



WOMEN'S RIGHTS IN REVIEW 25 YEARS AFTER BEIJING



UN WOMEN

UN Women is the UN organization dedicated to gender equality and the empowerment of women. A global champion for women and girls, UN Women was established to accelerate progress on meeting their needs worldwide.

UN Women supports UN Member States as they set global standards for achieving gender equality, and works with governments and civil society to design laws, policies, programmes and services needed to implement these standards. It stands behind women's equal participation in all aspects of life, focusing on five priority areas: increasing women's leadership and participation; ending violence against women; engaging women in all aspects of peace and security processes; enhancing women's economic empowerment; and making gender equality central to national development planning and budgeting. UN Women also coordinates and promotes the UN system's work in advancing gender equality.

GENERATION EQUALITY

UN Women is bringing together the next generations of women's rights activists with the gender equality advocates and visionaries who were instrumental in creating the Beijing Platform for Action more than two decades ago. Collectively, these change makers of all ages and genders will tackle the unfinished business of empowering women through a new, groundbreaking, multigenerational campaign: "Generation Equality: Realizing women's rights for an equal future".

View the Report at: unwo.men/eDNK50yyBhA

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**Phumzile
Mlambo-Ngcuka**
Under-Secretary-
General and UN Women
Executive Director

'Under-representation of women in power and decision-making is still the norm. We are impatient for that to change... Only half is an equal share, and only equal is enough.'

TAKING THE BEIJING PLATFORM FOR ACTION FORWARD

September 1995 saw the largest-ever global gathering on gender equality: the United Nations' Fourth World Conference on Women, held in Beijing, China. The commitments and actions that Member States agreed that year in the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action remain our most comprehensive and transformative agenda for gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls. However, as we take stock of progress, it is clear that its implementation has fallen far short of the initial promise.

The complex and fast-moving political, social, economic and environmental changes of the past 25 years have brought welcome steps forward in some areas of women's and girls' lives. But we have also seen powerful pushback, with damaging reversals of hard-won advances in women's rights and the broader development agenda. Poverty, discrimination and violence are still strongly present in the lives of women and girls. Under-representation in power and decision-making is still the norm. We are impatient for that to change.

Equality isn't just one quarter of the seats at the tables of power. But that's the current reality of women's representation. Men are 75 per cent of parliamentarians, hold 73 per cent of managerial positions, are 70 per cent of climate negotiators and almost all peace negotiators.

Only half is an equal share, and only equal is enough.

This report's review of the Beijing Platform for Action draws on the most comprehensive and participatory stock-taking exercise ever undertaken on women's rights, to which 170 countries contributed. It highlights gaps and opportunities and proposes effective solutions. It helps us look frankly at where commitments have been broken, and to energetically recommit to action and implementation. This is also critical for the success of the UN Decade of Action and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, for which gender equality is fundamental.

2020 is a milestone year. Women's rights movements are mobilizing, urged on and supported by UN Women's Generation Equality campaign. We have initiated six Action Coalitions that will bring together governments, the UN, civil society and the private sector to generate resources and catalyse game-changing results for gender equality.

We don't have an equal world now, but we are determined to have one, and we won't stop until we get there.

HOW FAR HAVE WE COME?

Today, a 15-year old girl in the developing world has more opportunities than ever before. Compared to previous generations, she is much less likely to live in extreme poverty, and has a better chance of growing up healthy and nourished. Thanks to shifts in laws, policies and social norms that have changed the world around her, she is more likely to be able to finish primary school and less likely to marry young and become a mother before she is ready. With more role models to look up to in the political leadership of her nation, this young woman can aspire to great things.

Yet, she will still be fighting against the odds because this progress, though important, has been incremental, uneven and insufficient. A billion people have escaped from extreme poverty since 1990, but poverty still has a female face. Although the number of out-of-school children at primary and lower secondary levels has nearly halved since 1995, 32 million girls of primary age are still out of school. The rate of child marriage has declined from one in four to one in five, but 650 million women alive in the world today were married before their 18th birthday. Politics is still an overwhelmingly male domain, with three quarters of parliamentary seats held by men.

This picture falls far short of the vision that was laid out in the Beijing Platform for Action a quarter of a century ago. It also bodes ill for reaching the Sustainable Development Goals a decade from now, progress on which critically depends on greater gender equality.

The actions of the global community now will determine the prospects of not only the current generation of young women but future generations too. New and emerging challenges mean that even the continuation of slow progress can no longer be taken for granted. Change is urgently needed and will only be possible if everyone joins forces and acts with determination to achieve gender equality and justice for all.

