

Focusing on Women and Children in the Sustainable Development Goals

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“Everyone has a fundamental right to the highest attainable standard of health, defined as physical mental and social wellbeing.”¹

As the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) crossed their deadline in 2015, new global targets, sustainable development goals (SDGs), have been launched in September 2015. Over the past 15 years under the MDGs, there has been unprecedented progress towards realizing this right and the global population is now better enlightened with information to know what further progress is necessary and ways to attain it. There has been reduction in global poverty, more children are attending school, child mortality has decreased, and there is better access to safe drinking water and targeted investments in fighting diseases.²

However, the eight MDGs failed to consider the root causes of poverty and overlooked gender inequality as well as the holistic nature of development. The goals made no mention of human rights and did not specifically address economic development and thus the unfinished business of the MDGs needs to be fulfilled.² In addition, the persisting inequality within and among countries has been a major setback for the maternal and child health. Within countries, development during the MDG era has overlooked women and those from lower economic ladder.³ On the global scale, women and girls continue to battle against gender inequality and amongst many challenges they face gender discrimination and violence in private and public places spheres.

WHO's global strategy on people-centered and integrated health services calls for a paradigm shift in order to meet the new range of challenges faced in the Post-2015 era, as populations live longer and health care systems face an associated increase in costs and need for multiple complex.⁴ There is a need to consolidate progress made and ensure equitable services to make sure that no one is left behind.

2013 UN Women had prepared a paper and summary

note on incorporating gender equality, women's rights and women's empowerment into the post-2015 development agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals 5 stressed on the importance of a stand-alone goal on gender equality and women's empowerment (MDG 3) and also integrate gender perspectives into other goals through targets and indicators.

After intense advocacy efforts, women and children's health has claimed central role in the new post-2015 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) agenda. Following the launching of the SDGs by the UN general assembly, global strategy for women's, children and adolescent's health has been launched which has further added onto making women centered programmes.

In addition to the stand-alone goal, UN Women argues, gender-specific targets should be integrated across other goals in order to ensure meaningful achievement of those goals by addressing the specific areas of gender-based discrimination.⁵ It has been imperative that gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls is not only one of the SDGs but is also vital to achieving all of the 17 goals. It is evident that if any effort is to be made to encourage sustainable growth, it becomes mandatory that we need to prioritize the health and well-being of women and girls. New innovations for women's sexual and reproductive health information and service will help to achieve higher targets for ensuring that women and children survive, thrive and transform.

SDGs focusing on women and children can be linked as follows:⁶

Goal 1 End poverty in all its forms everywhere

Keep families strong by reducing illness-related poverty in women

Goal 2 End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture

It is important to keep women healthy so as to help

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ensure food security and safety for all.

Goal 3 Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages

If women, who are the backbones of strong families and are often primary caregivers, are healthy then it can redirect the vast majority of any earned income back to their families.

Goal 4 Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all

Develop and encourage options that would help girls and young women stay in school and improve their chances for employment later.

Goal 5 Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls

Protecting one's health is a right and a crucial part of a rights-based toolkit that will empower women and girls to protect their own well-being.

Goal 8 Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all

Women are an essential part of the official economy, and cover and shoulder the enormous chunk of voluntary care and other informal work. Only if women are healthy, they can pursue employment, and help sustain strong and productive workforces.

Goal 10 Reduce inequality within and among countries

Gender discrimination, is one of the root causes of many inequalities. Women centered programmes will help overcome the inequalities and help empower women and communities, especially those from the poor economic arena.

To move ahead and progress on these goals it is important to realize that women's empowerment is not only a social issue but also an economic one in fact. Since, SDG 5 is a key to achieve other SDGs, it is imperative that all women get equal chance and freedom to contribute to the development of their countries before 2030. Gender equality and women's empowerment, in one hand will contribute to significantly reduce hunger and poverty, and on the other hand will ensure that by the end of the century more than half of the third world countries will have fully developed.

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