



United Nations Division for the Advancement of Women

**Report from the
Expert Consultation on Regional Perspectives in the
Implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action
and the Outcome of the Twenty-third
Special Session of the General Assembly.**

**New York, USA
5-7 May 2004**

Division for the Advancement of Women
Department of Economic and Social Affairs
2 UN Plaza, 12th

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I. INTRODUCTION

1. At the global level, Governments made commitments to gender equality in the Beijing Platform for Action, adopted by the Fourth World Conference on Women in September 1995, and the outcome document of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly entitled “Women 2000: Gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century”, held in June 2000. These commitments have been reaffirmed in the outcomes of other major international conferences and summits, including the Millennium Declaration. The existing international legal framework, including the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, have encouraged and accelerated efforts in this regard.
2. Over the past decade it has been increasingly emphasized that attention to gender perspectives will contribute to the achievement of all other development goals. The Millennium Declaration, adopted by Member States of the United Nations in September 2000, highlighted that promotion of gender equality was essential for the eradication of poverty and hunger and the promotion of sustainable development. Gender equality is a Millennium Development Goal in its own right, but gender perspectives must also be included in the implementation of all other Millennium Development Goals, on poverty and hunger, education, child mortality, maternal health, HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases, environmental sustainability and global partnerships for development.
3. Five years ago in 2000, a five-year review of implementation was carried out in the General Assembly and recommendations on new activities required for ensuring the full implementation of the Platform for Action were adopted.
4. The United Nations Commission on the Status of Women, which brings together top policy makers and leading experts on gender equality from around the world, will meet in New York from 28 February to 11 March 2005 to assess ten years of implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, adopted at the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995. Five regional meetings will be held in preparation for this important global meeting, in Mexico City (May 2004), Beirut (July 2004), Bangkok (September 2004), Addis Ababa (October 2004), and Geneva (December 2004). The active participation of non-governmental organizations at all levels will be critical to the successful preparations for the review and appraisal process at national, regional and international level.
5. The Expert Consultation on Regional Perspectives in the Implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action and the Outcome of the Twenty-third Special Session of the General Assembly formed part of the preparation by the United Nations Division for the Advancement of Women, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, for the ten-year review and appraisal of implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action in the forty-ninth session of the Commission on the Status of Women. This report provides a summary of the main conclusions reached in the Expert Consultation.

II. ORGANIZATION OF WORK

6. The Expert Consultation was held in New York, USA, from 5-7 May 2004. It was organized by the United Nations Division for the Advancement of Women, of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs. The meeting was attended by five independent experts¹ and a facilitator/rapporteur.² The first day of the Expert Consultation was also attended by staff members of the Division for the Advancement of Women and the Office of the Special Adviser on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women.

7. The experts met over a three day period from the 5 – 7 May 2004. Day One was devoted to presentations by the experts and discussions in small groups, During Day Two the experts identified findings from the presentations and discussions, including commonalities across regions. On the third day of the Expert Consultation the Bureau of the Commission on the Status of Women met with the experts, and approximately 100 participants (from Member States, Un

III. BACKGROUND

10. The presentations of the experts addressed the main achievements, gaps, strategies in implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action, and the remaining challenges in the coming decade. At the outset of Day One, the experts reached consensus on working definitions of achievements, gaps, strategies and challenges. This was intended to ensure consistency in terminology used across the different presentations and discussions (See Box). Of particular importance was the distinction between strategies and challenges. While strategies are intended to address current gaps in the implementation, challenges focus on new and emerging critical issues that have developed in the last decade at the global, regional or sub-regional level.

Definitions

- ***Achievements:***
These can be defined as realized goals or measurable progress related to goals in the implementation of the Beijing Declarati

IV. ACHIEVEMENTS, GAPS AND STRATEGIES

11. The experts emphasized that achievements, gaps, strategies and challenges are all highly interrelated. Although the description of the main conclusions from the expert presentations and discussions that follows is somewhat static, in reality relationships between these components are all part of an iterative process.

12. The following section of the report is structured around seven principal findings. Each finding is discussed in terms of the between achievements, gaps and strategies in order to highlight the interrelationships (see Annex 3). Some of the challenges identified by the experts are addressed in the final section of the report.

Achievement 1: There is greater public awareness of gender inequality

13. There is greater awareness of existing gaps and inequalities, both among women and in society more generally. Associated with this is increasing public space for discourse and debate on gender equality and women's issues. Such debate takes place not only in feminist research and activism fora, but also in the media, which has become an important vehicle for the dissemination of information, advocacy and dialogue and debate.

Gaps:

14. Such awareness is not, however, evenly spread, globally, regionally or even nationally. In many countries the increased awareness is limited to particular groups - some groups, such as grassroots women, poor women and youth, may be excluded. In many countries those in positions of power or control over resources, such as many government officials, are not sufficiently aware of gender differences and inequalities. While the media can be a powerful force for positive change, in some cases media perpetuate and exacerbate existing stereotypes.

