

Global Goals: Making them Work

CSW57 Thursday 7 March 2013
Baha'i Community Offices, NY

Chaired by Dr. Annette Lawson OBE

Speakers:

Pakshan Zangana

Chonga Mwila

Alex Rees

Wendi Momen

Zarin Hainsworth

The first speaker was Pakshan Zangana on the topic of Iraq post 2015 when the Millenium Development Goals (MDGs) were supposed to be achieved. As 2015 draws closer, however, it becomes less likely that this will be the case.

It is important to take the state of Iraq before 2003 into consideration when discussing the MDGs: the dictatorship, war and natural disasters seriously inhibited the ability of Iraq to work towards completion of the goals. There have been periods of violence in Iraq after 2003 that also makes achievement of MDG difficult but the Kurdistan region is safer and more stable than many others. It is developing well but, as with everywhere, there is much room for improvement. MDG3 has certainly had an influence. Constitutionally women and girls should be equal but the actual implementation of this has been difficult and there needs to be co-operation between the legislature, the judiciary and the wider community. The political participation of women has seen significant growth from 7% of all government politicians being female to 38%. This is a promising change and will hopefully continue. Education is also seeing improvement as illiteracy rates are dropping. Girls older than nine, on the other hand, are still commonly pulled out of school.

A study has also been carried out on the causes of violence against women and from this study has emerged the National Strategy on Violence against Women. The government is working on reducing the issues in a collaborative effort with UN agencies and NGOs. They have also allocated 7% of the health budget specifically for 'women's' issues such as premature babies and breast cancer.

In terms of employment, the workforce now has an even split between men and women but women become less common as the jobs become more prestigious as, for example, men outnumber women in health. The number of women in the private sector, however, has grown since last year and an association of businesswomen has been founded. Suggestions for the future were to concentrate on equality in the laws. According to the constitution of Iraq, all people are equal but this is not evident in its legislation. Zangana expressed hope that this would be totally achieved within the next five years. Cooperation with the international community will be vital for this and the microfinance schemes available to some single women would do well to fund a women's co-operative which makes an impact on the economy of the country as a whole.

Chonga Mwila spoke second, noting that it was difficult to speak about what worked in the MDGs as she felt it was so much easier to highlight what did not work. The implementation of MDGs, she

noted, was also difficult in Zambia; it is more difficult in a country where poverty is rife than in one where there is a) less poverty and b) more money to solve it. On the subject of poverty, 10 million fewer people worldwide now live in total poverty i.e. on a dollar a day or less. However, the worth of the international poverty line (US\$1.25) fell in 2010 to less than half of its 1990 equivalent which offers a partial explanation as to why poverty has fallen but hunger has risen, particularly in Asia and Africa. Another reason for the fall in poverty is that microfinance schemes have allowed 85,000 people with no resources to start their own business.

MDG2, universal primary education, has resulted in a significant rise in primary school enrolment between 1999 and 2010. In Sub-Saharan Africa, for example, primary school enrolment has grown from 58% to 76%. This has occurred mostly up until 2004. After 2004, however, the level of growth shrinks. In addition, the success of the goal should have been based on the completion and not the enrolment of the primary education. While girls and boys have similar chances of completion in 25 out of 43 countries researched, girls are more likely to be pulled out early and the risk is compounded by the need to pay for books and transport.

MDG3, the focus of which was empowering women, has seen a 75% increase of women in parliament since 1999. Women have most power in Nordic countries.

Infant mortality, the subject of MDG4, has decreased in children under the age of 4 but has continued to rise between birth and the first month.

The best part about the goals as a whole is that they provided a fundamental framework for development, had a clear vision for how we wanted the future to be and gave us something to aim for. Mwila had some suggestions for their replacement post 2015. She stressed the need for a focus on gender equality and education. She announced that the children of educated mothers were more likely to survive and pointed out that in sub-Saharan Africa children often do not progress past primary school which seriously hinders their future prospects. She finished by stressing that violence against women and girls undermined every goal, not just MDG3, and that stopping it was vital in order to realise the plans post 2015.

