

Girls

- The global commitments to achieving universal primary education and gender parity in primary and secondary education have had a beneficial impact on girls' enrolment and retention rates in many countries.
- Countries are increasingly adopting or revising legislation and policies to address the multiple forms of violence and discrimination against girls.
- There was some improvement in addressing early and forced child marriage, through the implementation of legislation, in some cases accelerated by policy measures and action plans.
- However, girls do not yet receive sufficiently explicit attention in policy and programme development and in resource allocation. Measures aimed at children insufficiently respond to the situation of girls.
- Girls continue to have insufficient access to services and information, including on sexual and reproductive health. Many girls continue to face the hardships and risks associated with child labour, and particularly with domestic labour.

BEIJING'S UNFINISHED AGENDA: THE WAY FORWARD

Fifteen years on, why do so many challenges remain? A number of cross-cutting issues have been found to limit progress.

- Women's under-representation in **decision-making** positions in all sectors limits the incorporation of gender perspectives in public policies and programmes. For example, the absence of women in top positions in peace processes contributes to the limited attention given to gender perspectives in peace agreements.
- **Violence against women** represents an obstacle to progress in many sectors, including health, education and employment. Sexual violence at and on the way to school, for instance, is an important impediment to girls' participation in education.
- Limited involvement on the part of **men and boys** restrains advances toward gender equality in all areas. Focusing attention on gender issues and building support for social change can only be achieved when engaging men and boys, for instance, in measures to eliminate violence against women and overcome stereotypes.
- Women continue to be responsible for most domestic and **caregiving work**. This unequal sharing of responsibilities negatively impacts their educational and employment opportunities, and limits their involvement in public life.
- The prevalence of negative **gender stereotypes** based on societal beliefs and attitudes affect women and men and constrain their opportunities and choices. Stereotypical assumptions about women in the labour market lead to occupational segregation and the gender wage gap, while the stereotypical view of men as breadwinners limits their involvement in family life.

Moving forward, governments must give priority attention to addressing the challenges faced by women. It is not enough to adopt laws and policies, they have to be effectively implemented. Measures that help ensure successful implementation of laws and policies include training public officials and raising women's awareness of their legal rights, as well as allocating adequate resources for implementation. The share of budgets and of development assistance specifically dedicated to gender equality and women's empowerment, through both gender mainstreaming and women-targeted activities, should be increased.

Political will and leadership is critical for generating sustained action for gender equality and empowerment of women and girls and for progress in development, peace, security and human rights. Only then will States be able to finish the agenda they committed to 15 years ago in Beijing, achieve the Millennium Development Goals and respond effectively to global crises.

For further information on the 15-year review of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, visit: <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/beijing15/index.html>



BACKGROUNDER

Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action: fifteen years later

This year marks the 15th anniversary of the adoption of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, the outcome of the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995. The Beijing Platform – the most comprehensive global policy framework to achieve the goals of gender equality, development and peace – called for action on twelve key issues:

Poverty | education and training | health | violence against women | armed conflict | economy | power and decision-making | institutional mechanisms | human rights | media | environment | girls

From 1-12 March 2010, government officials and representatives of civil society, the media and the private sector will meet at UN Headquarters in New York during the 54th session of the Commission on the Status of Women, to assess what has been achieved since the Beijing Conference, share experiences and good practices and discuss priority actions to deal with persistent obstacles and new challenges.

Since the Beijing Conference, progress has been made in a number of areas, most significantly in education. While gender-sensitive legislation and policies have addressed inequalities and discrimination against women, overall progress remains uneven. Disparities exist between regions and within countries. Global averages also hide differences among women based on location, economic status, ethnicity, age, disability and other factors.

KEY ISSUES

Poverty

- Poverty reduction is a national priority in developing countries and many States have taken steps to mainstream gender perspectives in poverty reduction strategies and associated macro- and micro-economic and social policies.
- Over the last decade, good practices such as safety nets to protect women from poverty were established through income support, conditional cash transfers for short-term assistance to families, and provision of child care.
- However, certain experiences suggest that women are more likely than men to be living in poverty, with certain groups – women farmers, women in the informal sector, migrants, women with disabilities, and older women – more vulnerable to poverty.
- Women's unequal access to economic and financial resources has a negative impact on the well-being of women themselves as well as a ripple effect on their families and communities and on economic growth and development overall.

Education and training

- Over the last decade, access to education has increased globally for girls at all levels, particularly in primary education. In 2006, there were 95 girls for each 100 boys enrolled in first grade, compared with 92 girls in 1999.
- Abolishing school fees, providing scholarships and establishing school feeding programmes and safer school environments have proven to be beneficial measures for girls' enrolment and retention rates that should be replicated.
- Out-of-school girls accounted for 55 per cent of the 75 million primary-age children not in school in 2006. Illiteracy remains a serious constraint for women, who continue to account for nearly two-thirds of the 776 million illiterate adults in the world.
- The educational gains of women and girls, however, do not always translate into improved employment opportunities.

Health

- In efforts to increase women's access to health services, including for reproductive health, countries have given priority to improving health infrastructure, broadening the range of services and quality of care, and strengthening the capacity of health professionals to deliver such services.
- HIV/AIDS related policies, strategies and action plans increasingly place specific emphasis on prevention, treatment and care for women, including with regard to information and education programmes on sexual and reproductive health, voluntary counselling and testing, prevention of mother-to-child transmission, male and female condom availability and use, and provision of antiretroviral therapy.
- Little progress has been made on reducing maternal mortality rates. Every year, 536,000 women and girls die as a result of complications during pregnancy, childbirth or following delivery, the overwhelming majority in developing countries. Most of these complications are largely preventable and treatable.
- Urgent resources are needed to reduce maternal mortality rates. Women must have access to modern contraceptives, to regular and sufficient ante- and postnatal care, to skilled personnel present at delivery and to emergency obstetric care when needed.