Suggested strategies:

15. Increased advocacy and information dissemination within government bodies is needed to raise awareness and build capacity. The important positive role the media can and should have needs to be more actively recognized and built upon. Of critical importance is the identification of, and action to reach, groups of excluded women. Mechanisms to reach such marginalized groups will vary from one context to another.

Achievement 2: There has been a significant strengthening of the important advocacy role of women's organizations

16. Many of the gains made over the past decade have been due to the efforts of women's organizations and networks at national, regional and global levels. In the past decade women's organizations have been considerably strengthened and there has been

increased recognition of their critical advocacy and monitoring roles in relation to government commitment to implement the Beijing Platform for Action and the outcome of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly. Some regional variations

coordinating reporting to the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). Over the past decade many new mechanisms have been put in place, including gender equality commissions, parliamentary caucuses, focal points in line ministries and ombudspersons offices

Gaps:

20. Severe limitations exist on the viability and effectiveness of national machineries for the advancement of women in many regions and countries. Resource constraints, unclear mandates, lack of expertise and inappropriate institutional locations have all contributed to the limited viability of many national machineries, particularly in contexts of economic recession and budget cuts. In addition, some machineries still experience problems with unclear mandates. To continue to guarantee their legitimacy, they often implement women-specific programmes and projects rather than focus strategically on incorporating gender perspectives in policies and programmes. Discontinuities from one government administration to another were identified as an important constraint that limited the sustainability of implementation of agreed policies and programmes. Linkages between the national machinery and other institutional mechanisms for promoting gender equality and the empowerment of women may be weak.

Suggested strategies:

21. Prior to the development of specific strategies there is a need for sub-regional evaluations by independent experts to better identify the constraints and opportunities experienced by national machineries. The Commission for the Status on Women can play an important role in facilitating exchange of experience among national machineries. Improved documentation and dissemination of good practice among national machineries is important. The experts also recommended the establishment of incentives and rewards for good practice. Increased collaboration between different mechanisms for gender equality and empowerment of women at national level should be developed. Regional networking among mechanisms can also be useful.

Achievement 4: Resource allocations to social sectors have improved the situation of women

22. In many countries increased investment over the past decade in social sectors such as health and education has had positive impacts on the educational levels and health status of women, as well as the literacy rates of girls. Micro-finance/credit is another area in which attention to gender perspectives has considerably benefited poor women. Increased attention has also been given to gender perspectives in HIV/AIDS programmes to address the impacts of HIV/AIDS on women and girls.

Gaps:

23. Over the past five years, cuts in government social sector spending - associated with economic recession as well as with privatization policies - have reduced the

Gaps:

32. There are still severe limitations in the consistency and compatibility of data available. Associated with this is the non-reliability or robustness of much of the quantitative data produced by some governments and international institutions. The targets and indicators on the Millennium Development Goal 3 do not adequately reflect the major gaps and challenges on gender equality and women's empowerment today.

Suggested Strategies:

33. Greater recognition need to be given to the robustness and relevance of different types of data, as well as to new approaches to data collection-including participatory and other qualitative techniques. Efforts are needed to ensure that all goals, targets and indicators for the Millennium Development Goals are gender-sensitive.

V. CHALLENGES

34. This section briefly highlights the challenges at global and regional levels identified by the experts.

1. Broader contextual issues

35. The experts noted the importance of placing the review and appraisal of the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action within the broader context of social, economic and political trends at the global and regional levels. Issues raised by the experts included:

- Globalization and associated inequities, such as cuts in social sector spending;
- Constraints relating to the global ethical environment – that include corruption;
- Increasing militarization and associated reinforcement of gender roles, including the reproductive roles of women;
- The interaction of religious fundamentalisms, market-based macro-economic policies and new militarist ideologies, resulting in erosion of women's human rights and increasing levels of structural violence, including trafficking in women and girls.

36. Global and regional processes such as these have important implications for the erosion of gender equality and lack of opportunities for women's empowerment, and thus for the implementation of the Beijing Platform of Action. Privatization has led to decreased access of women to decent work and to cuts in social service provisions and social security benefits. Many women are in part-time or casual work; and the majority of workers in the informal sector in some countries are women. Macro-economic policies continue to be seen as gender neutral and resource allocations are not considered from a gender perspective.

37. The priority areas identified in the outcome of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly in 2000, such as combating HIV/AIDs, eradicating trafficking in women and girls and harnessing the potential of ICTs for gender equality and empowerment of women need further attention.

