



Credit: Created by Juozas Galkus. Collection of Moravian Gallery, Brno.

Lithuania, 1968: International Women's Day, 1968/

Conclusions

Who answers to women? The evidence reflected throughout this Report suggests that despite generous formal guarantees of equality, progress for many women, particularly the poorest and most marginal, has been far too slow. Every time legal systems turn a blind eye to injustices experienced by women, every time public service systems respond to women's needs only in relation to narrowly defined traditional female roles, and every time structures of opportunity in markets favour men's enterprises or limit women to vulnerable or low-return employment, we are faced with an accountability failure that reinforces gender-based inequality.

Progress 2008/2009 argues that the achievement of gender equality depends upon building the accountability of power holders to women so that power holders are answerable for meeting commitments to women's rights and gender equality. As

the case studies highlighted throughout this Report demonstrate, there has been some progress. In the past decade, there has been marked improvement in national responses to women's needs in some areas, such as education. Such successes suggest that where there is accountability, progress is possible, even when resources are scarce.

Progress 2008/2009 shows that strengthening accountability is both a technical and a political project. The technical dimension involves practical changes to the remit or mandate of institutions to ensure they respond to women's needs. It also involves changes in the operating procedures, performance measures, incentive systems and practices of institutions in order to ensure the implementation of these remits. Achieving these technical changes is, however, a political process: political leverage and power are required to see that mandates are translated into changed practices, and

that incentives are created for changes in the ‘deep culture’ of institutions.

A framework for gender-responsive accountability

Progress of the World's Women 2008/2009 offers a framework for understanding and building accountability to women and accountability for gender equality. Based on the evidence highlighted throughout this Report, it suggests that *accountability systems that work for women contain two essential elements:*

- *Women are participants in all oversight processes*

Gender-responsive accountability institutions must ensure that decision-makers answer to the women who are most affected by their decisions. This means that women must be entitled to ask for explanations and justifications – they must be full participants in public debates and power-delegation processes.

- *Accountability systems must make the advancement of gender equality and women's rights one of the standards against which the performance of officials is assessed*

Power holders must answer for their performance in advancing women's rights. The standards of due diligence and probity in holding the public trust must include gender equality as a goal for public action.

In order to incorporate these two elements into institutional reforms aiming to build accountability, this Report has focused on changes that have been effective in bringing gender-responsive accountability in three key areas: mandates, procedures, and culture and attitudes.

Mandates: If the formal remit of an institution does not mandate its members to build gender equality, remits may need to be reformed. Just 20 years ago, concrete

constitutional and legislative commitments to women's rights and gender equality were scarce. Today, we see countries adopting laws against domestic violence and female genital mutilation, strengthening social protection policies for informal sector workers, and developing model contracts to protect migrant women.

Procedures: When the normative environment improves but the situation of women – especially the most disadvantaged women – remains the same, this adds up to an accountability crisis. Laws must be translated into *instructions* and *incentives* for the responsible officials; changed *performance measures, monitoring, review* and *correction* procedures must enable women to participate in assessing public action and demanding answers. Women's *access* to oversight processes must be facilitated, including by addressing gender-specific constraints on women's time, mobility, legal literacy, or disposable income.

Culture and attitudes: A long-term project of gender equality advocates around the world has been to change deeply engrained cultural biases against women. Their starting point has often been to protest against gender biases in informal institutions, such as the family or communities built on kinship, religious, or customary ties.

Women are changing the meaning and methods of accountability

Women around the world have led the way in demanding answers for abuses of their rights, and, in the process, they have changed expectations about accountability and even methods for obtaining it. There are several common patterns in these efforts.

- **First**, gender equality advocates have asked that *gender equality and women's rights be included amongst the standards against which public actions are assessed*. They have done this through changes to national constitutions, judicial review of and legal challenges to

government decisions, and the passing of international conventions on women's rights.

- **Second**, gender equality advocates have fought exclusion from decision-making and oversight forums by asking that *temporary special measures* such as quotas for women be set up at national and local government levels, on corporate boards, and in public administration.
- **Third**, women and their allies have sought *direct engagement in accountability and oversight processes* through mechanisms such as consultations on national development spending priorities, vigilance committees, and user group reviews of the distribution of public or natural resources. They have institutionalized gender-responsive budget analysis at the national and local level, and have fought for the right to participate in traditional justice forums from which their gender alone had previously excluded them.
- **Fourth**, where these attempts have not worked, women and their allies have set up *parallel accountability processes* such as citizens' report cards and public hearings on the allocation of public resources. These parallel forums have been most effective in contexts where citizens have made the right to information an issue of public concern.

