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ASSESSING PROGRESS ON GENDER EQUALITY

Progress made since Beijing, but more action needed to meet the MDGs

(Washington, DC – February 24, 2005) From February 28 to March 11, the UN Commission on the Status of Women will meet in New York City to review progress on gender and development since the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action was adopted in 1995.

According to a new world bank report, *Improving Women's Lives: World Bank Actions Since Beijing*, there is evidence that in the last 10 years, the lives of women and girls around the world have, on average, improved, due in part to concerted action by the international community and national governments:

- Female education levels have improved considerably. In 2000, the global gap in the numbers of girls compared to boys enrolled in primary education was five percentage points, compared to 16 percentage points in 1975.
- Since 1970, average life expectancies for women have increased by 15 to 20 years in developing countries.
- Since the 1970s, women's labor force participation has risen an average of 15 percentage points in East Asian and Latin American countries. Between 1990 and 2002, 81 countries of 111 studied saw increases in the female share of non-agricultural employment.
- Some countries—Brazil, Chile, India, Jordan, Malaysia, the Philippines, South Africa, and Thailand among them—have revised their labor codes to establish more equal treatment of men and women in the labor force.
- Since Beijing, there has been some improvement in women's property and inheritance rights in several Latin American and Asian countries.

“Gender equality is now a core element of the Bank's strategy to reduce poverty,” said Danny Leipziger, Vice President of the Bank's Poverty Reduction and Economic Management Network. “There is a clear understanding that unless women and men have equal opportunities, rights, and voice, the ambitious poverty-reduction goals set out in the Millennium Declaration will not be achieved.”

The World Bank has addressed gender issues since the 1970s, but the Bank's emphasis in this area increased following the 1995 Beijing Conference. Since 1995, the Bank has provided about US\$6.3 billion to support girls' education projects. Over two-thirds of Bank loans in the areas of

health, nutrition and population have included gender-related objectives, with particular emphasis on HIV/AIDS and women's reproductive health.

The new report, which is the Bank's contribution to the "Beijing + 10" review meeting, describes the World Bank's role as a partner in the international effort to promote gender equality and empower women.

The report describes concrete activities that have advanced the goals of the Beijing Platform for Action, outlines global trends in improving girls' and women's lives, and highlights some areas in need of further action. The report also describes World Bank projects that have helped to improve the lives of women and girls, the Bank's analytical work on gender issues, as well as institutional changes that have helped the Bank to increase attention to gender issues in its work.

Gender issues are highly relevant to achieving all of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), be it protecting the environment, achieving sustainable development or enabling universal access to health care. The third MDG – to promote gender equality and empower women – addresses gender equality by targeting the elimination of gender disparities in primary and secondary education preferably by 2005 and in all levels of education no later than 2015. It also targets literacy rates, the share of women in non-agricultural jobs, and the proportion of seats women hold in national parliaments.

The MDGs are mutually reinforcing, so success in many of the goals will have positive impacts on gender equality, just as progress toward gender equality will help further other goals. Low investment in girls' education significantly reduces a country's economic output. Data suggests that if countries in South Asia, Sub-Saharan Africa, and the Middle East had closed the schooling gender gap at the same rate that countries in East Asia did between 1960 and 1992, their income per capita would likely have grown an additional 0.5-0.9 percentage points per year.

But, despite increased awareness that gender equality is a critical factor in economic growth as well as poverty reduction, gender *inequalities* still prevail in many countries, as evidenced by disparities in access to secondary education and basic health services, women's lack of independent rights to own land, manage property, or conduct business, and women's under-representation at all government levels.

According to Leipziger: "despite the progress made on gender equality, meeting the gender targets – as with all of the MDGs – will require a concerted effort by the international community."

The current environment presents both opportunities and challenges for achieving the Beijing goals. The World Bank will continue to support country efforts to empower women and girls by creating and sharing knowledge on the links between gender equality and development. Specifically, World Bank efforts to help countries reach the Beijing Platform for Action goals will emphasize three main areas: supporting gender-relevant policy analysis, dialogue, and operational work; promoting greater gender equality through private sector development; and working more closely with civil society and development partners.

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Attachment

World Bank Action since Beijing – Report Highlights

At the Fourth World Conference in Beijing in 1995, the World Bank committed itself to actions that would enable women and girls everywhere to realize their potential, improve their quality of life, and help build better economic outcomes for all. Since then, gender issues, as a matter of operational policy, are being mainstreamed into the Bank's country programming, which supports countries in articulating and implementing their own development strategies.

The World Bank's work in gender equality is focused on three areas: *resources, rights, and voice*. Innovative Bank projects and initiatives have developed mechanisms to improve access to all three:

Improving Women's Access to Resources

Women continue to have less access than men to a range of productive resources, including education, health care, land, decent work, information, and financial resources. This reduced access hurts women's ability to participate in the economy and to contribute to higher living standards for their families. World Bank actions in several key areas are described below.

