Violence against women and girls impovershishes individual women and their families, drains public resources and lowers economic productivity. The CDC estimate that intimate partner violence in the US alone cost $5.8 billion annually.4

Failure to address the structural and cultural factors that bar women’s access to services, in particular violence against women and girls

has undermined the current MDG framework’s ability to eliminate poverty. When women and girls experience violence, they are denied access to essential rights (such as health and education), which in turn has a lasting impact on their ability to participate meaningfully in the development of their communities.

In addition to being a violation of rights, violence against women and girls significantly undermines progress towards all the development goals, making them impossible to achieve. For example, whilst MDG 2 had some success in increasing school places, the fact that 60 million girls worldwide are assaulted travelling to and from school prevents many girls attending.

Preparations are currently underway for the agreement of a new framework to follow the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), which expire in 2015. This vital opportunity must not be wasted as the world in the first quarter of the 21st century faces challenges that can only be dealt with through collective action. Women are half the world’s population but 70% of the world’s poor.1

Despite the MDGs’ partial attention to gender, they have not yet achieved all that they could because they do not address the structural issues which prevent women enjoying fully their social, economic and political rights.

MDG 3 on gender equality and women’s empowerment has been critical in focusing resources, political attention and legitimising government action. However, there is only one target and it relates to access (rather than quality or completion) of education, while key issues including violence are missing altogether. The goal has consequently not been able to make sufficient inroads.

Failure to mainstream gender sufficiently across the goals has also prevented meaningful action on gender inequalities that prevent the elimination of poverty and hunger. For example, MDG 1 on hunger may have had a deeper impact if it had specifically addressed the issue of women’s land rights, a huge enabling factor in the production of food.

MDG 5 on maternal health did not recognize that unintended pregnancy and poor reproductive health is a major cause of maternal death until seven years into the framework. As a result, while investment in global health increased, funding for reproductive health and family planning programmes declined. In actual terms, the number of women with an unmet need for family planning increased from 215 million to 222 million2, making MDG 5 one of the most off track MDGs. The United Nations Population Fund attributes this failure to the low value placed on saving women’s lives by governments and the lack of women’s political influence over health policy and spending.3

There should be a clear indicator or target on reducing violence against women and girls.
The new development framework replacing the MDGs should:

• **Address the root cause of inequalities:** Women and girls are far more likely to be poor, hungry and illiterate. The structural causes of poverty mean that only a development framework that aims to transform power relations and address the root causes of inequality rather than the symptoms can be successful in helping women escape poverty.6

• **Be based in principles of human rights and equality:** To be successful, the new framework should reflect lessons learned from the implementation of the first MDG framework, including the importance of grounding them in principles of human rights and equality. This in itself will help ensure that the framework tackles the exclusion and inequality that leads to poverty – not just poverty itself.

A new framework should address the root causes of inequalities rather than the symptoms.

• **Include a specific goal on gender equality:** The realisation of women’s rights is a key enabler to sustainable development. For this reason, a specific goal on gender equality is necessary; one which goes beyond the existing targets on access to education and maternal mortality and also includes specific transformative targets to address discrimination against women and girls (such as gender-based violence, legal discrimination and harmful traditional practices). Having a gender goal does not preclude having a separate goal that addresses other forms of inequality.

• **Include a target on violence against women and girls:** Such a target is essential, as a failure to make progress on this issue will seriously hinder all other efforts and increase the likelihood of failure on other goals and targets.

• **Ensure that all unmet existing goals that have not been met are renewed and reframed with greater ambition to see them achieved and with gender indicators mainstreamed throughout.** For example, there should be a renewed education goal that addresses the need for greater progress towards gender parity at the secondary level and a new goal on sexual and reproductive health (including maternal mortality), more ambitious than the last and including HIV, recognizing women’s increased vulnerability to contracting HIV.

**REFERENCES**

2. UNFPA, Guttmacher Institute, Costs and Benefits of Contraceptive Services Estimates for 2012.