Building women's 'voice' to demand change

Accountability can be built through political pressure for change, or by encouraging competition between public providers and empowering individual citizens, both women and men, to deploy market power to choose among them. While evidence suggests that both of these approaches are showing results, with many reforms combining elements of both, this Report finds that 'voice'-based approaches are often more promising for women, particularly poor women. This is

because women's ability to exercise choice can be constrained. Women's collective action has historically been — and is still — a powerful means for women to overcome the constraints imposed by individual male and family control, as well as class and other barriers.

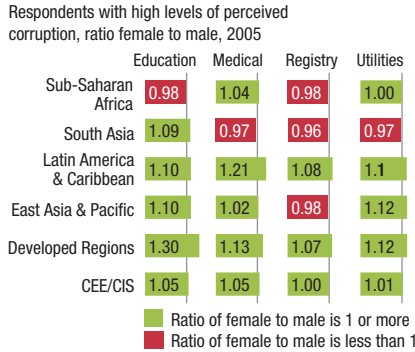
Where does the leadership and leverage for women's voice originate? This Report makes clear that women need to be present at all levels of decision-making — in government, the economy and at the community level. In all of these arenas, the fastest route to overcoming embedded resistance to women's leadership is often the implementation of temporary special measures, such as quotas. Such affirmative measures have been applied for some time in electoral politics, and more recent application to corporate boards and top management shows them to be an effective way of breaking through the glass ceiling in the private sector. Special measures can even be applied to traditional institutions, as seen in requirements that traditional justice systems in Rwanda include women on the bench of elders (Chapter 5), or in the reservations for women in traditional leaders' forums in local government in South Africa (Chapter 3). But temporary special measures, however useful, are not sufficient in and of themselves for ensuring that women have influence or leverage over decision-making.

Changes in at least two other institutional arenas must accompany these measures. First, women and men in decision-making must be backed by constituencies that actively demand gender equality. Second, institutional capacity must be built to ensure effective implementation of what can sometimes be perceived as counter-cultural equality policies. This Report has suggested that women's mobilisation is often most effective when it becomes apparent to the general public that women's rights and gender equality are in the broader public interest. The leverage of gender equality advocates is significantly expanded when it is not just women mobilising for women's rights.

FINDING

RECOMMENDATION

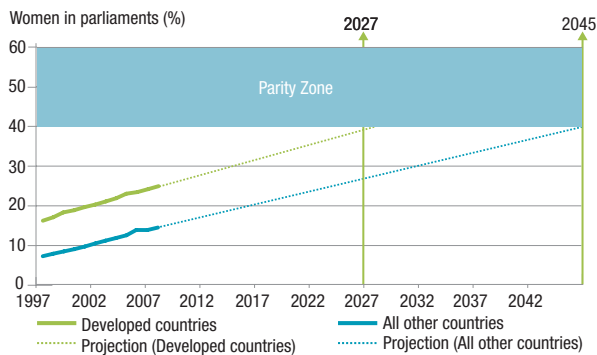
FIGURE 7.1 | Gendered Perceptions of Corruption: Service Provision institutions



Women around the world consistently perceive higher levels of corruption in public institutions than do men, particularly in the public services with which they have the most contact such as in schools and health facilities (Chapter 1).

Women's experiences and perceptions of corruption should inform anti-corruption efforts to ensure that forms of corruption that affect women in particular are addressed. Women beneficiaries of public services should have access to and roles in institutional oversight processes to enable them to perform a monitoring role. The right to information is a powerful tool to enable effective monitoring.

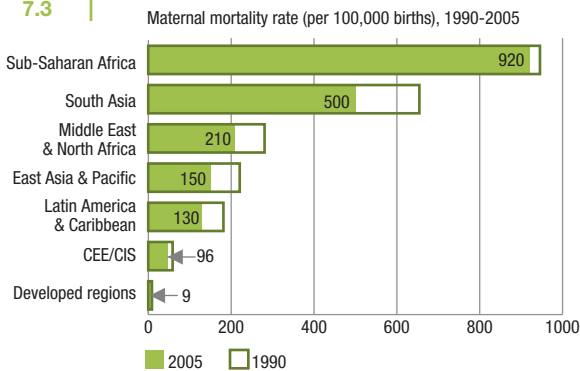
FIGURE 7.2 | Timeline to Reach Gender Parity in National Assemblies



At the present rate of increase, women's political representation in developing regions will not reach the "parity zone" of between 40% and 60% until 2045 (Chapter 2).

