

## BACKGROUNDER

# UNIFEM Worldwide

UNIFEM is the women's fund at the United Nations. UNIFEM works on the premise that it is the fundamental right of every woman to live a life free of discrimination and violence, and that gender equality is essential to achieving development and to building just societies. Working globally to advance women's rights and gender equality, it provides financial and technical assistance to innovative programmes and initiatives that foster women's empowerment.

International commitments to women's human rights, specifically two international agreements, frame UNIFEM's work: the Beijing Platform for Action resulting from the 1995 Fourth World Conference on Women, and the widely endorsed Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), known as the women's bill of rights and which celebrates its 30th anniversary this year. The spirit of these agreements has been reaffirmed by the Millennium Declaration and the eight Millennium Development Goals — combating poverty, hunger, disease, gender inequality, illiteracy and building partnerships for development — with a timeline of 2015. In addition, the four Security Council resolutions 1325, 1889, 1820, 1888, with their emphasis on women as peacemakers and peacebuilders, and sexual violence in conflict and protection of civilians, are crucial markers for UNIFEM's work.

Established in 1976, UNIFEM has touched the lives of many around the world. It finds effective ways to support women's own developmental priorities, and is often the first to demonstrate what works for women. UNIFEM maintains strong ties to both women's organizations and governments, linking them with the United Nations system to join national and international political action and create momentum for change.

UNIFEM focuses its activities on four thematic areas:

- Enhancing women's economic security and rights;
- Ending violence against women;
- Reducing the prevalence of HIV and AIDS among women and girls; and
- Advancing gender justice in democratic governance in stable and fragile states.

### **Enhancing Women's Economic Security and Rights**

UNIFEM works to enhance women's economic security by strengthening their rights to land and inheritance, increasing their access to decent work, and empowering women migrant workers in both sending and receiving countries. To see how governments are implementing their commitments to women, it is critical to follow the money. Therefore, UNIFEM works to support national and local initiatives to include gender perspectives in budgeting processes and to incorporate sex-disaggregated data in public policy formulation in more than 40 countries.

*For example:* In Bolivia, the Law of Popular Participation established citizenship participation in the local development plans. Supported by UNIFEM, the Instituto de Formación Femenina Integral of Cochabamba has mobilized and trained members of local women's organizations to use these opportunities and bring a gender perspective into local public policies, specifically into the municipal budget.

### **Ending Violence against Women**

Violence against women is the most pervasive human rights violation. Based on available country data, it is estimated that up to 70 percent of women experience physical or sexual violence from men in their lifetime — the majority from someone they know. Despite much progress in laws and policies, many gaps remain. UNIFEM works on several fronts, including supporting legal reforms and prevention at the grassroots level and in partnership across multiple sectors, to strengthen community ownership and men's engagement. UNIFEM also plays an integral role in supporting the high-profile UN Secretary-General-led *UNiTE* campaign, in particular through its advocacy initiative *Say NO – UniTE to End Violence against Women*.

*For example:* Statistics indicate that in Afghanistan more than 87 percent of all women suffer from domestic abuse, making the country one of the most dangerous places to be a woman. Since 2008, referral centres provide a safe haven and 24-hour legal advice for cases concerning elopement, divorce, domestic violence and land rights. Staffed and used solely by women, the centres were established by the government with support from UNIFEM, and plans are underway to extend them to all 34 Afghan provinces.

### **Reversing the Spread of HIV and AIDS among Women and Girls**

The HIV and AIDS pandemic increasingly has a young woman's face: more than 60 percent of 15–24 year olds living with HIV and AIDS are women today. UNIFEM focuses on enhancing policies and translating them into effective strategies on the ground, and assists HIV-positive women in their advocacy efforts for a life without stigma and violence.

*For example:* UNIFEM's catalytic work on HIV and AIDS in Kyrgyzstan helped improve national legislation, as well as strengthen the capacity and usher in attitudinal change in civil servants, social workers, women's organizations and the media. This work was replicated by partners to cover the entire Central Asia region, with technical support from UNIFEM, to establish a regional system of training and retraining of specialists in HIV and AIDS prevention and treatment.

### **Advancing Gender Justice in Democratic Governance in Stable and Fragile States**

Women remain vastly under-represented in national or local assemblies, accounting for a worldwide average of some 15 percent of seats in national parliaments. In post-conflict situations, when electoral processes, new constitutions and legislative structures are being created, it is critical for women to be involved.

*For example:* In Sudan's Khartoum and Northern States, electoral law analysis is being used to build public awareness of and commitment to defend women's rights in the electoral process, ahead of the 2010 presidential and parliamentary elections. In Timor-Leste, the mandate of peacekeeping forces was strengthened to prevent systematic sexual violence and support women's participation in peace consolidation, following the passing of UN Security Council resolution 1820 in 2008 with technical input from UNIFEM.

For more information on UNIFEM, please visit [www.unifem.org](http://www.unifem.org).