

Fifteen Years after Beijing

2010 holds significant importance for the promotion of gender equality and empowerment of women. It marks the 15 year review of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action adopted at the United Nation's Fourth World Conference on Women, the 10 year review of progress achieved in the Millennium Development Goals, and the 10 year review of implementation of the Security Council resolution on women and peace and security.



The International Women's Day celebrations I attended recently in Tanzania included a focus on 15 years after Beijing. Printed cloth worn at a rally and placards carried by participants could be translated from Swahili to say "Fifteen years after Beijing shows that if you give women the opportunity, they will show that they can do it."

Fourth World Conference on Women

In 1995 in Beijing, China, the United Nations held the Fourth World Conference on Women for action on equality, development and peace. The full Declaration made at that conference is posted in several languages at the UN website <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/beijing/beijingdeclaration.html>. Canada's 1995 statement as a member state included the idea that "equality benefits not only women, but all of society" and that "worldwide, women's autonomy and control over economic resources are essential to their own and their families' survival."

Item 35 of the 1995 Declaration, which is of interest to the work of AIC, stated that the governments involved were determined to "ensure women's equal access to economic resources, including land, credit, science and technology, vocational training, information, communication and markets, as a means to further the advancement and empowerment of women and girls, including through the enhancement of their capacities to enjoy the benefits of equal access to these resources, inter alia, by means of international cooperation."

Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action +15

From March 1-12, 2010, the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) undertook a fifteen-year review of the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. Experiences and good practices were shared, with a view to overcoming remaining obstacles and new challenges, including those related to the Millennium Development Goals.

As a member state, Canada's 2010 statement from the Minister of State (Status of Women) identifies that the plan to ensure progress toward full gender equality has a focus on three pillars: (1) supporting women's economic security, (2) ending violence against women, and (3) promoting women's involvement in democracy and leadership. This statement also identifies that in 2007, women attained 61 percent of all university degrees, diplomas and certificates in Canada. In 2009, Canadian women became the majority of the work force at 50.9 percent.

Outcomes

On 12 March, 2010, the CSW adopted resolutions on the following seven topics:

1. Women, the girl child and HIV/AIDS
2. Release of women and children taken hostage, including those subsequently imprisoned, in armed conflicts
3. The situation of and assistance to Palestinian women
4. Women's economic empowerment
5. Eliminating maternal mortality and morbidity through the empowerment of women
6. Strengthening institutional arrangement of the UN for support of gender equality and the empowerment of women by consolidating the four existing offices into a composite entity
7. Ending female genital mutilation

Outcome 4 - Women's Economic Empowerment

This resolution document identifies concerns and urges member states to address barriers and take action to improve women's economic empowerment. Included are references to agricultural production, access to land and credit, value-added production and marketing. (For full details, please refer to the Sources listed at the end of this article.)



Moderator's Summaries

On 12 March, 2010, the Commission on the Status of Women transmitted Moderator's Summaries to the 2010 Annual Ministerial Review of the Economic and Social Council.

Key points of interest relevant to AIC's work on gender equality mainstreaming and international partnerships include the following quotes:

1. The full and effective implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action is essential to achieving the Millennium Development Goals. Gender equality and empowerment of women is a key development goal in its own right and an important means to achieving all the Millennium Development Goals.
2. Legislation and policies have been adopted to increase women's ownership of productive assets. Implementation however remains inadequate in many countries owing to socio-cultural norms and women's lack of knowledge about their rights.
3. Access to land and housing is vital to women's livelihood and economic independence.
4. Development cooperation efforts should increasingly integrate gender equality perspectives. A range of critical interventions is available and should be taken to address poverty among women and to support their economic empowerment, including : ensuring women's control over and equal access to economic and financial resources; ensuring universal access to affordable food; and addressing past policy neglect in relation to the agricultural sector, particularly subsistence farming where women farmers are concentrated.
5. Progress still cannot be sufficiently measured in several critical areas of concern because of limited or non-existent data. Participants recognized that despite efforts to improve collection of data disaggregated by sex and age and development of gender-sensitive indicators, many gaps remain. Attention was drawn to the need for increased investment in data collection and analysis.

6. While participants recognized that gender equality makes good economic sense, inadequate resources have been allocated to the promotion of gender equality and empowerment of women.
7. Consultative processes, solid partnerships and collaboration among different stakeholders, including line ministries, parliamentarians, the judiciary, civil society, the private sector and the media, are critical to achieve gender equality.

Sources:

15-year review of the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (1995) and the outcomes of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly (2000),
<http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/beijing15/index.html>

Statement by the Secretary of State (Status of Women and Multiculturalism) of Canada at the Fourth United Nations World Conference on Women, Beijing, September 6, 1995.

<http://www.un.org/esa/gopher-data/conf/fwcw/conf/gov/950906204201.txt>

Statement by Canada's Minister of State (Status of Women) at the 54th Session of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women (Beijing+15). March 2, 2010.

http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/beijing15/general_discussion/Canada.pdf

Global 15-year review process in the 54th session of the Commission on the Status of Women, Outcomes, <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/beijing15/outcomes.html>

Resolution on Women's Economic Empowerment,

http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/beijing15/outcomes/L%20%20_%20Ec%20empowerment_Advance%20unedited.pdf

High-level round table on "Implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the outcomes of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly and its contribution to shaping a gender perspective in the realization of the Millennium Development Goals"

<http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/beijing15/outcomes/crp/crp5e.pdf>

Panel discussion on "Linkages between implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action and the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals"

<http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/beijing15/outcomes/crp/crp7e.pdf>

Panel discussion on "Women's economic empowerment in the context of the global economic and financial crisis" <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/beijing15/outcomes/crp/crp8e.pdf>

Panel discussion on "Implementing the internationally agreed development goals and commitments in regard to gender equality and the empowerment of women – contribution to the 2010 Annual Ministerial Review of the Economic and Social Council"

<http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/beijing15/outcomes/crp/crp9e.pdf>

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Photos of International Women's Day celebrations at Ukiriguru, Tanzania, March 8, 2010 courtesy Bert Phillips