Education

One of the most effective development interventions is eliminating gender disparities in education. When a country educates both its girls and boys, economic productivity tends to rise, maternal and infant mortality fall, fertility rates decline, sounder management of environmental resources is promoted, and the next generation's health and educational prospects are improved.

- The World Bank has provided over \$34 billion in education loans and credits since the first education loan was approved in 1963. As of June 2004, about 90 low- and middle-income countries were implementing a total of 142 World Bank-financed education projects together worth about \$8.5 billion.
- The **Fast-Track Initiative** was launched with donor partners in 2002 to support the Education for All effort by providing additional support to countries that have in place a poverty reduction strategy and a sound education sector plan. For the 2003–07 period, about \$255 million has been mobilized for short-term financing for education sector programs, particularly in countries that are unable to mobilize sufficient resources.
- Evaluations of recent projects indicate that lowering the cost of schooling increases girls' enrolment rates. In Balochistan, **Pakistan**, World Bank support helped NGOs build schools in poor urban neighborhoods, with a subsidy tied to girls' enrollment. Schools could admit boys as long as they made up less than half the total enrollment. Girls' primary school enrollment subsequently increased by 50 percent.
- **Mexico's** PROGRESA program reaches over 2.6 million rural households and links cash benefits and nutritional supplements to mandatory participation in health and education programs; school-based cash transfer amounts are greater for girls than for boys in secondary school. PROGRESA has led to increases in secondary school enrollment rates ranging from 11 to 14 percentage points for girls and from 5 to 8 percentage points for boys.

Health Services

Providing women, men, and children with basic health care and nutrition lies at the heart of Bank strategies to reduce poverty and promote economic growth.

- A \$25 million investment in health sector reform in **Bolivia** designed to address high maternal and infant mortality rates has paid off in significant increases in the number of births attended by trained health workers—from 36 percent in 1998 to 51 percent in 2000—and in immunization coverage, which rose to 86 percent from 75 percent.
- A family planning project in **Malawi** used community-based distribution agents for the delivery of family planning services. In the pilot districts, the percentage of women aged 15–19 who had used contraception at zero parity almost doubled between 1999 and 2003, from 11 to 21 percent, compared to a three percent increase in other districts.
- In **Brazil**, the World Bank provided in 1993 \$160 million for an AIDS control project. Between 1993 and 1997, the project helped 175 NGOs conduct more than 400 grassroots campaigns, educating high-risk groups, including commercial sex workers who are mostly women, about unsafe or harmful behaviors. Between 1996–1999, the use of condoms with a regular partner nearly doubled among women. Prevalence of HIV/AIDS among women who delivered babies in health facilities decreased from 2.8 percent in 1998 to 1.7 percent in 2000.
- In **India's** Andhra Pradesh state a healthcare project is providing handheld computers to auxiliary nurse midwives, enabling them to eliminate redundant paperwork and freeing up an estimated 40 percent of their time to deliver health care to poor women.

Productive Resources

Providing women with access to productive resources such as land ownership, financial services, and formal sector employment has a direct and positive impact on economic growth and on reducing poverty, while increasing women's and empowerment.

- In **Morocco's** national water supply program, provisions were made to include at least one woman in each social mobilization team. Saving time in water collection has meant more girls are able to attend school: during the past four years, rural primary school attendance for girls jumped from 30 to 51 percent in the project areas.
- The **Dhaka** Urban Transport Project in Bangladesh has increased women's use of public transport through women-only bus services, bus route scheduling for women passengers, user-friendly sidewalks, and other pedestrian amenities. Rural roads projects in **Peru** and **Guatemala** also increased women's access to employment, markets, and public services through improved transportation.
- The World Bank is paying particular attention to gender-sensitive land titling programs, for example, in **Vietnam** through the Land Tenure Certificate Project and the **Lao People's Democratic Republic** through the Laos Land Titling Project.
- In **Vietnam**, a Rural Finance Project provided nearly \$650,000 to 250,000 rural households; women were almost one-third of the borrowers with a repayment rate of 98

percent. The project also financed mobile banking, adding many women as new borrowers.

- Investment by the World Bank and IFC in GrameenPhone Limited in **Bangladesh** has not just expanded rural connectivity. Villagers eligible for microcredit through Village Phone—most of whom are women—are given loans to purchase mobile phones. These “operators” then sell telephone service to the villagers in their community and can earn enough money to repay the Grameen Bank loan. The program reduced the need for residents of remote rural communities to make costly trips to nearby cities, and owning mobile phones has opened up a new economic niche for rural women.

Reducing Gender Disparities in Rights

Legal, social, and economic rights provide an enabling environment in which women and men can participate productively in society, attain a basic quality of life, and take advantage of the new opportunities that development affords. The World Bank is supporting a variety of activities that contribute to improving women’s rights.

