

Elements of an Irish/Danish/Norwegian intervention on the topic of “Promoting equality including social equity, gender equality and women’s empowerment”

3-7 February 2014

- The experience since the establishment of the MDGs and the preceding decades has shown that equality is not a natural outcome of development processes. On the contrary, the inherent disadvantages of living in poverty mean that poor people, including those that are already at a disadvantage because of discrimination based on their gender, ethnicity, disability or any other status, are less able to access economic opportunity and turn it into real livelihood benefits. Where public policies fail to redress this disparity and do not provide equal opportunities and ensure the right to development, the natural outcome is that the better-off benefit disproportionately and inequality increases.
- The success in reaching some of the MDGs at aggregate global level, including the target on income poverty, has been due to significant progress in a relatively small number of mostly middle income countries. In many other countries, where policies, actions and development programmes do not include specific measures to ensure the inclusion of poor and marginalised people in development processes, poverty reduction, despite high rates of economic growth, has been weak or absent and inequality has risen.
- The rapidly growing inequality we are witnessing is absolutely unacceptable, but also exacts a high price in terms of exclusion, marginalisation and exploitation, which have a broader impact on sustainable economic growth, social cohesion, conflict and long term stability.
- Inequality constrains the economic and productive base of any society and, by limiting the sectoral and demographic spread of economic activity, reduces both the rate and sustainability of growth and the extent to which it reduces poverty.
- Expectations are high for the post-2015 agenda, with the eradication of extreme poverty a possible new goal. Rising inequality between and within countries makes achieving this goal by 2030 a very challenging prospect and undermines the sustainability of progress already achieved. The “unfinished business” of the MDGs cannot be addressed by business as usual. The new framework must do better on inequality than the MDGs.
- Inequalities have been at the centre of the global consultations and we would like to urge the SDG-OWG to build on the outcome of these consultations. This includes the Global Consultation on Addressing Inequalities in the Post-2015 Development Agenda, held in Copenhagen on 19th February 2013.
- More specifically we would like to see at this meeting an expression of strong support for integrating the promotion of equality across the entire framework. In monitoring goals and targets we need to be able to see and measure the progress of poor and disadvantaged

groups relative to the progress of the better off and of the population in general. We need commitments to reducing the gaps in progress achieved for the different groups.

- Addressing inequality requires decisions over public resources and policies at global, national and local levels that favour the interests of poor, vulnerable and marginalised groups. Such decisions will be contested - and will only be possible if these groups are represented and influential in policy making and resource allocation processes. The new framework must have targets on inclusive governance and accountability to ensure this.
- Gender-based discrimination and denying women and girls their rights is the most longstanding and fundamentally discriminatory form of inequality and it is pervasive across most societies. It compounds and is reinforced by other inequalities. The disadvantage and exclusion that women and girls experience from living in poverty is multiplied by the gender inequality they face in their own households and communities. Achieving gender equality in poor communities is a key to reducing the poverty of women themselves and that of their families and communities.
- Realisation of women's and girls' rights and their full participation and leadership in all areas of sustainable development is fundamental to achieving gender equality and it is also the prerequisite for poverty eradication. This is particularly true in food and nutrition security where the inequity women small holder farmers' experience contributes to the challenges they have in moving beyond subsistence farming. Therefore achieving gender equity would be a major contributor to achieving food and nutrition security.
- It is also critical for dealing with the unfinished business of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and accelerating global sustainable development beyond 2015.
- This calls for renewed efforts to focus on the rights of the poorest women and girls, to address their needs and the inequalities they face. We need to ensure that targets and indicators to capture progress on gender equality, such as access to land, energy, education, political and economic power are differentiated to show progress among the poorest and most marginalised women relative to the better off and are included in the new framework.
- MDG3 has been a powerful tool for advocacy and resource mobilisation which has helped drawing increased attention to the importance of gender equality. It has also strengthened accountability for commitments made on gender equality and empowered women's organisations to advocate for women's rights and hold their governments to account.
- While significant progress has been made on parity in some areas such as in political representation and primary education, ambitious targets will still be needed in the new framework to ensure all girls, including the most difficult to reach, get access to and complete a quality primary education and that parity is also achieved in secondary and tertiary education.