Temporary special measures such as quotas are needed in order to accelerate the increase in women's political participation. Beyond numbers, the influence of gender equality advocates in politics can be enhanced through democratization of political parties, building women's Parliamentary Caucuses, political parties' commitment to and support of women candidates, and governance reforms that bring gender equality into performance measures and monitoring systems.

FIGURE 7.3 | Slow Decline in Maternal Mortality



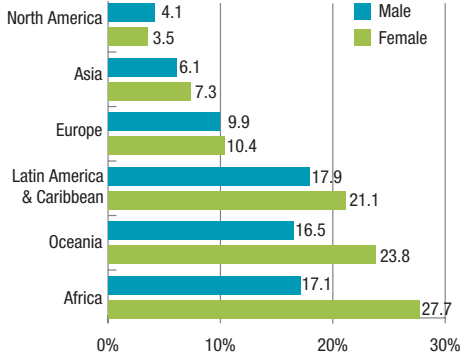
Services that respond to women's needs are the 'litmus test' of whether accountability is working for women. They show that women's needs are addressed, and that women are informing and monitoring the ways public priorities are set and paid for (Chapter 3). The data on maternal mortality – currently decreasing at a rate of only 0.4% per year instead of the 5.5% decrease needed to meet the MDG 5 target – is a sign of a serious accountability crisis.

Governments need to implement institutional reforms to public services to ensure that these services respond to women's priorities. Reforms must incorporate women's specific needs and enable women to engage in oversight through monitoring and performance reviews that orient services to women's needs. More can be done to improve services for women in key areas: building public and private security for women, support for women's enterprises (beyond micro-finance), agricultural extension support, and social protection, among others.

FINDING

RECOMMENDATION

FIGURE 7.4 | Migration Rates of People with Tertiary Education



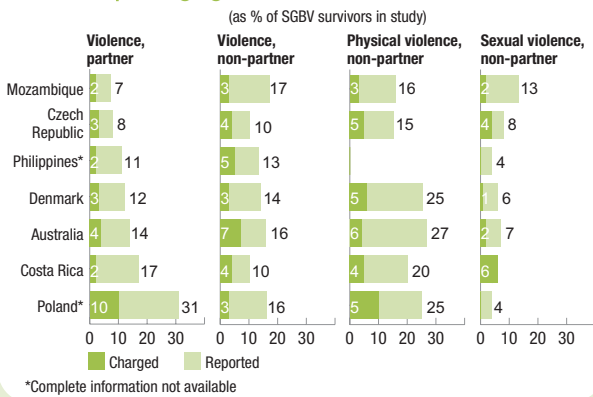
Women are under-represented in senior management in both the public and private sector around the world. A lack of accountability for protecting women’s labour rights makes poor women in poor countries a low-cost labour pool for global production chains (Chapter 4). Weakly defended labour rights also fuel the growing numbers of women migrating in professional worker categories. This female “brain drain” from developing countries does not bode well for women’s economic leadership in development.

Governments have a responsibility to “manage the market” in the interest of gender equality.

For women, collective action pays off, with union membership reflected in lower pay gaps and stronger labour rights.

Companies committed to building women’s economic leadership have effectively used quotas for women on corporate boards.

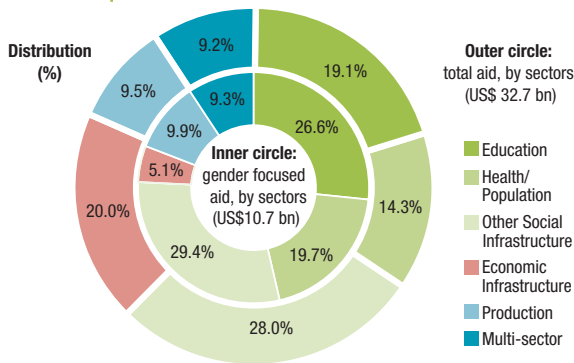
FIGURE 7.5 | Violence Against Women: Reporting and Charging Rates



Judicial accountability cannot work for women as long as many forms of violence against women are not criminalised and as long as law enforcement practice is not responsive to women’s protection needs (Chapter 5). There is serious under-investment in rule-of-law reforms that address women’s needs, and most women have few alternatives to informal justice systems where national and international human rights standards may not apply.

