Long-term challenges for women as assessed by the Millennium Project

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Abstract

The interdependence of economic growth and technological innovation has been the most significant engine of change for the last 200 years, but unless we improve our economic, environmental, and social behavior (first and foremost gender-equity), the next 200 years could be difficult. The 15 Global Challenges identified by the Millennium Project aim to provide a framework to better understand the present and assess prospects, and offer some thoughts and resources to help decision-making. This presentation will focus specifically on the interdependency of the challenges and therefore of the policies addressing them, assessing specifically issues related to gender-equity. It will also propose the use of the collaborative Real Time Delphi process to improve the understanding of gender-sensitivity; identify emerging gender-related issues, policies and strategies; and organizations that might help address them; and help prioritize efforts for accelerating gender-equality and improving the status of women worldwide.

Full Text

We were able to decipher the mysteries of the human genome; we should be also able to solve the mystery of the mind-set that keeps women under the glass-ceiling. Further, the new generation is already thinking differently and gender equality is so normal in many parts of the world that it is not even considered an issue any more. Shifts in mind-sets, policies and actions of leaders of governments and private companies occur fast, but with increased and more focused action, they can be expanded to be global, comprehensive, and socially-responsible.

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The daily complexities of politics, the need to manage current problems, and the increasing number and intricacy of choices that need to be considered seem to be growing beyond our abilities to analyze and make decisions. The decision process in many cases is also becoming more complex as the number and diversity of people involved in decisions is increasing.

The 15 Global Challenges

The 15 Global Challenges identified by the Millennium Project (already introduced by Jerome Glenn and Rosa Alegria) aim to provide a framework to better understand the present and assess prospects for the future, and offer some thoughts and resources to help decision-making. They present longer-term prospects and consequences, with global and regional perspectives, and propose alternatives, offering insights to help build a better future. Making wise and timely decisions about these challenges will set the course of global development and societal achievements in the years immediately ahead.
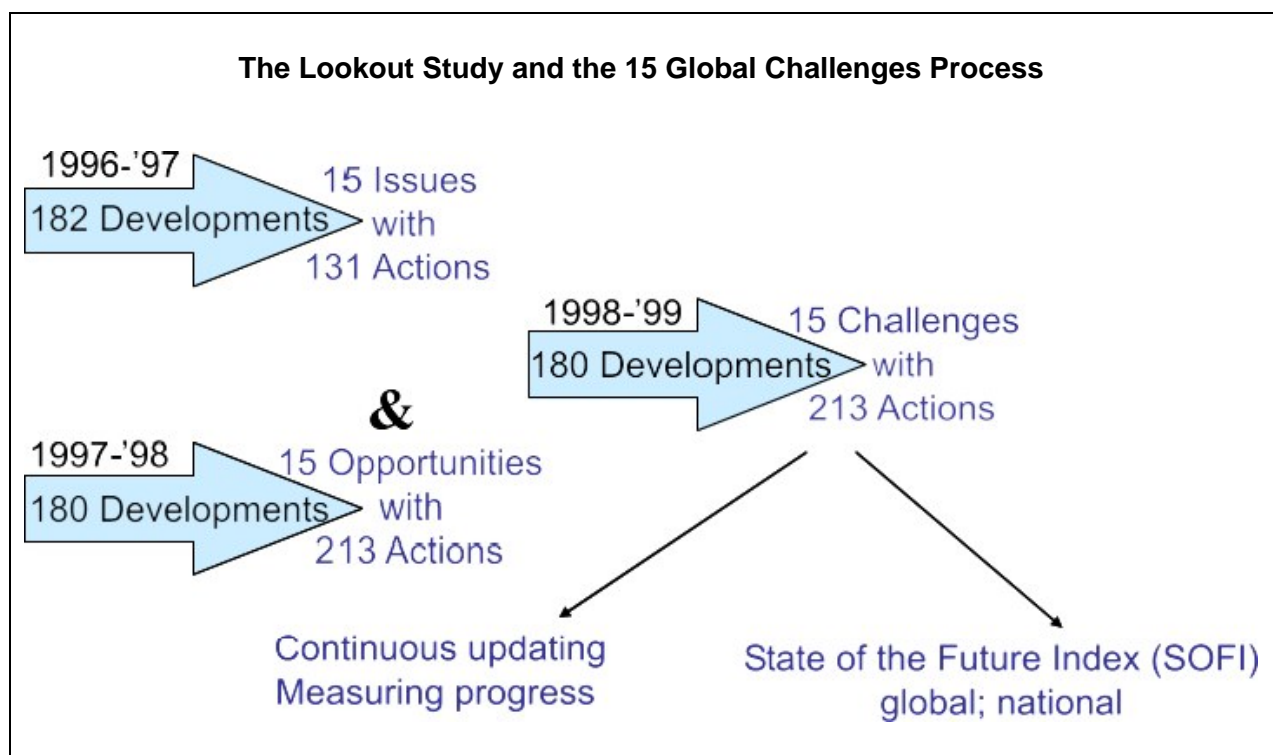
One of the challenges is specifically dedicated to the status of women.