The third speaker was Alex Rees who had chosen the topic of suggesting MDG alternatives to be implemented post 2015. She began with a critique of the current goals while reminding us how important they were. She reminded us that 40% of African women still lack an education and bemoaned the lack of women in government. Above all, she found that they were less applicable to more economically developed countries.

On the issue of women and power, Rees suggested electoral reform to get more women onto the political field. In this way, women would be in a position to pass more equality related legislation. Sadly, getting women into the seats is difficult because they face more scrutiny than their male counterparts from the campaign stage onwards. The unrealistic expectations that the public places on them makes it more difficult to win votes. Tradition makes public perceptions of political and economic competence in women lower. She used the example of Kathleen Sebelius who was judged on her clothing, nail polish and parenting skills in a magazine next to a male candidate who was judged on his biography and resume. In addition to a serious rethink from the media on how it portrays women, Rees also pointed out the importance of beginning to raise perceptions of women

by placing them in 'safe seats' where they are almost guaranteed to win, using the Labour government of the UK 2005-2010 as an example. Yet she pointed out the inequalities that these women suffered and reiterated her point that women should not have to be in safe seats to be elected. In summation, she said that poverty was not the only barrier to equality, getting more women into politics would be the goal worth working for and any post 2015 framework would do well to remember this.

Dr Wendi Momen's address was entitled: 'business and making global goals work'. Momen's core values are equality and development and she expressed mixed feelings regarding the world of business in the post 2015 plans and stressed the need to make the workplace a safe place for women. Highlighting the importance of business as the whole supply chain was her explanation of why the voices of the private sector were given so much consideration on these matters. She also illustrated how business and equality go hand in hand and used the poverty barrier as the main link. Criticising irresponsible business practice, she mentioned how it perpetuates poverty before advocating models which create jobs for locals, develop rather than exploit resources, supply equal opportunities for women and, in doing so, provide childcare. She used the example of a car manufacturer facing difficulties in an employee presence due to HIV/AIDS. Offering a vaccine solely to the workers did not encourage the employees so the company's bosses had to publicly have the vaccine themselves in order to persuade their workers – an example of employee/employer co-operation.

Zarin Hainsworth concluded that although 75% of agricultural work world-wide was done by women, they owned only 1% of the land itself. She also questioned the methods of measuring the MDGs success and suggested some improvements on development methods using her own experiences in Tanzania and around the globe. Neighbourhood based activities were the best bet as they involved the local people on whom the change would have the biggest impact rather than workers following a bureaucratic and ineffective process. Activities needed to be based on the needs of the people according to those people: a considerable amount of the 7% GDP spent on international development could be being squandered. She focused particularly on women and girls as agents of change as well as beneficiaries, with the aim of not only improving their lives but also society's perceptions of them and encouraging the women themselves that they are capable of the work. Decisions should be made for the benefit of everyone, including the women.

More work needs to be done in rural areas on making women's voices heard as this is an area often ignored and also often in need of most economic development; CSW56 found that rural women and unpaid work was a key issue. She also believes that development had become too money focused and there needed to be a shift towards a goal of self development, empowerment and betterment of humanity as a whole.

More precise and reliable data is needed on many issues surrounding widows. At least 50% of households in warzones are headed by women, particularly widows. More attention needs to be paid to this as they are vulnerable to violence. Hainsworth expressed concern for the future, particularly the next twenty years as children, themselves products of rape in a society against abortion, grow up through violence and become more and more disenfranchised and angry with their lack of community. She suggested that advancement of women and girls in the community was the answer.

It became clear during the question and answers section of the conference that getting more women

into politics is difficult in Zambia due to a lack of funding. Women's organisations will contribute to funds but the candidate herself must also make a contribution.

It was also suggested that the White Ribbon campaign and the Young Women's Christian association should work more closely together.

A disappointing fact brought up was the lack of entrepreneurial spirit amongst women, many of whom would rather work with an existing company than receive a grant to start their own. If a woman is put into contact with an already existing business, it may be a solution to give her a set of particular skills and encourage her to use them in order to begin a tributary company. The need for macro, not microfinancing was mentioned as well as the need for large-scale and multi-member women's projects which would have an effect on the world stage, empowering the women standing on it.

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