Governments should invest in strengthening judicial systems, including through the establishment of Family Courts, particularly in post-conflict states, to provide women with alternatives to informal justice systems. Law enforcement institutions need to recruit more women and set up gender-sensitive victim support units to ensure that women feel safe to report crimes and feel confident that complaints will be investigated and prosecuted.

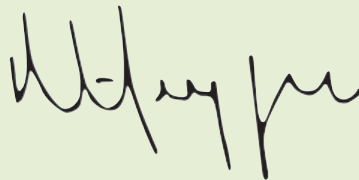
FIGURE 7.6 | Distribution of Sectoral and Gender Marked OECD/DAC Aid



To date, no consistent tracking system exists in multilateral institutions to assess the amount of aid allocated to gender equality or women’s empowerment. Within the OECD there is a gender marker to indicate translation of commitments into allocations, but less than half of the funds eligible for ‘screening’ use this marker. Gender-focused aid shows less investment in economic infrastructure than social sectors (Chapter 6). Current approaches to mutual accountability in the use of aid resources do not adequately ensure women’s engagement in determining national spending priorities.

International institutions can do much more to meet their own commitments and standards on gender equality. Credible and consistent resource tracking systems to reveal the amount spent on women’s empowerment must be established. The gender-focused aid portfolio should be diversified to include more funds allocated to economic infrastructure and private sector development. National spending priorities should be set in consultation with women. The ‘gender architecture’ of expertise and decision-making within aid and security institutions must be strengthened.

“ Women around the world are changing the way we think about accountability and democratic governance. Impatient with inadequate service delivery, with gender biased rulings from judges, and with exclusion from market opportunities and from the ranks of decision-makers, women are demanding that power-holders correct for their failures to respond to women’s needs or protect their rights. There are two essential elements to women’s efforts to reform accountability systems. First, women insist that they be included in systems of oversight at every level. Second, the standards against which the actions of power-holders are judged must include the advancement of women’s rights. When we ask ‘Who answers to women?’ we know who should answer to women but who does not. Women are now asking not only that powers-holders answer to women, but that they answer for gender equality, from now on.



Noeleen Heyzer

*Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations
and Executive Secretary of ESCAP*

Constituencies actively demanding gender equality play a critical role in supporting decision-makers in building public policy to advance women’s rights. But institutional capacity to implement and answer for new directives on gender equality does not emerge as an automatic next step. The key measures that must be taken to ensure institutional capacity have been a main theme of this Report: they include gender-responsive performance measures, dissemination of information on gender differences in policy priorities and resourcing patterns, incentives to reward gender-responsive performance, and operating procedures that ensure response to women’s needs.

Making gender equality ‘mission critical’ to accountability

The combination of leadership positioning, political leverage and institutional capacity should result in making gender equality ‘mission critical’ – and therefore part

of accountability processes at all levels of decision-making and in the distribution of resources. The achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) depends on gender equality if targets are to be met on time. Security Council Resolution 1820, passed in June 2008, reflects the recognition that widespread and systematic sexual violence constitutes a national and sometimes international security threat, so that the security of all requires specific steps to ensure security for women. Since gender equality is ‘mission-critical’ to poverty reduction and international peace and security, the mandates, operating practices, and deep cultures of international institutions must be revised where necessary to ensure that gender equality is a top priority in the hierarchy of issues for which they are accountable.

The forward agenda for accountability and good governance, then, is to pursue accountability reforms affirming that *women matter*. A real test of gender-responsive accountability is a reduction in violence

against women. UNIFEM maintains that reducing violence against women should be recognised as an MDG target, as it is a critical step in building the capacity of women to engage fully in economic, political and social life. Accountability to women means that justice and security systems are reoriented where necessary to revise laws and directives so as to mandate prevention and prosecution of cases of violence against women. This means revising operating procedures and incentive structures to defend a vast shift in the workload of police and judicial personnel that would be needed to deal with the enormity of the problem. Above all, it entails political commitment to tackle some deeply engrained cultural preferences that regard violence against women as a male prerogative.

The proof of accountability is in the experiences of women going about their normal lives. Are they living lives free of fear of violence? Can they profit from their own hard work? Can they access services that are responsive to their needs as women, mothers, workers, rural dwellers or urban residents? Are they free to make choices about how to live their lives, such as whom to marry, how many children to have, where to live, and how to make a living? Where accountability systems are rid of gender biases, they can ensure that states provide women with physical and economic security, access to basic services, and justice systems to protect their rights.