The 15 Global Challenges:

1. How can sustainable development be achieved for all?

2. How can everyone have sufficient clean water without conflict?

3. How can population growth and resources be brought into balance?

4. How can genuine democracy emerge from authoritarian regimes?

5. How can policymaking be made more sensitive to global long-term perspectives?

6. How can the global convergence of information and communications technologies work for everyone?

7. How can ethical market economies be encouraged to help reduce the gap between rich and poor?

8. How can the threat of new and reemerging diseases and immune microorganisms be reduced?

9. How can the capacity to decide be improved as the nature of work and institutions change?

10. How can shared values and new security strategies reduce ethnic conflicts, terrorism, and the use of weapons of mass destruction?

11. How can the changing status of women help improve the human condition?

12. How can transnational organized crime networks be stopped from becoming more powerful and sophisticated global enterprises?

13. How can growing energy demands be met safely and efficiently?

14. How can scientific and technological breakthroughs be accelerated to improve the human condition?

15. How can ethical considerations become more routinely incorporated into global decisions?
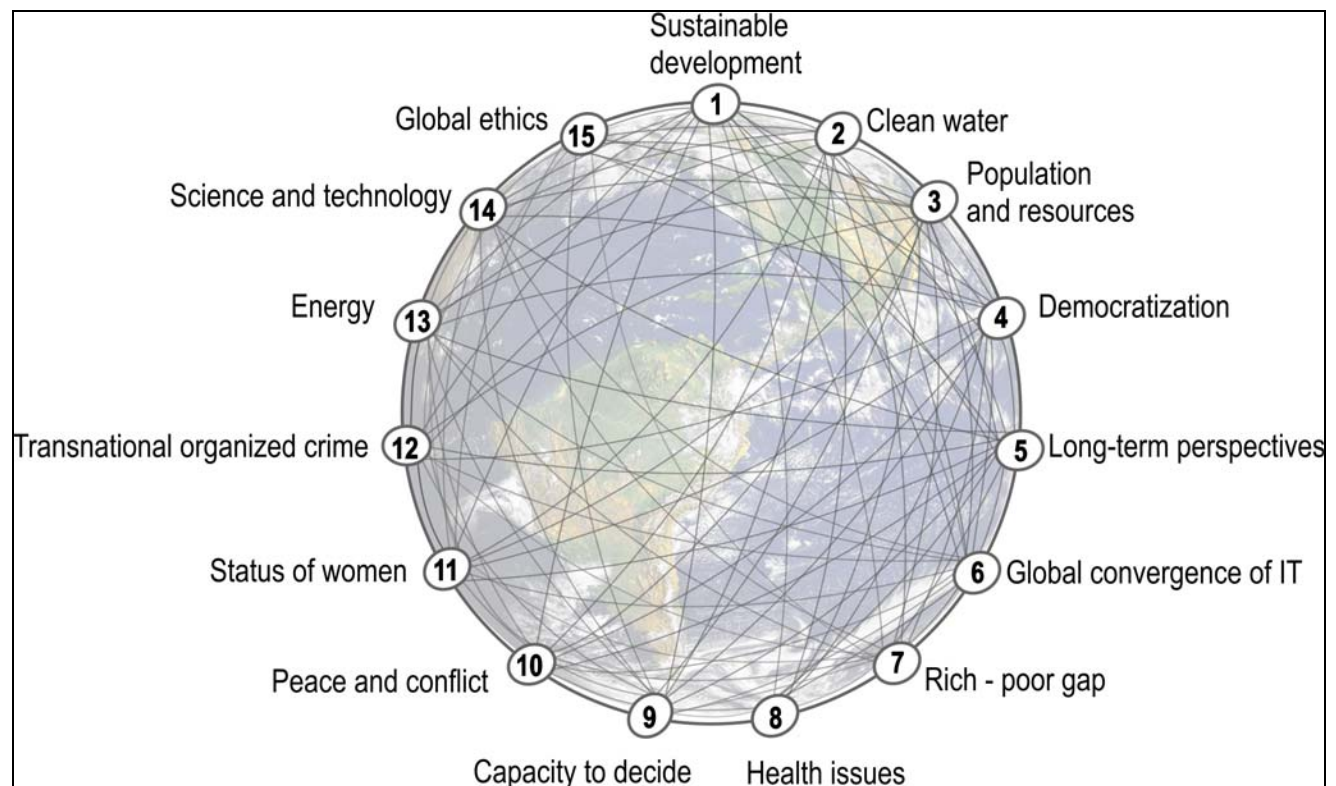
The 15 Global Challenges Process