Violence against women

- Over the last decade, violence against women has become a priority issue at the global, regional and national levels. A growing number of States have strengthened and adopted comprehensive legal, policy, and institutional frameworks to end violence against women and girls. Support services are increasingly becoming available to victims/survivors of violence against women.
- Despite these advances, violence against women and girls is a global pandemic. The problem remains universal, with women and girls affected by violence in every region and every country.
- Impunity for perpetrators, inadequate services for victims/survivors, attitudes and behaviours that perpetuate negative stereotypes and violence against women, and an overall scarcity of resources for implementation of existing measures remain persistent barriers to preventing and ending violence against women.

Armed conflict

- During the past decade, the Security Council has put in place a stronger normative framework on women's participation in peace processes, the elimination of sexual violence in armed conflict, and the protection and promotion of women's human rights and mainstreaming of gender equality perspectives in the context of armed conflict, peacekeeping, peacebuilding and reconstruction.
- An increasing number of countries are developing national action plans to better coordinate strategies and activities on women, peace and security.
- However, women continue to be excluded or seriously under-represented in peace negotiations, peacebuilding and disarmament processes. Since 1992, women represented, on average, just 7.1 per cent of official delegations, and only 2.1 per cent of signatories to peace agreements. To date, very few women have been formal mediators.
- As of February 2010, out of 27 United Nations peacekeeping operations, special political missions and peacebuilding support offices, women headed four missions and were deputy heads of five missions.
- The deliberate targeting of civilians and the use of sexual violence continues on a large scale in ongoing conflicts. The provision of services and support to survivors of sexual violence remains inadequate.

Economy

- Globally, women accounted for 39 per cent of all people engaged in paid employment outside of agriculture in 2007, an increase from 35 per cent in 1990.
- However, access to labour markets and to decent work remains limited for women. In 2008, an estimated 52.6 per cent of women were in the labour force, compared with 77.5 per cent men. Women are more likely than men to have low-paid, low-status and vulnerable jobs, with limited or no social protection or basic rights. A very high proportion of women in the labour force continue to work in the informal economy.
- Gender wage-gaps persist in all parts of the world and are estimated to range from 3 to 51 per cent, with a global average of 17 per cent.
- Women continue to have disproportionate responsibility for unpaid work, such as caregiving, which impedes their full participation in education, the labour market and public life.

Power and decision-making

- Globally, women held 18.8 per cent of seats in single/lower chambers of parliament in November 2009, compared to 11.3 per cent in 1995. Twenty-five countries had 30 per cent or more women parliamentarians in 2009, a significant increase from only five countries in 1995.
- Quotas and other temporary special measures, applied in areas such as electoral systems, and corporate and civil service recruitment processes, have played a significant role in increasing the number of women in public life across all regions.
- Serious challenges persist to women's full and equal participation in senior decision-making positions. These include negative stereotypes about women's leadership roles and potential, a lack of commitment by political parties and men leaders, inadequate funding and training for women candidates and government officials, and discriminatory selection processes in all sectors and at all levels.

Institutional mechanisms

- Institutional mechanisms such as ministries for gender equality or equal opportunities commissions continue to play a key role in the promotion of gender equality. They have become more diverse, and their responsibilities have expanded, including improving accountability for the implementation of legal and policy commitments to gender equality and the elimination of discrimination against women.
- The systematic incorporation of gender equality concerns is increasingly applied across all sectors, supported by a wider range of tools, capacity-building programmes, training and monitoring and evaluation.
- Despite an increased recognition of the importance of statistics on gender equality and the empowerment of women, data are still not available to adequately monitor progress towards gender equality in all its aspects.
- However, institutional national mechanisms still lack political support at the highest level, have limited access to key policy and decision-making processes and struggle with scarce human and financial resources.

Human rights

- The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women has increasingly been used as a framework for action for the promotion of the human rights of women. States have made progress in carrying out legal reforms, enhancing equality between women and men before the law.
- In spite of advances, discrimination against women persists in law and in practice. The effective implementation and enforcement of these laws remains an issue. Many women suffer numerous forms of discrimination and limited access to rights, resources and opportunities.

Media

- Women increasingly participate in the media sector, and contribute to making the media more inclusive.
- However, employment inequalities between women and men persist. Many women journalists do not enjoy equal status with their male colleagues, earning less and being hired on a part-time basis. Women are underrepresented in decision-making positions, such as in advisory, management, regulatory and monitoring bodies of the media industry.
- Persistent gender stereotypes prevent a balanced and realistic portrayal of women, while media coverage continues to focus on men in most areas.

Environment

- Some countries have started to integrate gender perspectives in their national plans or strategies on sustainable development, the environment and rural development and to strengthen the participation of women in environmental decision-making.
- Increased recognition of women's right to access to natural resources for their livelihoods has led to measures to support women's role in agriculture and food security, their access to land and property, as well as their roles as users and managers of water for domestic consumption, subsistence agriculture, health and sanitation.
- The under-representation or absence of women in high-level decision-making organs in the environment sector has seriously limited women's contributions to environmental policy development, including adaptation and mitigation strategies on climate change.