

## Empowering Women, Empowering Society: Reviewing the Beijing +20

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### Research Article

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#### ABSTRACT

Progress in the field of gender equality and advancement in laws on women rights have been made since the meeting in 1995. However overall growth is important, not much of the areas have been making progress since the meeting. One third of women in the developing and the developed countries suffer from physical abuse. Every day, around 800 women die post giving birth to their child because of inadequate health care services. Hindrance in the BPfA is caused mainly at the national and regional levels, orthodox social norms and attitudes, poor political will, and poor monitoring frameworks. The one aspect that has pinned down the efforts of BPfA is “gender equality”. “Gender Equality does not only mean empowering women but also means empowering humanity and global development as a whole”, this is a concept, and many have failed to understand. It is a right time for us to “reconnect, regenerate commitment, charge up political will and mobilize the public” especially when we are talking about the advancement of women in the community. It is also important to note that the UN Women, one of the leading “women centric” agency of the United Nations plays a crucial role in ensuring effective role of the government in the BPfA.

### INTRODUCTION

The year 2015 marks two decades of the Fourth World Conference on Women in China, where the internationally community converged to discuss social issues of women. Over 17,000 individuals from 189 governments and thousands of civil society organizations attended the conference, which made it the largest convention of women in the history. Talking about the outcome of the conference, the Beijing Platform for Action (BPfA), served as a foundation for international community and their efforts to achieve gender equality, supporting the international humanitarian law, as what we know today. The BPfA “emphasizes that women share common concerns that can be addressed only by working together and in partnership with men towards the common goal of gender equality around the world”. The BPfA “marked a significant turning point for the global agenda for gender equality” and brought the international community’s attention to 12 critical areas of concern:

- a. Women and Poverty,
- b. Education and Training of Women,
- c. Women and Health,
- d. Violence Against Women,
- e. Women and Armed Conflict,
- f. Women and the Economy,
- g. Women in Power and Decision making,
- h. Institutional Mechanism for the Advancement of Women,

- i. Human Rights of Women,
- j. Women and the Media,
- k. Women and the Environment, and
- l. The Girl child
- m. Abstract : Women and Poverty,
- n. Education and Training of Women,
- o. Women and Health,
- p. Violence Against Women.

## **INTERNATIONAL FRAMEWORK FOR DEVELOPMENT**

Aiming to improve the rights of women on the occasion of International Women's Year <sup>[1]</sup>. The Conference passed the "Declaration of Mexico on the Equality of Women" and adopted "Women Contribution to Development and Peace" intuitive to honour the women contribution in peacebuilding and development. The "World Plan of Action for the Implementation of Objectives of the International Women's Year" was also discussed and passed in the conference <sup>[2]</sup>. Taking these considerations into account, Member Nations adopted the General Assembly (GA) resolution 3520(XXX) and established the International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (INSTRAW) followed by the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM). Few years later, the United Nations hosted the World Conference on the United Nations Decade for Women in Copenhagen, Denmark, which was attended by over 145 member nations <sup>[3]</sup>. Member nations discussed on various areas from equal employment opportunity, proper healthcare services, to education for women <sup>[4-6]</sup>. The conference also focussed on the equality of "rights, responsibilities and opportunities for the participation of women in development, both as beneficiaries and as active agents." The Conference further adopted the "Program of Action", which addressed the urgent need for technical cooperation from international community along with improving gender centric data and economic data accuracy and sharing. Also the adoption of "Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)" in 1979 created a stronger approach towards the topic of gender equality in the global community <sup>[7]</sup>.

## **AGGRESSIVE NATIONAL CAPACITY BUILDING**

Capacity building programs play an important role in achieving gender equality and women empowerment. These programs not only develop general understanding of the member nations towards the issue but also act as a vital information gathering source for international agencies such as UN Women and other bodies. It further becomes a valuable source of knowledge and proven technical and logistic asset to the Member States <sup>[8,9]</sup>. Also, the UN-Women Training Centre holds numerous programs and courses for Member States, women, girls, and men on the issues of gender bias gender equality and empowerment. For example, the United Nations Women Community of Practice is a popular knowledge sharing platform which holds numerous seminars, conferences, research discussions on gender equality and free education for women. The Fourth Dialogue of the title of the discussion was <sup>[10]</sup>. "Training for Gender Equality and Beijing +20." Experts from numerous organizations, Diplomats from all over the globe were given the opportunity to exchange ideas and discuss key issues on Beijing+20. Also; many United Nations agencies are working with "Gender Training Experts Roster" <sup>[11,12]</sup>, an open platform where women in the fields of gender equality, economic empowerment, political participation, peace and security, and HIV/AIDS interact. Together many entities and stakeholders along with experts and trainers can work together on gender equality worldwide. As member nations participate in the capacity building programs of the United Nations, nations also create their own capacity building programs <sup>[13]</sup>. After attending few conferences on capacity building and gender equality, Tanzania started their own capacity building programs on gender equality and free education, which today has made significant impact on female's decision making and in political arena as a whole. As a result, Tanzania had its first woman Deputy Speaker of the Special Constitutional Parliament despite heavy opposition from the males <sup>[14-16]</sup>. The Women's Economic Empowerment Programme was established by the Botswana government in association with local NGOs and CSOs, which provided grants to the women's NGOs and civil groups to help them generate finances for their projects, which not only created employment opportunities for women but also enhanced women's entrepreneur skills and decision-making capability <sup>[17]</sup>.