The list and description of the 15 Global Challenges are the result of the collaboration of about 2,000 experts from around the world, from different sectors (futurists, government, NGOs, academia, and private sector). Since 1996, participants contributed thoughts to identify issues and opportunities that were then distilled into challenges which have an important impact on humanity's future and are therefore important to be assessed and addressed in order to improve decision-making and global prospects. The 15 Global Challenges, with a range of views and actions to address each, are updated each year and enriched with regional views and indicators to measure progress, and published in the annual *State of the Future*.

The Lookout Study and the 15 Global Challenges Process

1996-'97
182 Developments → 15 Issues with 131 Actions

1997-'98
180 Developments → 15 Opportunities with 213 Actions

&

1998-'99
180 Developments → 15 Challenges with 213 Actions

Continuous updating
Measuring progress

State of the Future Index (SOFI)
global; national

In 2000, Ted Gordon introduced the State of the Future Index (SOFI), a new tool to measure progress and to show a range of possible future options to help decision-making. This presentation doesn't get into details on the SOFI, but calculating a specific gender-sensitive State of the Future Index might facilitate depiction of the developments, strategies and policies which would considerably impact the status of women in particular, and the global future generally.

Global Challenges Interdependency

The Global Challenges are interdependent: improvements in one make it easier to address others and vice-versa, deterioration in one makes it harder to address others. Arguing whether one is more important than another is like arguing that the human nervous system is more important than the respiratory system, says Jerome Glenn.

For example, improvements in sustainable development (which got higher on today's agendas thanks to climate change), not only improve the environment and increase efficiency, but also reduce poverty, strengthen government, diminish conflicts and improve all the other prospects. To list just a few implicit effects: improving the water situation (challenge 2 -- due to a more rational use of water in agriculture and industrial sectors), the population and resources balance (challenge 3—improving the use of land, reducing environmental degradation, and addressing food security) therefore reducing the threat of conflicts over resources (challenge 10), reduce the rich-poor gap by improving living standards of the poor (challenge 7), as a result advancing development in general and with it, the access to information technology (challenge 6), open access to information and improve living conditions and access to health care (challenge 8), develop peoples' sense of right to self-determination and spreading democracy (challenge 4), which allows introducing long-term thinking in policy-making (challenge 5), thus improving decision-making capacity and institutions (challenge 9), which would help reduce corruption and trans-organized crime (challenge 12), enhance possibilities for developing and implementing new energy and S&T policies (challenges 13 and 14), all contributing to enhancing the system of values and ethics at all levels (challenge 15), and last – but not least – improving the status of women (challenge 11).

A similar rationale is valid if we begin with any other challenge – for example challenge 4-democratization: would obviously strengthen governance and improve decision-making (challenge 9), reduce conflict (challenge 10 -- since democracies tend not to fight each other), therefore improving the living standards of the poor and reducing the rich-poor gap (challenge 7), open access to ICT (challenge 6), improve people knowledge and understanding of other cultures while developing a sense of accountability, therefore improving ethics (challenge 15) and again, last but not least, women are the principal winners (challenge 11).