2. The issue of heterogeneity

38. Uneven progress across the world affected by structural constraints relating to poverty, illiteracy and unemployment, has resulted in increased recognition that women are not a homogeneous category. In addition, it has led to greater understanding of the importance of recognizing diversity, identity and agency on grounds that include not only sex/gender but also ethnicity, race, religion and age. The specific vulnerability of rural women in all regions was highlighted by the experts.

3. Continued lack of resources

39. There has been a serious lack of resources to address gender inequality at all levels – national, regional and global, which has limited the effective implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. The importance of promoting gender sensitive budgeting to ensure greater correlation between policy commitments on gender equality and resource allocations, as well as greater transparency and accountability, was highlighted by the experts. National mechanisms for the advancement of women and women's organizations and networks need increased financial and human resources to play the catalytic role required for full implementation of the Platform for Action.

4. Limitations of current global frameworks and initiatives

40. The experts highlighted that the current global development frameworks and instruments are inadequate from a gender perspective, for example the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and the Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs). Greater attention needs to be given to explicitly addressing the critical areas of concern for gender equality identified in the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the outcome of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly, as well as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), within the context of the implementation and monitoring of the Millennium Declaration and MDGs. All planning and monitoring instruments, such as PRSPs and the Common Country Assessments (CCAs) and United Nations Development Assistance Frameworks (UNDAFs), should give increased attention to gender equality and empowerment of women, including through greater consultation with women's groups and networks, particularly rural women.

Annex I.

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Annex II.

PROGRAMME OF WORK

Wednesday, 5 May 2004

- 09.30 - 10.00** **Introduction and objectives of the meeting**
Carolyn Hannan, Director, DAW and Caroline Moser, Facilitator
- 10.00 - 11.00** **Presentations by two experts**
Kalyani Menon-Sen
Sonia Correa
- 11.00 - 11.30**

2.30 - 5.30 **Preparation of experts for meeting with the Bureau of the Commission on the Status of Women and presentations in the panel**

Friday, 7 May 2004

10.30 - 1.00 **Discussion of experts with the Bureau of the Commission on the Status of Women**

1.00 - 3.00 *Lunch*

3.00 - 6.00 **Panel discussion for Member States, United Nations entities, and representatives of NGOs and academic**

Panelists: Farida Allaghi, Sonia Correa, Oksana Kisselyova, Kalyani Menon-Sen and Caroline Moser.

Chair: Carolyn Hannan, Director, DAW

Annex III.

Table: Summary of seven principal global findings in achievements, gaps and suggested strategies

<i>Achievements</i>	<i>Gaps</i>	Suggested strategies
Greater public awareness of gender inequality	Despite increased awareness of gender inequality this is limited to particular groups of women and society more generally in many countries.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prioritize affirmative action for marginalized groups of women; • Make excluded women and their needs and priorities more visible.
Strengthening of women's organizations with an important advocacy and monitoring role	Despite the strengthening of women's organizations with an important advocacy role many are still largely exclusive in composition, urban in focus and run by elite urban women	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prioritize support to organizations of excluded women; • Make marginalized women and their priorities and needs more visible; • Develop partnerships between women's NGOs and other groups and networks.
National machineries are now firmly in place	Severe limitations exist in the viability and effectiveness of women's machineries	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sub-regional evaluations by independent experts to identify constraints and opportunities; • The use of the CSW for the exchange of experience • Monitoring by the International Standards Organization.
Resource allocations to social sectors have improved the situation of women	Cuts in social sector spending and privatization have reduced resources for existing programmes and prevents the development of new policies and programmes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use of gender budgets to identify priority allocation areas; • Use of donor pressure and support; • Focus on attention to gender perspectives in implementation of the MDGs.
Legal and policy frameworks for gender equality have been adopted in many countries	Lack of implementation of existing legal and policy frameworks remains a problem.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identification of new mechanisms to increase government's capacity to implement legislation including training and capacity building;

<i>Achievements</i>	<i>Gaps</i>	Suggested strategies
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Call on countries to respond to commitment to fully implement CEDAW, repeal discriminatory laws and address issues such as gender violence.
<p>In many regions increased adoption of a human rights framework provides an important instrument for promotion of women's human rights</p>	<p>There is widespread resistance to a human rights approach in some regions. In many contexts there is still insufficient attention to the human rights of women in the promotion of the rights-based approach. Mainstreaming of women's human rights in work on human rights is often neglected.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development and implementation of a human rights approach should consistently give attention to the human rights of women; • The implementation of existing human rights mechanisms for promoting and protecting the human rights of women should be strengthened; • Increased attention should be given to the human rights of vulnerable groups of women.
<p>Considerable improvements in sex disaggregated data at international and national level</p>	<p>Serious limitations on access to required data relevant to the promotion of gender equality and systematic sex-disaggregation of statistics remain.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Harmonize and co-ordinate data collection systems; • Make the targets and indicators in the MDGs gender-sensitive to improve monitoring and reporting progress.