- In **Chile**, the Fundacion Facultad de Derecho at the Universidad de Chile is conducting capacity building for legal practitioners on women’s human rights, the integration of international law into domestic legal practice, and the creation of a network of practitioners that will increase civil society’s ability to assess legal and judicial performance.
- In **Uruguay**, activity is focused on the implementation of the National Plan for the Eradication of Violence Against Women, including a pilot training program on women’s rights for judges, attorneys, academics and legal professionals.
- In **Sub-Saharan Africa**, an active gender and law program provides institutional strengthening and capacity-building support to governments and civil society organizations involved in advancing women’s status. The program has mobilized around \$6 million in grants for work in 14 African countries. In Tanzania, for example, the gender and law program financed a participatory land appraisal to identify and examine gender and land issues after the Ministry of Community Development and Women determined there was a need for additional information on customary land practices. Recommendations that land control be vested in the village assembly, as opposed to the clan, that land be registered in the names of both spouses, that before disposing of any land, the allocating authority ensure that wives consented to the proposed disposition, and that they and their children retain access to their means of subsistence. These recommendations fed into the debate on the Tanzania Land Bill, which was passed in 1999.
- In **Indonesia**, to mobilize community support for achieving the rights of women victims of violence, the National Commission on Violence Against Women conducted a 16-day Campaign of Activism on Violence Against Women in cooperation with local organizations in more than 15 districts. With support from the Norwegian and Dutch governments, the World Bank provided funding for activities in six of the districts. The project opened opportunities for a more strategic collaboration with local governments, police, hospitals, and other communities for future campaigns, while also building local groups’ capacity to lead such campaigns.

Strengthening Women's Voice and Power to Influence

Women's ability to influence decisions in the community and nation is often limited by a lack of access to voice and decision making power. The World Bank is supporting a variety of measures to increase women's voice in policymaking and development decisions.

- Community-driven development (CDD) lending has grown rapidly in recent years, from about \$325 million in 1996 to \$1.93 billion in 2003, and several CDD projects specifically focus on empowering poor women. In **India**, the District Poverty Initiatives Project supports women's self-help groups to use collective action to generate higher incomes and reduce harmful social conditions such as child marriage, rape, and men's abandonment of their families. The project now covers all of Andhra Pradesh's districts.
- In **Indonesia**, through the World Bank-supported Kecamatan Development Project (KDP), villagers receive grants for infrastructure projects that they have chosen after assessing the community's needs. Women initiated 6,170 proposals (or 55 percent) of the 11,275 proposals funded across 23 provinces.
- In **Timor Leste**, the Community Empowerment and Local Governance Project introduced quotas for female representation in new local governance structures.

Creating and Sharing Knowledge on Gender Equality and Inspiring Institutional Change

By creating and sharing knowledge on the links between gender equality and development, the World Bank is helping to improve women's and girls' lives. Enhanced knowledge helps countries understand why and how gender equality contributes to development. The World Bank is also striving to integrate gender – a issue relevant to virtually all development sectors – into the Bank's work.

- Recognizing the importance of local ownership of development agendas, the World Bank supports local knowledge networks and helps them build capacity to better address gender issues. For example, in the **Middle East and North Africa** (MENA), through the Development Grant Facility and in partnership with UNDP and the Arab Gulf Programme for United Nations Development Organizations, the World Bank is supporting the MENA Regional Gender and Development Network. The initiative has created an active network of policymakers, academicians, NGOs, and donor organizations concerned with gender and development issues.
- User-friendly data on gender differences and characteristics is essential for countries to better measure development determinants and outcomes. The World Bank is supporting several initiatives aimed at making sex-disaggregated data readily available to governments, civil society, and development partners. These initiatives include GenderStats, a global electronic database of gender statistics and indicators, and regional databases for Africa, Europe and Central Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean, and the Middle East and North Africa.
- Since Beijing, each of the Bank's six regional departments has appointed gender coordinators who assist regional operational staff to mainstream gender issues into their

analytical work and lending operations. In addition, and in parallel with the Bank's decentralization, over 70 country gender focal points have been appointed in World Bank country offices.

- In the past decade, the World Bank's poverty reduction approach has become increasingly participatory and country driven. The country ownership principle is embodied in the **Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs)**, which encapsulate a country's own development vision and puts the country in the driver's seat. This approach has had implications for the Bank's work on gender issues and is a key driving force in the Bank's current gender mainstreaming strategy.
 - In **Vietnam**, the World Bank helped the government integrate gender issues into its PRSP and, with the Norwegian government's support, provided resources to increase gender awareness among key provincial officials responsible for implementing Vietnam's PRSP, specifically by funding a series of workshops for about 500 provincial officials.
 - In **Ghana**, the World Bank provided support to a country-led national workshop in November 2001 that brought together the national PRSP team, government officials, gender activists, and NGOs to address ways of integrating gender issues into the PRSP.