The Global Challenges are transnational in nature and transinstitutional in solution. They cannot be addressed by any government or institution acting alone. They require collaborative action among governments, international organizations, corporations, universities, and NGOs. Transinstitutional mechanisms to focus these global actors are missing.

There is greater consensus about the global situation as expressed in these challenges and the actions to address them than is evident in the news media, although diverse views exist about some other constructive actions.

The Status of Women Study

Focusing specifically on improving the status of women (which is important for actually improving the well-being of society as a whole) requires better understanding of gender-sensitivity and therefore addressing the issues and helping design policies and programs accordingly.

Radical mind-set changes towards a more gender-equitable society are taking place all over the world, driven by cultural and ideological changes, improved systems of values, and mainly by access to information and knowledge. If the factors that trigger shifts in mind-sets that influence gender equity are understood, supportive or inhibitory actions could be promoted accordingly.

Better understanding gender-sensitivity will help address issues and design policies and programs accordingly; e.g. for setting work standards; or designing programs for adaptation and response to climate change or for conflict and post-conflict situations.

It is important to identify emerging challenges, driving forces and agents of change, which would affect the status of women —and implicitly humanity as a whole—and include female perspective dimensions in strategies and policies. This should be complemented by identifying the strategies, policies, and technologies with potential to help improve the status of women worldwide and in specific sectors and/or regions. Ultimately, we need to see which the likely future scenarios are and what is and would be women's role?

The MP women-oriented study aims to show the large picture, and the challenges and perspectives, and to try to bring the actors together to address them.

Addressing Gender-sensitiveness

In order to properly address gender issues, the question arises: How can we measure progress on gender-equity and assess areas of improvement or regression?

There are some important tools that would be needed and which are missing completely or exist just partially:

- gender-disaggregated data and indicators (basic indicators and data for assessing quality of life, economic and technological development, etc., should be available in a gender-disaggregated form as now exist mostly for education and health for example)

- indicators (monetary value) for non-traditional (household) work (reflecting housework value, income, and labor dynamics). Some countries began quantifying household care and care for children and elderly, but there are no international standards and methodologies yet.

It is important to identify the areas in which women are disproportionately vulnerable and monitor progress and/or regress; e.g. access to resources (natural, financial), education, skills development, access to certain categories of jobs, as well as the geographical regions or specific cultures that hinder equal access.

There are some sectors where women are essential and effective agents of change, as for example at home, in developing children's systems of values. It is important to know which are the regions, social systems and/or cultures that promote or even impose gender inequality, in order to promote special programs and strategies.

This might often be impeded by lack of transparency and/or access to information on specific gender constraints (labor, education, access to information, health, access to resources, skills, etc), therefore making it almost impossible to assess the real situation or even less so, to assess progress or regress. An international treaty that would require disclosure of inequality practices might help mitigate the situation.

Establishing a system of real-time news alerts for women-related topics and resources might help both increase awareness and response possibility, as well as improve and allow progress/regress assessment. For example, the World Health Organization (WHO) launched the 'Environmental health in emergencies' website to provide information and resources for health management related to environmental disasters and emergency situations, after realizing the important correlation between disease and environmental factors. Similarly, a good information system on gender inequality might reduce health and poverty issues in many countries, improving the general living standard—not just for women and children.

Women and Climate Change

In this address, it is impossible to deal with policies related to all 15 challenges and analyze how they might impact the status of women and show the interlinkages to the other challenges.

Hence, I chose to address some that are the most complex, and "hot" on the international agenda, since if they have global priority, they are more likely to be constructively and successfully addressed. I will highlight gender-sensitiveness of climate change and armed conflicts.

I was not surprised, although very pleased, to see that these were also among the main themes up for discussion at this year's session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW), which ends today (March 7, 2008). I am looking forward to reading the outcomes and engaging the Commission and those interested, in Millennia 2015.

In the new context, climate change and conflict shouldn't even be separated, as it is generally accepted that one exacerbates the other. Climate change and its implications dominate the international and many national agendas. It's the "defining issue of our era," states Ban Ki-moon, Secretary-General of the UN.

Although it is widely acknowledged that the impact of climate change is and will be considerably different from one region and category of country to another, with the poor feeling the most burden, adequate strategies and adaptation policies and actions are lagging behind. Even more so does a gender-sensitive approach.