- Progress on meeting MDG's which target the specific needs of women has been weaker than progress on other MDG.
- This is evidenced by the significant underperformance in delivering MDG 5 on reducing maternal mortality and achieving universal access to reproductive health. Still today, complications related to pregnancy and childbirth are a leading cause of adolescent death in developing countries, taking the lives of 70.000 adolescent girls each year. That is nearly 200 a day. Further, every day 39000 girls under 18 are married – most against their will - leaving them with limited educational opportunities and at higher risk of gender based violence. We believe that the poor performance on this goal is a real indicator of the state of commitments and progress towards gender equality and reflects the severe lack of respect, protection and fulfilment of women's basic human rights.
- The new development agenda must be rooted in principles of human rights. Advancing universal access to sexual and reproductive health and rights should be an integral part of the gender equality agenda. This includes ensuring universal access to contraception, eliminating early/forced marriages and female genital mutilation (FGM), ensure access to post-abortion care, sexual education, skilled birth attendance, post-natal care and prevention and treatment of Sexually Transmitted Diseases, including HIV/AIDS.
- Women should be able to make independent decisions in regards to family planning. Denial of women's sexual and reproductive rights undermines women's opportunities for education and employment, exacerbating gender inequalities and poverty and poverty with devastating consequences for their children, families and societies.
- **Therefore we call for an ambitious goal on gender equality as well as its effective mainstreaming across all other goals, targets and indicators.**
- Such goal would reflect the renewed commitment to fulfil our obligations to dismantle the structural underpinnings of gender inequality, transform gender relations and effect positive change in the lives of all women and girls. The targets under this goal must relate to meeting the specific needs of women and girls and to their empowerment and ability to gain and exert influence over the political, economic and social processes that determine their livelihood opportunities.
- In addition, the new framework should retain the approach of using gender disaggregated targets and indicators across the range of goals and set targets for reducing the disparities.
- The first step in addressing gender inequality is recognising it and understanding where the causes of manifestation and challenges lie. There is a need to understand what are the attitudes, behaviours and practices that perpetuate and condone gender stereotypes and all forms of discrimination and violence against women and girls and to act on these. In order to address discriminatory legislation, social structures and cultural practices as well as the distribution of power and resources we need to improve ability at national level for

the collection, analysis of disaggregated data to identify gaps, prioritise actions, monitor progress and fight discrimination with an evidence-based approach.

- We need to ensure that the new framework encompasses broad gender equality issues such as **gender based violence** which has been referred to as "the most pervasive yet least recognized human rights abuse in the world". Gender based violence prevents girls and women from reaching their potential and impoverishes individual women, their families and whole societies.
- The **empowerment of women living in conflict-affected environments and in peace-making and peace-building** is particularly important as it reduces the disproportionate risks they face in fragile and dangerous situations and because it leads to more effective and equitable conflict resolution and more durable peace.
- Empowerment requires the elimination of legal and other barriers to, and proactive support for, women's participation at an equal footing with men in economic and political decision-making from the household to the national and international level.
- Finally we need to ensure that our global commitments are translated into concrete decisions on resource allocation and financial investments. Investments need to focus on those areas which have proven to have a significant positive and transformative impact on poverty, development and sustainability for future generations. Investments in reducing inequality will have the highest returns for development through delivering equitable and inclusive growth, sustainable social cohesion, peace and stability. Supporting women's leadership, the economic empowerment of poor women and men, girls' access to primary, secondary and tertiary education and the prevention of violence against women are critical interventions and will pave the way for women and for girls to enjoy the full expression of their rights and contribute to and benefit from discrimination free societies.