

IN BRIEF



BEIJING+20 IN ASIA PACIFIC



BACKGROUND

The Beijing Platform for Action (BPfA) adopted at the 1995 United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women, in Beijing, China, is an unprecedented agenda for women's empowerment, offering a policy framework and roadmap for achieving gender equality and women's rights. The BPfA has stimulated action around the world, with governments, civil society and others using it as the basis to end inequality and discrimination.



The year 2015 is crucially important for the advancement of women globally as it marks the 20th anniversary of the BPfA. It is also the endpoint of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), with the international community considering the post-2015 development agenda and a new set of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

The Beijing+20 review process provides the opportunity for governments and civil society to assess the implementation of the BPfA. Through this review, it is also a time to celebrate achievements and recommit to accelerate implementation to ensure gender equality and women's empowerment are central to the Post-2015 development framework.

BEIJING+20 IN ASIA PACIFIC: ACHIEVEMENTS AND CHALLENGES

Much has been achieved but gender inequality persists.

PROGRESS

1. Women and Poverty

- Absolute poverty rates decreased and economies grew in all the Asia-Pacific low- and middle-income countries.
- There were improvements in food security across Asia and the Pacific, related to the implementation of social protection measures, among other factors.

CHALLENGES

- There is no clear correlation between economic growth and reduction in inequalities in Asia-Pacific economies. For example, the absolute number of women and girls surviving on US\$ 1.25-2.00 per day has increased during the past 20 years.
- Women experience 'time poverty': they carry out most unpaid work, providing care to children, and to elderly, sick or disabled family members, as well as doing other unpaid household work. In the Asia-Pacific region, the gender gap in unpaid work is about three hours per day, with gaps particularly large in South Asia.
- Women and girls continue to face discrimination in and exclusion from ownership of land.

2. Education and training of women

- Primary school enrolment rates have reached gender parity in virtually all countries across Asia and the Pacific.
- Significant progress has been made in increasing the enrolment and retention of women and girls in secondary and tertiary education, and increasing rates of female literacy and participation in vocational training.
- Many countries have already begun to increase female school attendance through, for example, cash transfers that are conditional on the school attendance of girls.
- A majority of countries in the Asia-Pacific region are committed to the full abolishment or prohibition of corporal punishment in all settings including schools.

3. Women and Health

- There have been substantial reductions in the maternal mortality rate, falling to almost 62 per cent over the past 20 years.
- Major improvements have been made in female life expectancy at birth, calorie intake and the provision of health services, including those pertaining to sexual and reproductive health.

4. Violence against Women

- The development and adoption of laws to criminalize violence against women in many countries in the region provide a foundation for enhancing State due diligence or accountability to prevent and respond to such violence.
- Data collection has improved and there is a growing evidence base in some countries on the prevalence, causes and consequences of violence against women.
- Increased social mobilization and partnerships have reduced the acceptance of violence against women.

5. Women and armed conflict

- Subregional and national action plans on women, peace and security have been developed.
- Significant awareness-raising and educational programmes and the provision of services to women affected by conflict have taken place.

6. Women and the Economy

- Economic development in the region is related to gains in educational attainment. To avoid wasting years of investment in educating girls and young women, it is important to ensure that men and women have equal opportunities to contribute in the workplace.
- Gains in educational attainment have contributed to narrowing gender gaps in labour force participation, and in most countries gender pay gaps have been reduced.
- There is considerable potential for the development of female entrepreneurship and its contribution to inclusive and sustainable economic growth.

- Girls are still more likely to be out of school than boys at the secondary level, and females are less likely than males to continue formal education, and are more likely to be illiterate.
- Subject streaming on the basis of gender and gender stereotypes in curricula persist.
- An estimated 18 million children of primary school age are not in school, despite the remarkable progress made in improving overall access to education
- Several countries in the region still have more than half of children or young people not in secondary school.
- There is a concerning degree of evidence highlighting sexual violence and abuse on the journey to and from schools (but more data on sexual violence and abuse in schools in the Asia-Pacific region is needed).
- There is a continuing prevalence of school-related violence in the Asia-Pacific region which can have profound consequences for students' participation, achievement, and continuation, particularly for girls.

- The overall incidence of maternal mortality in the region remains high.
- Women and girls continue to face barriers to access to sexual and reproductive health care.
- In some countries there is rising prevalence of HIV among women and uneven access to health care coverage

- Violence against women and girls remains widespread throughout Asia and the Pacific: a recent UN study involving interviews with over 10,000 men in six countries in the region, found that nearly half reported using physical or sexual violence against a partner (ranging from 26-80 percent across sites).
- Women are at risk of violence and face additional barriers in accessing services and justice, in particular: migrant women, women with disabilities, displaced and refugee women, adolescent girls, and ethnic minority women.
- There is limited availability of and funding for multisectoral survivor services.
- There is widespread impunity for perpetrators of violence against women and limited access to justice for victims.
- 'Honour' and dowry-related crimes, conflict-related violence, trafficking, and sexual abuse and harassment are widespread in the Asia-Pacific region.

- A majority of countries in the region have not developed normative frameworks to ensure the protection of women and girls in times of conflict, their participation in conflict resolution and peacebuilding, the prosecution of perpetrators of human rights abuses against women and girls, or the provision of relief and recovery programmes, including the reintegration of female ex-combatants and the provision of restorative justice.