International and specialized organizations keep on highlighting the links between gender and climate change, calling for a gender-specific vulnerability approach, to place women at the center of the climate change debate and at policymaking table. Women are considerably more affected by the consequences of climate change from all points of view, but mainly:
- economic—loss of livelihood due to land degradation, flooding, desertification, or simply pollution;
- affective—being more "sensitive" and since they have to be the moral support to their children and family (3 million children under the age of 5 die every year from environment-linked diseases)
- cultural—losing their traditions, way of life, and access to education due to migration.
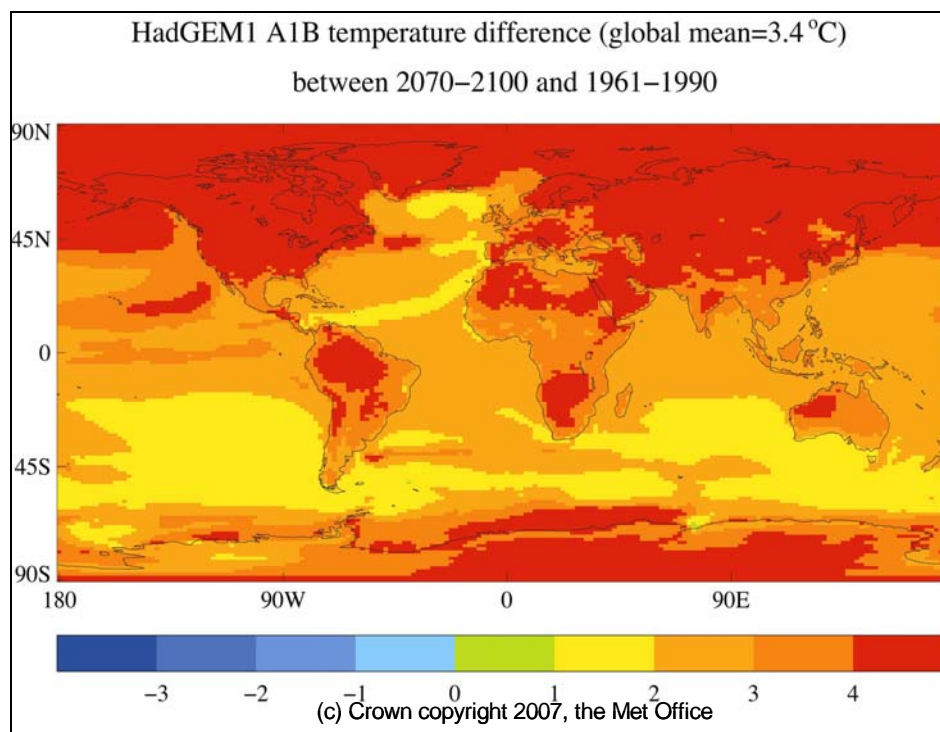
Women suffer disproportionately more from natural disasters. In the case of the 2004 Tsunami, the female/male victims' ratio was 4:1.

Consequently, women and children constitute the majority of displaced victims. It is estimated that the number of environmental refugees will reach 50 million by 2010, and about 1 billion over the next 50 years.

However, women also have an important role as actors of change; for example, increasing environmental awareness and influence by education, the creation of a more environment-friendly system of values, helping adaptation and preparedness for the effects of climate change, and changing life-style (mainly in housework and agriculture).

Mapping Climate Change Threats

"Projected climate changes can not only have serious environmental, social, and economic implications, but implications for peace and security, as well" warns Ban Ki-moon, Secretary-General of the UN. And that is easy to portray if we look at the areas with highest vulnerability – those that are the most populated, poor, and already conflict-torn or threatened by unrest.

HadGEM1 A1B temperature difference (global mean=3.4 °C) between 2070–2100 and 1961–1990

(c) Crown copyright 2007, the Met Office

Women and Armed Conflicts

Hence, climate change and conflict are increasingly interlinked, as are their consequences. Conflicts might increase as population grows mainly where resources are already scarce, triggering migration and increasing the threat of conflict. In turn, war destroys the already stressed environment, the infrastructure, like water sources, and increases the population's suffering, mainly women and children. Over the last few years it has been emphasized over and over that the environment is an underlying and multiplier cause of conflict. Environmental degradation is one of the main causes of the fact that in the past 20 years, 50% of conflicts were "re-conflicts." "Too often, where we need water we find guns instead," noted Ban Ki-moon at the recent World Economic Forum.

