistency of government action to advance women's rights and gender equality by providing leadership, advocacy and technical support to mainstream gender in all policy areas. In **Guatemala**, MDG-F support improved the capacity and recognition of the Presidential Secretary for Women and the Office in Defence of Indigenous Women, ultimately enabling the integration of both gender and ethnic equality approaches in government planning and budgeting processes, at both central and departmental level.

Acknowledging the necessity of public commitment and action to furthering progress towards gender equality and women's empowerment, the MDG-F has supported the elaboration of **gender equality policies** and the integration of a gender perspective into policies, plans and budgets. In 2011, the Ministry of Culture of the **State of Palestine** approved the first-ever gender-responsive Palestinian Culture Sector Strategy and its action plan, which set measures to overcome the obstacles that hinder women's participation. The ministry's Gender Unit also received capacity-building support to facilitate the implementation of the new strategy.

Women's increased participation has the potential to make gender equality a central objective and consideration when developing public policies that can advance women's human rights. In **Ecuador**, the Ministry for the Coordination of the Natural and Cultural Heritage adopted a ground-breaking Gender and Interculturality Sectoral Policy in 2011, aiming to promote equal opportunities for the indigenous, African-Ecuadorian and Montubio nationalities and peoples, with a special emphasis on women.

Finally, budgets are a clear reflection of a government's social and economic priorities. Therefore, implementing commitments towards gender equality requires intentional measures to incorporate a gender perspective in planning and budgeting frameworks and to fund specific investments

addressing gender gaps. **Gender-responsive budgeting** seeks to ensure that the collection and allocation of public resources is carried out in ways that contribute to advancing gender equality and women's empowerment. In **Nicaragua**, 15 pilot municipalities have effectively mainstreamed gender considerations into their development plans and budgets. The national budget and those of the ministries of health and labour have also mainstreamed gender. Moreover, nine national government commissions and seven local governments have institutionalized gender units.

In **Timor-Leste**, key governmental, parliamentary and civil society stakeholders have enhanced their knowledge of gender-responsive budgeting. As a result, 20 per cent of the Ministry of Education and Health budget is now targeted to women and

children, and the budget allocated to implement the Law against Domestic Violence has increased. In parallel, a new non-governmental working group on gender-responsive budgeting has begun to advocate for fair budget allocations for women's needs, and some of the key demands it put forward have already been successfully taken up by the parliament.

## Conclusion

Case studies follow in their entirety. They are intended for use by both policy-makers as well as programme practitioners. While they are not prescriptive, the lessons and experience that they contain can inform actions to promote gender equality and the empowerment of women among a wide spectrum of development actors.