## **INITIATING THE POST-2015 DEVELOPMENT AGENDA**

Development agenda, these are "freedom from violence against women and girls," "gender equality in capabilities and resources," and "gender equality in decision-making power in public and private institutions <sup>[18]</sup>." It is also important to understand that these decisions are on paper but to implement a lot of resources and voluntary contribution is necessary. The causes it is going to cover includes gender inequality, but it is just not limited to violence against women <sup>[19]</sup>, employment, women's control over their assets and property, followed by equal access to women in open and closed door decision making roles. In order to initiate these decisions into actions <sup>[20-28]</sup>, introducing new indicators and involving more stakeholders is necessary. It is also important to introduce gender responsive accountability systems that empower women to claim what is right giving them a stronger voice in

decision making, which will also defend them from repetitive physical and psychological abuse. With reference to the topic of post development agenda, women empowerment and protection of rights of women will all that needs to be focussed. This also means that to <sup>[29-35]</sup> “transform the structural factors that underpin the widespread persistence of gender inequalities, gender-based violence, discrimination and unequal development progress between women and men, girls and boys” the community involvement and open invitation for stakeholders is a must. It is also important that to move ahead in the programs past failures should also be kept in mind, the United Nations however have created a comprehensive approach in global, regional, and at national level but the United Nations failed to maintain an effective and efficient system to watch over stakeholders and the member nations, developing a program is one thing but implementing the same on the ground level requires new set of approaches, approaches which many of the countries lack. “A universal approach” <sup>[36-39]</sup> should be the agenda of development; instead, stakeholders and regional parties are given more prioritise rather than community involvement as a whole. The development agenda can be monitored through the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG’s) of the UN. Whereas the level of gender equality, gender studies can be indicated by the pointers in the SDG mechanism, since SDG 5 also focusses on gender equality an “eight core indicator” mechanism can be created, such as during a case of women having suffered from sexual or physical violence would be counted in a certain frame, through this percentage of sexual violence in the region can easily identified along with the case of child marriage, harmful traditional practices <sup>[40,41]</sup>, women working in extreme labour, participation of women in national and regional policy making, etc.

## UNDERSTANDING CHALLENGES

Understanding what is BPfA is one thing but understanding the backdrops and challenges is in implementing BPfA is equally important than understanding. Below are some of the challenges faced by BPfA today.

**Monitoring:** The absence of concrete stakeholders and the number of stakeholders is very important and if the government or regional development centre fails to understand the same, the ability to monitor the plan is compromised <sup>[42]</sup>. This is one of the biggest challenges in BPfA. Specific targets for agencies should be drafted instead of fitting all the goals and requirements.

**Accountability:** Political will is another obstacle that has questioned the accountability of BPfA. Repetitive demands and unclear tactics of implementation hinder the overall development of BPfA <sup>[43]</sup>.

**Assessing Gender Equality in Development:** It is very difficult to understand gender equality in development independently and the community on the other <sup>[44]</sup>, both work best when together. Gender Equality is a part of Community development.

**Stakeholders today, Barriers tomorrow:** Since its creation, the BPfA has not be able to overcome socio economic barriers in gender equality and resolving these issues will be a must in order to sustain the development agenda. In Africa there are a total of 80% women farmers, but only a meagre of the population are land owners. It is not just in the case of Africa, it is in the case of South America and Asia too <sup>[45]</sup>. Limited resources, partial access to technologies still remain one of the major challenges to implement BPfA.

## CONCLUSION

The BPfA comprises of a strong policy and intelligent framework and is one of the most essential agenda for achieving gender equality and women and girl empowerment. It not only brings international community on the board to fight inequality, but it also effective involve regional stakeholders, elected representatives, private sector, rural leaders. Comparing to the past 20 years, progress has been made, but there is not even a single country that has implemented the BPfA has a whole. “Women make up half of the global population, and empowering women means a significant step toward strengthening Society”.

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