The world is at a turning point

The Beijing conference came at a high-water mark of democracy and multilateralism in the world. Gender equality advocates were cautiously optimistic that democratic and accountable governments would respond to women's demands for sweeping change in laws, policies, practices and social norms across all dimensions of society. Now, in an increasingly unequal world, the future looks much more uncertain. Momentum has been lost. The world's women and girls are running to stand still as hard-won victories have either stalled or are being reversed.

The gains of development have not been shared equally: Since the 1980s, the global top 1 per cent of earners have captured twice as much of the growth in global income as the 50 per cent poorest individuals.¹ While wealth and power are concentrated in the hands of the few, economic insecurity prevails for the many. Fiscal austerity measures have led to cuts to essential public services, with particularly harsh impacts for women in low-income countries who rely on them the most. The new wave of public spending cuts, which will be implemented in 126 countries by 2021, will hit health care, education and social protection, the very policies that have underpinned the progress seen since Beijing.²

Conflict and humanitarian crises have become more complex and protracted in the past 25 years, leaving women and girls more vulnerable than ever before. If the world continues on its current course, the escalating environmental crisis will destroy many of the development gains achieved to date. The poorest and most marginalized women and girls, who have contributed least to causing the problem, are already the most affected by irreversible environmental degradation and natural disasters. Along with the economic costs of the climate crisis, a rise in displacement, and forced migration, poverty and insecurity will have a disproportionate impact on women and girls, including through greater exposure to abuse and violence.

All of these trends have coalesced in the rise of exclusionary politics, characterized by misogyny and xenophobia. Forty years after the adoption of the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), women's rights are being eroded in the name of a return to 'traditional values', and the institutions created to advance gender equality are being undermined.

Women's organizations that have been at the vanguard of change find it increasingly difficult to do their work where space for civil society is squeezed and funding is scarce.

Women's voices are rising

Yet, across the world, women are raising their voices, joining together with allies in governments, the private sector and social movements to insist that bold systemic change is possible. These feminist leaders see gender inequality as inseparable from broader struggles for racial justice, workers' rights, climate justice, LGBTI rights, corporate accountability and more.

In doing so, they are shaping an alternative vision of a future where women's rights are at the centre of a better world for all.

The way forward

The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action is the most comprehensive and transformative global agenda for the achievement of gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls. Today, its bold vision has renewed relevance.

Linking the Beijing Platform for Action's 12 critical areas with the 17 Sustainable Development Goals, this report presents data and analysis across a series of thematic clusters. It makes recommendations for future action and showcases inspiring policies and programmes that are already making a difference.

To ensure that progress is accelerated and achieved across all of these themes, four universal catalysts for change come to the fore:

Support women's movements and leadership

From individual decisions about work or family life, to collective action for a better world, women and girls must be heard and heeded.

Women's voices in political decision-making, in communities, in parliaments and in peace negotiations are essential to support and sustain prosperous and peaceful societies. Women's rights organizations have transformed the world for the better. They are indispensable in bringing women together, amplifying their voices, and mobilizing their collective power to demand accountability and change.

Harness technology for gender equality

New technologies hold enormous potential for the empowerment of women and girls, by creating jobs and opportunities for women in business, enabling the innovative delivery of public services, and finding ways to mitigate and adapt to climate change.

To harness this potential, it is essential to close the gender digital divide, which is particularly wide in low-income countries, so that women have equal access to and use of digital tools and can participate equally in the development of technology. At the same time, new risks such as cyber violence, threats to privacy rights or algorithms that perpetuate unconscious bias also need to be eliminated.

Ensure no one is left behind

The promise to achieve gender equality for all women and girls stands and falls with empowering and guaranteeing the rights of those who have been pushed to the margins by decades of structural discrimination on the basis of gender, class and ethnicity, among others.

Progress must be shared by everybody, with no woman or girl left behind. Data should be collected to show who is being excluded. All must be given a voice and a seat at decision-making tables so that policies and programmes are designed and implemented to respond to the rights and needs of everyone.

Match commitments with resources

Commitments to gender equality mean little without the financial resources to back them up. Yet, across the board, the percentage of development resources devoted specifically to gender equality typically languishes at less than 5 per cent.

In a world where annual military expenditure has reached US\$1.82 trillion, the problem is not a lack of resources.³ Money should be steered to where it is needed most. A greater share of development funding from governments and private actors must be channelled to gender equality. A global push to eliminate tax evasion and avoidance along with progressive tax reforms at the national level, are also part of the answer.