- Important gender differences in labour market outcomes remain, notably in South Asia and the Pacific islands, with women most likely to be involved in the most vulnerable employment conditions.
- The vast majority of women work in the agricultural sector in low-income economies, while in middle-income countries they are most likely to be employed in the service sector.
- Women are less likely to have career progression than men in the Asia-Pacific region.
- The number of female-owned and run businesses is less than half that of men according to available indicators.

7. Women in power and decision-making

- Women's participation in parliaments in the Asia-Pacific region rose on average from 12 per cent in 1995 to 16 per cent in 2014.
- Quotas have been adopted in nine countries to transform the culture of political participation by mandating minimum levels of women's representation.

8. Institutional mechanisms for women

- National machineries have been established to support multisectoral, whole-of-government approaches for the advancement of women and gender equality.

9. Human Rights of Women

- Ratification of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and national legislative measures are almost universal across the region.
- Equality is guaranteed in the constitution of 30 countries in the Asia-Pacific region.
- Non-discrimination is guaranteed in 31 countries of the Asia-Pacific region.

10. Women and the Media

- Positive measures to foster equitable access to information, communication have been introduced, together with media and ICT, education and training programmes that promote the interests of women and girls.
- More people are being empowered through 'connection', supporting their right to freedom of expression, to challenge stereotypes and share ideas.

11. Women and the environment

- Gender equality and differential impacts of disasters and climate on women and children are visible in regional and national disaster risk reduction and climate change agendas and policies, resulting from consistent advocacy and awareness-raising.
- The mainstreaming of gender in disaster and risk reduction and climate change policies is increasing.
- There is support for equal access to clean and renewable energy.

12. The Girl Child

- There is universal ratification of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC).
- Infant mortality rates, malnutrition, and teenage pregnancies have been reduced, and there is progress on ending impunity for harmful practices against girls.

- Gender stereotyping continues to limit women's substantive access to decision-making in the public and private spheres, despite advances in educational attainment.
- The majority of countries in the Asia-Pacific region have under 12 per cent of women in ministerial portfolios.
- Women exceed 30 per cent of legislators, senior officials and managers in only four countries in the Asia-Pacific region.
- Women's representation in private sector leadership is low: a 2013 study of 700 private sector boardrooms in seven large economies in the region found that only twenty-two had more than two female directors.

- There is a need to strengthen the mandates and status of national machineries, increase resources and promote political will across government.

- The violation of rights is continuing with violence, discriminatory practices and persistent gender stereotyping.

- Negative gender stereotyping remains in popular culture.
- In the fields of media and ICT, women and girls continue to have less access than men and boys.
- Women and girls hold fewer decision-making positions and have less influence in the media.
- Women continue to be subjected to harassment, stalking and violence online, and to be in receipt of messages that reinforce gender stereotypes.

- The high disaster-related mortality and injury rates among women and girls is compounded by a lack of data disaggregated by sex and age.
- Women face disproportionate barriers to equitable ownership and control of natural resources, which are key for responding and adapting to disasters and climate change.
- There is limited implementation of gender responsive disaster risk reduction and climate change policies.
- The environmental knowledge and skills of women are often disregarded, and women are underrepresented in decision-making bodies on environmental issues.

- Child and forced marriage remain prevalent.
- There is greater value attached to boys than girls (prenatal sex selection and son preference).
- Domestic enslavement of girls and commercial sexual exploitation of the girl child remain major issues.



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Under Secretary-General of the United Nations
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What remains to be done?

It is time to make bold and far-reaching decisions to accelerate the implementation of internationally agreed minimum standards.

1

VOICE: Women's voices must be heard.

The low numbers of women in public decision-making, from national parliaments to local councils, must be remedied to ensure that women feature prominently in democratic institutions and their voices are heard in decision making in the household, the private sector and institutions of governance. The lack of voice in decision-making is also found in the key institutions influencing public opinion and promoting accountability, including the media and civil society, as well as in private sector institutions, and in the management and governance of firms. The roots are in unequal power relations in the family and community.

2

CHOICE: Women and men need equal opportunities, resources and responsibilities to realize equality.

The often skewed distribution of capabilities, such as knowledge and health – encompassing sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights for women and adolescent girls, as well as resources and opportunities, including productive assets (including land), decent work and equal pay – must be addressed with renewed urgency to build women's economic and social security.

3

SAFETY: Freedom from violence against women and girls.

Concrete actions to eliminate the debilitating fear and/or experience of violence must be a centerpiece of any future framework. This violence, which causes great physical and psychological harm to women and girls, is a violation of their human rights, constrains their ability to fulfill their true potential and carries great economic costs for them and for society.

How it cannot be business as usual.

- Agree on a transformative goal on gender equality and the empowerment of women; and the integrate gender perspectives – with targets and indicators – with all goals of the post-2015 development framework.
- Maximize financing of and investments in gender equality and the empowerment of women.
- Strengthen the evidence base, conduct further research, and develop standards and methodologies.
- Strengthen institutions working for the advancement of gender equality and the empowerment of women at all levels.
- Strengthen and develop accountability mechanisms for the implementation of internationally agreed minimum standards.
- Forge stronger partnerships, with multiple stakeholders and include men and boys in actions.

Only with a comprehensive approach, addressing all the above will gender equality be achieved.

UN Photo/Taufan Wijaya



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