

PUBLIC COMMENT ON
THE CRITERIA FOR DETERMINING ELIGIBILITY OF CANDIDATE COUNTRIES
FOR MILLENNIUM CHALLENGE ACCOUNT ASSISTANCE IN FY 2005

SUBMITTED BY
THE INTERNATIONAL CENTER FOR RESEARCH ON WOMEN
September 28, 2004

The International Center for Research on Women (ICRW) applauds the Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) for its decision to include Girls' Primary Completion Rates as a new indicator in FY 2005, and welcomes its announcement that it will consider the use of Skilled Attendants at Birth as a possible indicator for the future. Girls' education leads to improvements in their own well-being, increased income for families and nations, and healthier children. Similarly, ensuring that women have access to skilled personnel during delivery is critical to reducing maternal and newborn deaths, which harm families and societies. These indicators provide reliable measurements of a government's investment in the education and health of its people, and demonstrate the seriousness of the MCC's commitment to reducing gender inequities that hinder economic growth and poverty reduction.

Because improving women's economic, social and political status is both a goal of sustainable development and an important means for achieving it, ICRW recommends that the MCC consider adding gender-sensitive indicators to the other policy categories as well. In the category of "Ruling Justly," ICRW recommends that MCC substitute "Percent of Parliament Seats Held by Women" for one of the current indicators. In its comment on the FY 2004 criteria, ICRW noted that three of the indicators of ruling justly – Civil Liberties, Political Rights, and Voice and Accountability – are so highly correlated as to be duplicative. The proposed new indicator would both measure the extent to which women are politically represented in decision-making and encourage good governance, since women's equal participation in public life is correlated with improved policies and reduced levels of corruption.¹

As the MCC moves from initial country selection to negotiation and implementation of final compacts, ICRW urges that the MCC take several steps to reduce the barriers that prohibit women from fully benefiting from economic growth and development. First, the MCC must ensure that countries have engaged in meaningful consultations with a variety of women's organizations on the substance of their proposals. In most cases, governments will need to solicit input directly from women's groups rather than relying on general public meetings with civil society more broadly. Opportunities for exchange should occur throughout the proposal development process, enabling groups to offer input at each stage and to propose alternative ideas.

¹ World Bank, *Engendering Development -- Through Gender Equality in Rights, Resources and Voice*, 2001.

Second, in reviewing country proposals the MCC should consider their specific implications for women and girls. Different paths to growth can have variable impacts on the status and well-being of women and girls, even when they appear on the surface to be gender-neutral. Legal and cultural constraints based on gender often cause growth-limiting market imperfections and thus must be addressed at the outset.

Finally, the MCC should ensure that countries receiving assistance are using sex-disaggregated data to track the impact of funds. Increasing the access of women and girls to resources and opportunities is essential for sustained economic growth and poverty reduction, and the use of gender-sensitive performance indicators is critical for measuring the extent to which this is being achieved.