Women's Empowerment:
Education as a Tool for Achieving Equal Opportunities

Ambassador Daniel Carmon

As the 2015 target date for achieving the Millennium Development Goals approaches a number of processes are under way among Member States, the UN system, the academia, policymakers and civil society to reflect on the post-2015 development framework.

A growing number of States are reviewing and prioritizing the lessons learned that need to be incorporated into the post-2015 framework. The most recent, 2012, Millennium Development Goals Report revealed that while there was notable progress in some gender equality dimensions there remains much to be done in every country, at every level, to achieve equality and women’s empowerment.

Empowerment means moving from enforced powerlessness to a position of power. Education is an essential means of empowering women with the knowledge, skills and self-confidence necessary to fully participate in the development process. Sustainable development is only possible when women and men enjoy equal opportunities to reach their potential.

Women and girls experience multiple and intersecting inequalities. Structural barriers in the economic, social, political and environmental spheres produce and reinforce these inequalities. Obstacles to women’s economic and political empowerment and violence against women and girls are barriers to sustainable development and the achievement of human rights, gender equality, justice and peace.

Across much of the world, either by law or custom, women are still denied the right to own land or inherit property, obtain access to credit, attend school, earn income and progress in their profession free from job discrimination. Women are significantly under-represented in decision-making at all levels.

While the economic benefits of educating girls are similar to those of educating boys, recent findings suggest the social benefits are greater. Women have the potential to change their own economic status and that of their communities and countries in which they live yet usually women’s economic contributions are unrecognized, their work undervalued and their promise unnourished.

Unequal opportunities between women and men hamper women’s ability to lift themselves from poverty and secure improved options to improve their lives. Education is the most powerful instrument for changing women's position in society. Investing in women's and girls' education is one of the most effective ways to reduce poverty.

In line with the Millennium Development Goals and the objectives established by the international community, MASHAV, Israel’s Agency for International Development Cooperation, at Israel’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs, consistently promotes the empowerment of women, considering
women’s education as a critical component of development policy and planning, and central to sustainable development.

Following important changes in the international development landscape in recent years MASHAV adopted a dual approach to development: We engage in active development policy dialogues and development diplomacy thus contributing to and shaping policy at a higher, multilateral level. And, through professional programs, we maintain an active and effective presence at the field level.

One of MASHAV’s earliest affiliate training institutions, The Golda Meir Mount Carmel International Training Center (MCTC), has addressed the connection between gender, poverty reduction and sustainable development for over five decades. MCTC places education at the core of women’s ability to contribute to all activities, working to enhance knowledge, competency and skills, including in the development process and in their contributions to civil society.

Guided by this mindset MASHAV, together with MCTC, the UN Development Program and UN Women is organizing the 28th International Conference for Women Leaders on “The Post-2015 and Sustainable Development Goals Agenda: Ensuring the Centrality of Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment in the Next Framework.”

This November, senior women and men from the public and associative sectors - ministers, members of parliaments, heads of women's associations, representatives of international organizations and representatives of the judicial, business and academic sectors - will convene in Haifa to discuss progress achieved and gaps remaining in the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals from a gender perspective. We will highlight lessons learned and best practices in advancing gender equality and women’s empowerment.

Education is important for everyone, but it is a critical area of empowerment for girls and women. This is not only because education is an entry point to opportunity but also because women's educational achievements have positive ripple effects within the family and across generations.

Education is much more than reading and writing. It is an essential investment countries make for their futures, a crucial factor in reducing poverty and achieving sustainable development.

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