In September 2019, the UN Secretary General called on all sectors of society to mobilize for a Decade of Action to deliver the SDGs. There is no time to waste in shaping a world where the promises made at Beijing, 25 years ago, finally become a reality for all women and girls everywhere.

SNAPSHOT

There have been important gains since the adoption of the Beijing Platform for Action:



LAWS

Over the past decade, **131 countries** enacted

274 legal and regulatory reforms

in support of gender equality.

EDUCATION

More girls are in school

than ever before.

Parity in education has been achieved on average, at the global level, yet **large gaps remain across and within countries.**

MATERNAL MORTALITY

The **global maternal mortality ratio** is still **too high**, (211 deaths per 100,000 live births), but has **fallen** by

38%

between 2000 and 2017.

But there is still work to be done:

POLITICS

1 in 4 seats are held by women

in national parliaments.

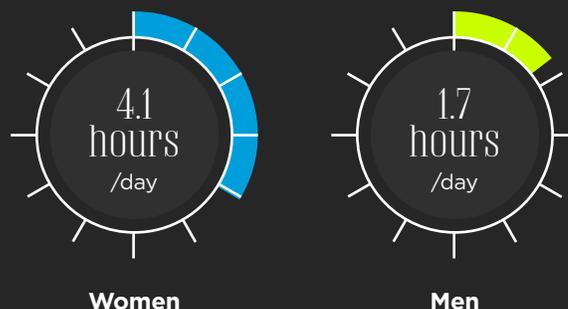
POVERTY

Globally, women aged 25 to 34 are

25% more likely

than men to live in **extreme poverty** (living on less than US\$1.90 a day).

UNPAID CARE AND DOMESTIC WORK



Women on average do **three times** as much unpaid care and domestic work as men, with long-term consequences for their economic security.

LABOUR FORCE PARTICIPATION

The **gender gap in labour force participation** among adults aged 25 to 54 has **stagnated** over the past 20 years, standing at

31 percentage points.

VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN



of ever-partnered women

aged 15 to 49 experienced **sexual and/or physical violence by an intimate partner** in the previous 12 months.

GENDER PARITY IN THE WORKPLACE

Women are paid

16% less than men, and only



1 in 4 managers

are women.

CLIMATE JUSTICE

The climate emergency will most affect those with **limited access to land, resources or the means to support themselves**. Globally,



of employed women

are working in **agriculture, forestry and fisheries**, but only

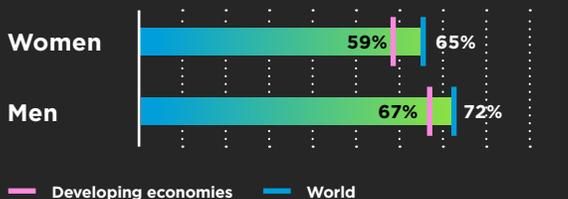


of agricultural landholders

are women.

ACCESS TO FINANCE

Share of women and men with an **account at a financial institution**



ACCESS TO JUSTICE

In most countries with data, less than



of women

who **experience violence seek help of any sort**, indicating barriers and lack of confidence in justice systems.

YOUTH



of young women

aged 15 to 24 are **not in education, employment or training** in 2020, more than double the rate for young men (14%).

HEALTH

190 million women

of reproductive age (15 to 49) worldwide who **wanted to avoid pregnancy did not use any contraceptive method** in 2019.

INCLUSIVE ECONOMIES AND DECENT WORK



Current economic models are failing women and girls. Economic security and autonomy remain elusive for many women, especially in their childbearing years.

In most regions, the gender gap in labour force participation has stagnated over the past 20 years, and women's control of assets is limited. More than half of all women who work are in the informal economy, often in jobs where they lack even basic rights and protections. On average, women across the world are paid 16 per cent less than men.

While, in most regions, young women have made significant gains in education, they continue to face barriers to translating these gains into equal labour market opportunities. The countless hours women spend in unpaid care and domestic work remain a huge obstacle to being able to access decent employment.

Action is needed to transform the world of work in ways that help women thrive and achieve economic independence. Equal pay, ending occupational segregation and tackling violence and harassment at work are urgent

Investing in childcare services: Reaping a triple dividend

Investments in affordable early childhood education and care services can help women participate in the workforce, improve child health and nutrition and create decent jobs in the paid care sector. Across different regions, the impact of rolling out quality childcare services is evident:

- Germany made nursery places for children under age 3 a legal right in 2013. This was accompanied by a massive expansion of subsidized childcare places. By 2017, 37 per cent of under-3s were enrolled,

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