Additionally, gender became a crucial factor in some of the most deadly armed conflicts—rape being used as a weapon—such as in the Democratic Republic of Congo (where more people have died than in Iraq, Afghanistan, and Darfur combined), and the sexual assaults against women displaced by Kenya's post-election violence.

Addressing Vulnerability

Hence, addressing vulnerability becomes crucial for improving the status of women.

Since we are already over-living our planet's capacity to replenish, we should address demographics and resources issues more intensively. Humans use about 25% more than nature can replenish and 60% of the ecosystems are being degraded or used unsustainably. If current trends continue, Africa might be able to feed just 25% of its population by 2025. While sea levels rise, coastal population is expected to increase 35% by 2025, reaching 2.75 billion people who would live within 60 miles of the ocean, therefore increasing their vulnerability and most probably forcing migration.

The number of people displaced by natural disasters is estimated to be approximately the same (25 million) as those displayed by conflict and human rights. It is imperative that an international framework for environmental refugees be created, and that it would have gender-sensitive stipulations. Also, gender vulnerability studies (by region and population segments) should be conducted to develop specific strategies for women and children (e.g. gender-specific early warning and preparedness strategies.)

Since fragile states are most vulnerable to both climate change and conflict, special attention should be given to forecast and address possible fragile states issues.
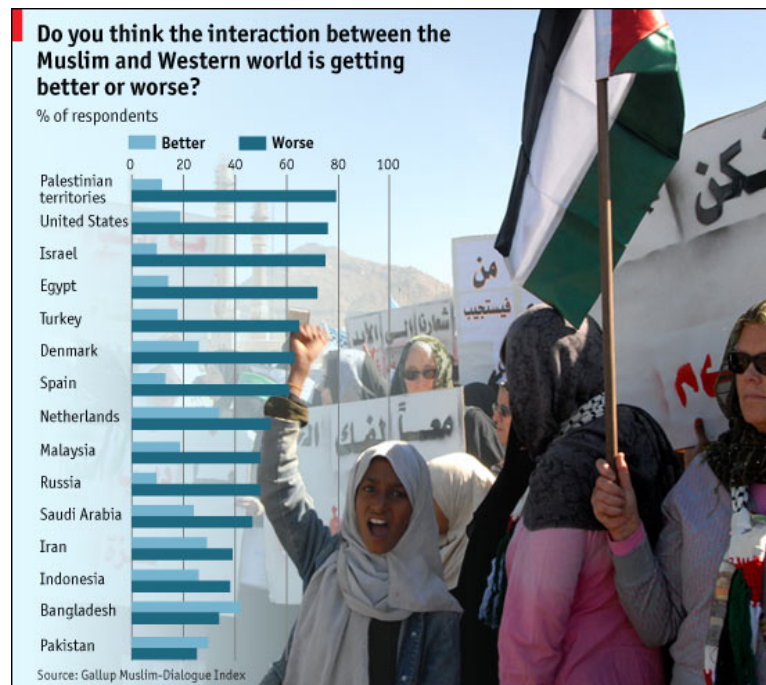
Given the opportunity, women are great agents of change, many times being crucial factors in environmental diplomacy and peace building. For example in the activities initiated by the Middle East Friends of the Earth, women are the main participants in the Israel-Palestine-and Jordan water programs.

Women Actors of Change

Indeed, there are expectations from women to be conflict-mitigation agents. This image (below) was published in *The Economist*, regarding a study conducted recently and presented at the World Economic Forum, on the interaction between the Western and Muslim world *Islam and the West: Annual Report on the State of Dialogue*.

What struck me were not so much the results, but the image *The Economist* chose; all the visible people in the photo are women. So, what's the message? That the answer and solution, and therefore the burden to mitigate the situation, are expected to come from women. And it comes back to the same issue: it's in the family, and mainly under the direction of women that the system of values is created. Hence, it is indeed our—women— responsibility to make sure that we have the mindset to educate our sons and daughters to be compassionate, ethical, and ready to build a better, more equitable world.

A side comment would be that the use of this kind of images by the media might also help perpetuating gender stereotyping.

