

## NEWS RELEASE

### Empower Women to Help Children

*UNICEF has identified three core areas where further and urgent work needs to be done to improve equality for women in Indonesia: access to higher levels of education, attacking the root causes of sexual exploitation and improving health services for pregnant women.*

Jakarta, 23 January 2007 – Eliminating gender discrimination and empowering women will have a profound and positive impact on the survival and well-being of children in Indonesia, according to a new UNICEF report, *The State of The World's Children Report 2007*, launched in Jakarta today by Prof. Meutia Hatta Swasono, Minister for Women's Empowerment.

Gender equality produces the “double dividend” of benefiting both women and children and is pivotal to the health and development of families, communities and nations. When women are empowered to lead full and productive lives, children and families prosper. According to the report, women's influence in key decisions improves the lives of women and has a positive effect on child well-being and development.

In Indonesia, UNICEF has identified three core areas where further and urgent work needs to be done to improve equality for women: access to higher levels of education, attacking the root causes of sexual exploitation and improving health services for pregnant women.

“Interventions in these areas will have practical and immediate benefits to women and to society,” said Dr. Gianfranco Rotigliano, UNICEF Representative in Indonesia.

The Report notes globally that despite progress in women's status in recent decades, the lives of millions of girls and women are overshadowed by discrimination, disempowerment and poverty. Girls and women are disproportionately affected by HIV/AIDS and women in most places earn less than men for equal work. Millions of women throughout the world are subject to physical and sexual violence, with little recourse to justice. As a result of discrimination, girls are less likely to attend school; nearly one out of every five girls who enroll in primary school in developing countries does not complete a primary education. Education levels among women, says the report, correlate with improved outcomes for child survival and development.

“Indonesia has achieved an overall good progress towards gender parity in net enrolment ratio at primary and junior secondary levels. However, access to education becomes increasingly more limited as children go to higher levels of education,” said Dr. Rotigliano.

Some of the barriers to achieving gender equality in education include inadequate programmes to directly address access and participation of disadvantaged children, in particular poor and marginalized girls, early marriage, gender biased textbooks, gender stereotyping, and unreliable sex-disaggregated data at national and sub-national levels.

In Indonesia poverty, lack of educational and economic opportunities as well as the low status of women make women and girls vulnerable to sexual exploitation and trafficking, Dr. Rotigliano warned.

"This feeds back into access to education. If we can ensure that children, especially girls, attend schools, they will later be better able to support themselves and become less vulnerable to traffickers and exploiters," said Dr. Rotigliano.

The benefits of gender equality go beyond their direct impact on children. *The State of the World's Children* shows how promoting gender equality and empowering women – Millennium Development Goal number 3 – will propel all of the other goals, from reducing poverty and hunger to saving children's lives, improving maternal health, ensuring universal education, combating HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases, and ensuring environmental sustainability.

In Indonesia, an estimated 20,000 women die every year due to pregnancy complications. The Maternal Mortality Ratio (MMR) of 307 per 100,000 live births remains one of the highest in the ASEAN region, and maternal mortality reduction remains a high priority development issue. The majority of maternal deaths can be prevented with increased access to quality reproductive health services and use of skilled providers at delivery.

In order to meet the Millennium Development Goal of reducing MMR by 75%, Indonesia must accelerate actions and efforts at the national and local levels to achieve this target.

"The efforts made in reducing MMR will demonstrate a commitment to improving equality for Indonesian women," Dr. Rotigliano said.

### **A roadmap to gender equality**

*The State of the World's Children 2007* presents seven key interventions to enhance gender equality:

- **Education:** Key actions include abolishing school fees and encouraging parents and communities to invest in girls' education.
- **Financing:** Little recognition has been given to the resources needed to meet the goal of gender equality and women's empowerment. Investment to eliminate gender discrimination must be integrated into government budgets and plans.
- **Legislation:** National legislation in property law and inheritance rights should ensure a level playing field for women, alongside measures to prevent and respond to domestic violence and gender-based violence in conflict.
- **Legislative quotas:** Quotas are a proven method of ensuring women's participation in politics. Of the 20 countries with the most women in parliament, 17 use some form of quota system.
- **Women empowering women:** Grassroots women's movements have been vocal champions for equality and empowerment and should be involved in the early stages of policy formation so that programmes are designed with the needs of women and children in mind.
- **Engaging men and boys:** Educating men and boys, as well as women and girls, on the benefits of gender equality and joint decision-making can help nurture more cooperative relationships.
- **Improved research and data:** Better data and analysis are critical, especially on maternal mortality, violence against women, education, employment, wages, unpaid work and time use, and participation in politics.

## **Closed out of household decisions**

The report finds that women do not always have an equal say in crucial household decisions, which can have negative consequences for children. In only 10 of 30 developing countries surveyed did 50 per cent or more of women participate in all household decisions, including those regarding major household spending, their own health care or their visits to friends or relatives outside the home.

Women's ability to control their own lives and make decisions that affect their families is closely linked to child nutrition, health and education, the report states. In families where women are key decision-makers, the proportion of resources devoted to children is far greater than those in which women have a less decisive role.

A study by the International Food Policy Research Institute found that if men and women had equal influence in decision-making, the incidence of underweight children under three years old in South Asia would fall by up to 13 percentage points, resulting in 13.4 million fewer undernourished children in the region. In sub-Saharan Africa, an additional 1.7 million children would be adequately nourished.

## **Gender gap in earnings**

As income in the hands of women can reap benefits for children, gender gaps in earnings can decrease or limit the resources available to meet children's rights, such as health care, adequate nutrition and education.

Estimates based on wage differentials and participation in the labour force suggest that women's estimated earned income is around 30 per cent of men's in countries surveyed in the Middle East and North Africa, around 40 per cent in Latin America and South Asia, 50 per cent in sub-Saharan Africa and around 60 per cent in CEE/CIS, East Asia and industrialized countries, the report states.

## **The political sphere**

Women's increased involvement in political systems can also have a positive impact on the well-being of children. Growing evidence from industrialized and developing countries alike suggests that women in legislative bodies have been especially effective advocates for children. Yet as of July 2006, women accounted for just under 17 per cent of all parliamentarians worldwide.

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### ***About UNICEF***

*For 60 years UNICEF has been the world's leader for children, working on the ground in 156 countries and territories to help children survive and thrive, from early childhood through adolescence. The world's largest provider of vaccines for developing countries, UNICEF supports child health and nutrition, good water and sanitation, quality basic education for all boys and girls, and the protection of children from violence, exploitation, and AIDS. UNICEF is funded entirely by the voluntary contributions of individuals, businesses, foundations and governments.*

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