

30
Years of Challenge
Years of Change

In 1980, UNIFEM established the UN's first community revolving loan fund in Swaziland. The project transformed UN development strategies by re-interpreting the traditional emphasis on experts, equipment and training. With renewable financial resources rather than handouts, women learned livelihood skills and borrowed money to create their own enterprises, often working in cooperatives. By 1984, the project's success, evidenced by high repayment rates and improved living standards, convinced financial institutions to get on board. While previously 96 per cent of women could not get bank credit, the Swaziland Development and Savings Bank now opened its doors wide to women's businesses, quadrupling available funds.

Milestone

2

Message

**From Kemal Dervis,
Administrator, UNDP**

A Time of Opportunity

This year, UNIFEM celebrates its 30th anniversary, which comes at a time of particular opportunity. At the World Summit in September 2005, world leaders reaffirmed their commitment to achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), giving the development community a renewed mandate to effect change. We must seize this opportunity. The fight against poverty is at its core a mission of empowerment; it is very clear that without vigorous and sustained efforts toward gender equality, half of humanity is not fully participating in this process of empowerment.

In UNIFEM's publication *Progress of the World's Women 2005: Women, Work and Poverty*, we see just how daunting and persistent are the challenges of gender inequity. Women's participation in non-agricultural employment has grown, but at least 60 percent of women workers in developing countries are informally employed. Women also tend to be concentrated in more precarious types of informal work, where earnings are not only meagre but also highly unreliable, and often insufficient to lift families out of poverty. A greater focus on addressing women's informal employment is therefore an important step in reducing poverty and strengthening women's economic security.

This and other insights exemplify UNIFEM's knowledge and experience in putting gender equality and women's empowerment at the centre of efforts to build capacity and achieve the MDGs. UNIFEM has worked to make the most of private-sector and government interventions intended to boost the economic prospects of women around the world. For example, UNIFEM brought together a wide range of companies in the information-technology sector to provide the residents of villages in Jordan, and women in particular, with the skills



needed to gain a competitive edge in the job market. Elsewhere, migrant women workers have reaped benefits from UNIFEM's close collaboration with governments both in countries of origin and destination, which brought about legislation securing better protection for those workers. Success stories like these inspire us all.

Within the UN system, we have been able to count on UNIFEM to coordinate our gender efforts. UNIFEM is leading a new Task Team on Gender in the UN Development Group; as UNGDG Chair, I would like to express my deep appreciation for UNIFEM's work in this role, which helps all of us in the UN system scale up our activity and become more effective in addressing gender inequality. Most of all, however, I would like to add my voice to those congratulating UNIFEM for three decades of achievements as a tireless advocate for women worldwide.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Kemal Dervis'.

Kemal Dervis