Source: "Misunderstood?" Economist.com, Jan 24, 2008
http://www.economist.com/daily/news/displaystory.cfm?story_id=10553086&fsrc=nwl
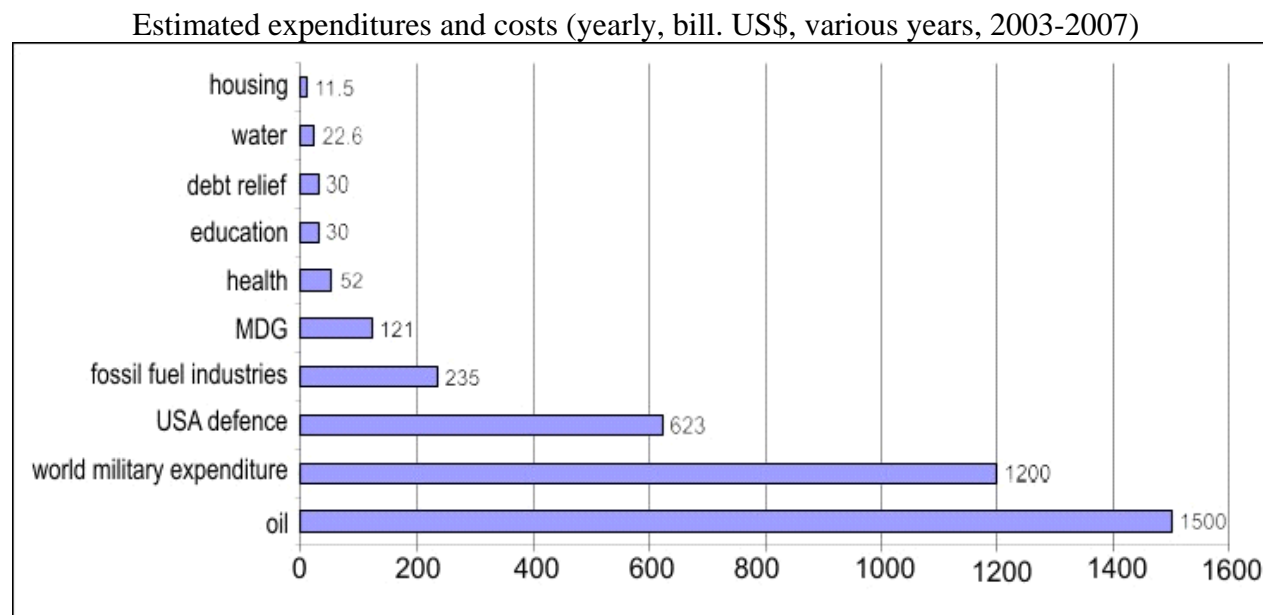
Similarities and Interdependences

The conclusion is that there are many similarities and interdependences in addressing women, environmental, and conflict issues. The elements are common: detection, preparedness, reaction and relief with concrete actions like:

- changing mindset

- global and national regulations and policies, plans and procedures

- capacity building

- public education, awareness and community participation

- collecting, analyzing and disseminating information at all levels

- including environmental and gender dimension in all policy strategies

- reacting to emergency situations

- implementing new, efficient technologies

- public-private partnership to improve investment and social responsibility

- trans-sectoral, international, and non-conventional cooperation ("transinstitutions" – government, private sector, academia, NGOs, civil)

If we know all this, then what is needed for bridging the gap between rhetoric and policy?

Setting Priorities Right

Usually it is argued that lack of funds is the main impediment. Well, let's take a look at some of the funds needed for improving the quality of life, and those allocated for other, possibly less worthy, purposes.

Estimated expenditures and costs (yearly, bill. US$, various years, 2003-2007)

Data sources: International Peace Bureau, Economists for Peace and Security, Worldwatch Institute

While we know that poverty, environmental degradation and living standards might trigger conflict, and we know that oil is the main source of greenhouse gas emissions, and we do have plans in place for meeting the Millennium Development Goals, the allocation of funds looks different.

The International Peace Bureau underlines that one of the wider problems associated with all this is related to "gender policies and attitudes…, patriarchal culture with its macho attitudes, fascination with weapons and its preference for 'tough' over 'soft' solutions." And the Bureau recommends "strong alliance of development agencies, social justice movements, peace and disarmament groups, and other bodies… primarily at the national level, since that is where the key decisions are made, and where it is easiest to create coalitions."

