



Executive Summary:
Workshop on Advancing the Millennium Development Goals
Kabul, Afghanistan
1 December 2004

The Afghan Women's Resource Center, in collaboration with the Afghan Women's Network and the Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children, organized a workshop in Kabul to teach members of the national and international community how to use a set of important tools created to help promote development and reduce inequity worldwide — the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

The eight MDGs are designed to encourage the international community to do all it can to reduce poverty, hunger, disease, discrimination against women, illiteracy, and environmental degradation to target levels by 2015.¹

Displaced populations are disproportionately affected by these challenges. Refugees returning to their countries of origin (returnees) often lack access to property and housing. Internally displaced² women often face increased obstacles to education, health care and employment opportunities. In order to achieve progress in each of the eight goals, the needs and requirements of returnees and internally displaced populations must be considered in MDG programs, policies and strategies.

The objectives of the one-day Kabul workshop, which was attended by representatives from local Afghan nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), international NGOs, media, the Government of Afghanistan and the United Nations were to:

- raise awareness among Afghans about the UN Millennium Development Goals;
- encourage dialogue among Afghans, especially returnees and internally displaced persons (IDPs), United Nations Development Program (UNDP), United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the Government of Afghanistan's Ministry of Return and Repatriation, to clarify mandates, responsibilities, expectations and capacities of actors;
- identify applicability of the MDGs process as contributing to durable solutions for internally displaced and returnee populations;
- develop a set of recommendations drawn from the perspective of returnee and IDP women on how to enhance the implementation of MDGs considering their needs;

¹ The MDGs were established in September 2000 at the United Nations Millennium Summit, where 189 countries adopted the Millennium Declaration, which encourages governments to prioritize development by upholding the eight interconnected and mutually reinforcing goals. For information on the MDGs visit <http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals>. For information on gender and the MDGs visit the Women's Environment and Development Organization at www.wedo.org or UNIFEM at www.unifem.org.

² Internally displaced persons have fled from their homes and live in refugee-like situations, but remain in their own country (have not crossed an international border). In Afghanistan, an estimated 167,000 people are displaced in camps (UNHCR: September 2004. From Global IDP Database. <http://www.db.idpproject>. Accessed 16 Feb 2005.) This number does not include IDPs who live in urban areas.

- explore how participants can collaborate in the future to advance the recommendations and monitor their implementation.

The workshop focused on the MDGs as an important mechanism to hold governments, the United Nations and donors accountable to their commitments. As the majority of NGO participants were returnees themselves, they acknowledged that under current conditions, many refugees and IDPs were unable to remain in their places of origin or preferred destination due to a variety of factors, including insecurity and lack of employment and access to basic services. This is leading to further destitution and renewed cycles of displacement or migration.

Recommendations focusing on IDPs and returnees

The government of Afghanistan, in collaboration with donors, the United Nations, international agencies and nongovernmental organizations should:

1. Prioritize needs of returnees and IDPs in MDG policies and programs. There should be closer alignment between the government's policies and assistance programs, particularly with the Ministry of Refugees and Repatriation, the Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development and the Ministry of Urban Development and Housing in order to address the crucial needs of the majority of returnees and IDPs, such as housing and sustained employment.
2. Adopt a regional approach to address poverty and promote sustainable development and consider cross-border concerns from the perspective of the protection needs of women (e.g., examine obligations under repatriation agreements negotiated by governments and UNHCR in terms of impact on family separation).³
3. Foster community spaces for IDPs, especially female-headed families, to help them integrate and forge new social and economic partnerships with the host community.
4. Guarantee all IDP children, including those living in camps and urban areas, access to education, including through the government's acceptance of previous educational accreditations.
5. Provide mobile counseling teams for returnees, given their psychosocial and other needs upon return.
6. Improve monitoring of the conditions of return and address abuses by local authorities to ensure returnees and IDPs are treated as equal citizens.
7. Accelerate the process of disarmament, demobilization and reintegration among Afghans.

Recommendations focusing on all Afghans, with a focus on the specific needs of IDPs and returnees as part of the poorest population.

The Government of Afghanistan, in collaboration with donors, the United Nations, international agencies and nongovernmental organizations should:

³ The government of Pakistan estimates that 3 million Afghans live in all parts of Pakistan, while UNHCR estimates that about 1 million live in refugee camps alone. (UNHCR: 9 Feb 2005. <http://www.unhcr.ch/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/news/opendoc.htm?tbl=NEWS&id=4209f2dc4&page=news>. Accessed 16 Feb 2005.) For information on Afghan refugee women's perspectives in the MDG process, refer to the Pakistan workshop summary, "*Advancing UNHCR's Five Commitments to Refugee Women and the UN Millennium Development Goals*" available at www.womenscommission.org.

Education

1. Develop a standardized curriculum for use by all actors in the education sector whether they are government, UN, international agencies or local organizations.
2. Include women's rights issues in the education curriculum, beginning at the primary level.
3. Seek ways to educate children who work, while prioritizing efforts to phase out child labor (e.g., provide evening or programs that provide lunch; establish standards and monitor their implementation to ensure that all children who must work have access to education).
4. Improve monitoring of education, including ensuring access by returnee and IDP children.
5. Increase female Islamic mentors and disseminate "positive" messages to the community about educating girls in the context of Islam and international laws and conventions.
6. Explore ways to increase girls' enrolment (e.g., provide transportation or funds for transport; increase number of female teachers; establish new schools, including within IDP and returnees' communities).
7. Increase opportunities for adult women and men to access education by establishing home-based literacy programs.

Employment/Income Generation

1. Avoid hiring and promoting men and women in government posts who do not demonstrably promote women's equal rights.
2. Make provision for women's special needs, such as daycare and transportation, to increase their participation in the workforce.

Law and Order

1. Establish a special women's task force of female law enforcers, who can register violations against women and provide counseling and conflict resolution.
2. Consider ways to better motivate persons responsible for security to register and monitor cases of gender-based violence by providing them with regular relevant trainings.
3. Make marriage registration compulsory and monitor the data to check on issues such as early marriage. Information gathered can be used to counter these practices.

Health

1. Provide ongoing monitoring and evaluation of health services to identify gaps and propose recommendations to improve services.
2. Develop universal standards and policies on maternal and child health for all NGOs working in Afghanistan.
3. Establish HIV/AIDS awareness campaigns and enact them throughout the country, including in hospitals, clinics, schools, women's and community centers, basic health units and among traditional birth attendants.

For further information on the Kabul workshop, "Advancing the Millennium Development Goals" or Pakistan workshop, "Advancing UNHCR's Five Commitments to Refugee Women and the UN Millennium Development Goals", please contact Ms. Partawmina Hasheme at AWRC at awrc@brain.net.pk.

For further information on Afghan Women's Network, please visit www.afghanwomensnetwork.org.

For further information on the Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children and for copies of the Pakistan workshop summary, "Advancing UNHCR's Five Commitments to Refugee Women and the UN Millennium Development Goals", please visit http://www.womenscommission.org/pdf/af_wkshp.pdf or contact Ms. Ramina Johal at ramina@womenscommission.org.