It is obvious that savings from military activities will not automatically be spent on social or development programs, let alone to fund gender equality-related issues. But what it would do, is to eventually reduce the harm that is done to society in general and women specifically.

Obviously we can always argue what do "right" priorities mean and even if we get more or less a consensus there, the question remains of how to translate the ethically-obvious into politically-accepted actions.

Women in Policy/Decision-making

One possibility might be to have more women in pictures such as this one with the Heads of States and Governments attending the World Summit in 2000. Increase female participation at decision-making levels in conflict resolution and post conflict programs design.

Source: UN

Increased women's input to policy-making might change priorities since they tend to have different perceptions of the community's needs and interests and the balance of preference for 'tough' over 'soft' solutions would likely change.

As former U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright points out, global security depends on solving economic and environmental problems, not just relying on "missiles, guns and bombs."

ICT Tool

So, what would help change the trend? The obvious answer would be: foster democracy and enhance transparency, and in general increase civil society's role in the decision-making and consultation process, so that it has more to say (and be listened to) in state business, allocation of funds and ethical attitudes – including gender issues.

And here comes the opportunity offered by the new INFORMATION SOCIETY. Globalization fundamentally changed the way people collaborate and the Internet unprecedentedly changed the entire expression of social movements. With no censorship or boundary restrictions; it is a self-organized unparalleled social power, re-inventing citizens' role in the political process, changing institutions, policy-making, and governance. It enables the development of a collective intelligence and cooperation of global citizens for building a better future for all. Injustices in different parts of the world become the concern of thousands who search for solutions and put them forward, offering the greatest support to civil society campaigns and networks operating on

different social justice issues, thus improving decision-making and accelerating action. It becomes the most efficient social accountability system.

RTD to Address Women Issues

Gender equality and advancement of women is addressed by the Commission on the Status of Women of ECOSOC and dozens of governmental and non-governmental organizations. Nevertheless, disparities continue worldwide, from the glass-ceiling in the nations adopting equality principles, to more difficult issues such as unequal access to education, healthcare and decision-making positions in many cultures and world regions.

The Millennium Project suggests conducting a Real Time Delphi to foster informed dialogue and collect developments and judgments that might improve women's status, and identify issues that impact differently on women or to which women can make a unique contribution. It would aim to provide a range of views on practical decision tools, strategies and policy recommendations, that would help improve decision making at all levels and sectors with an interest in gender issues (international organizations and agencies, governments, private sector, and NGOs).

The participation could be by invitation only -- to assure expert opinion (access code-protected), or open to anyone, depending how the Millennia 2015 Scientific Committee would decide. In principle the suggestion is that participants be experts from international and intergovernmental organizations, NGOs, governments, specialized institutes, academia, and the private sector.

The RTD is in the form of an online questionnaire updated automatically after each submitted answer. The answers are kept anonymous, but participants will be listed in the final report (except if otherwise advised).

Since there are many developments from different domains, the participants can choose to answer just questions about which they feel comfortable. It is possible to return and edit one's own responses as many times as wanted and also see the other respondents' input, as well as the group's average.

RTD Questionnaire (instructions)

A concise but complete description of the study and how to participate is provided at the beginning of the questionnaire and will also be sent in the invitation e-mail to the participants.

RTD Questionnaire

The questionnaire will ask participants to rate some developments as to their probability of happening, and possible positive and negative effects, as well as the status of organizations that might be responsible for addressing the respective development. It also encourages the participants to give further details, seeking to identify new developments, as well as regions and sectors that need special attention.

RTD Questions

The initial set of developments presented in this questionnaire was selected by the Millennium Project's staff simply for purposes of illustration. We expect the Millennia 2015 Scientific Committee to decide the set of developments to be rated. The general format of the questionnaire is flexible too, but based on our experience, this is the form we considered the most suitable and which might deliver the richest and most useful outputs.

RTD Outcomes

The outcomes should help set global standards, formulate concrete policies to promote gender equality and improve the status of women worldwide, suggest methods for assessing, monitoring, and measuring gender equality and impact on women, as well as identify what are some emerging challenges facing women in general and gender equality specifically.

Looking forward to your participation!

www.millennium-project.org

www.realtimedelphi.org