



GLOBAL WOMEN'S ISSUES

WOMEN in the WORLD TODAY

Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action

FOURTH WORLD CONFERENCE ON WOMEN

“If there is one message that echoes forth from this conference, let it be that human rights are women’s rights and women’s rights are human rights once and for all. Let us not forget that among those rights are the right to speak freely — and the right to be heard.”

— Hillary Rodham Clinton, September 1995 at the United Nations’
Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing



This book is based on the 12 critical areas of concern identified at the Beijing Conference:

- 1 The persistent and increasing burden of poverty on women
- 2 Inequalities and inadequacies in and unequal access to education and training
- 3 Inequalities and inadequacies in and unequal access to health care and related services
- 4 Violence against women
- 5 The effects of armed or other kinds of conflict on women, including those living under foreign occupation
- 6 Inequality in economic structures and policies, in all forms of productive activities and in access to resources
- 7 Inequality between men and women in the sharing of power and decision-making at all levels
- 8 Insufficient mechanisms at all levels to promote the advancement of women
- 9 Lack of respect for and inadequate promotion and protection of the human rights of women
- 10 Stereotyping of women and inequality in women’s access to and participation in all communication systems, especially in the media
- 11 Gender inequalities in the management of natural resources and in the safeguarding of the environment
- 12 Persistent discrimination against and violation of the rights of the girl child

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in the
WORLD
TODAY

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF STATE
BUREAU OF INTERNATIONAL INFORMATION PROGRAMS

PUBLISHED 2012

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P R E F A C E

In September 1995, I joined representatives from 189 countries for the United Nations' Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing. That event still stands out as one of the great honors and highlights of my life.

That 1995 historic gathering brought together people of all backgrounds and beliefs to voice our support for women's rights and put women's issues at the forefront of the global agenda. Together, we outlined a Plan of Action to improve the condition of women and girls worldwide.

In the years since Beijing, advocates, activists and governments around the world have used that plan to advance opportunity and progress for women. The good news is that we have accomplished a great deal. More girls are enrolled in school, more women hold political office, and more laws exist to protect vulnerable populations.

Unfortunately, we have a long way yet to go. Sometimes by custom, sometimes by law, millions of women worldwide are still denied their rights. They are excluded from public life in their societies, subjected to violence or barred from getting an education, taking a job or driving a car.

This is morally wrong. It offends our basic sense of justice and fairness. But it is unacceptable for another reason too — because it keeps countries from making real progress in creating jobs, sparking economic growth and giving all their people an opportunity to create a better future. No country can advance when half its population is left behind.

But when women are empowered to exercise their human rights and afforded equal

opportunities, amazing things happen. The benefits don't stop with an individual woman. They spread to entire communities and countries. Simply helping girls stay in school longer, for example, has a powerful effect. Birth rates drop. So does the number of young children who die. HIV infections, domestic violence and female cutting all decline. And, in nations divided by violent conflict, the chances for lasting peace go up when women are part of the solution. Women play important roles as peacekeepers, as they



U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton meets Burmese pro-democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi in Rangoon, Burma, in 2011. Suu Kyi, awarded the Nobel Peace Prize (1991), spent nearly 20 years under house arrest. Released in 2010, she has engaged with the ruling military junta on reforms. She and members of her National League for Democracy won parliamentary seats in 2012 by-elections.

did in Northern Ireland and Liberia. In short, women around the world sustain families, build communities and knit the social fabric together.

At the State Department, we believe elevating the status of women and girls in their societies is not only the right thing to do, it is also the smart thing to do. Women and girls are often a community's greatest untapped resource, which makes investing in them a powerful and effective way to promote international development and our diplomatic agenda.

We're working to address the issues that impede women's progress and putting critical tools into women's hands. For example, a cellphone can transform a woman's life by giving her a way to safely deposit her savings or receive payments through mobile banking, or by helping her connect to markets outside her village. Yet many women lack access to cellphones and the benefits they offer, so we launched the mWomen partnership to reduce the gender gap in mobile technology. And the Global Alliance for Clean Cookstoves is providing a standard for safe, efficient, nonpolluting stoves to women. Clean cookstoves will improve the health of women and their families, the quality of the air they breathe, as well as their economic conditions.

Every time I travel, I meet extraordinary women who are driving change in their communities, often in the face of overwhelming obstacles. Women like Nasim Baji in Pakistan, who only needed a \$10 microfinance loan to start a jewelry-making business that today employs 30 women in her community. Or women like Sina Vann, a Cambodian who escaped sex slavery to become a freedom fighter for thousands of girls — some as young as four — who are held and sold against their will. I visited the rescue center that Sina runs in 2010, and I was deeply touched by the courage and resilience I saw in those little girls.

This book tells Nasim's and Sina's stories, and those of other women leaders, innovators, entrepreneurs, educators and politicians leading change in their communities.

Women in the World Today shows how far we have come since 1995. Each chapter reflects one of the 12 points in the action plan we developed in Beijing. It also explores what we need to do now, so that all countries can fully benefit from the wisdom, compassion and energy women bring to every aspect of society.

I hope the stories you read here inspire you to take action in your community and help move us closer to that goal. It could be as simple as sharing stories of the women in this book and in your own life with others. You could volunteer with a women's organization in your hometown or start your own project. Above all, you can make sure the girls in your life grow up feeling safe, valued and powerful.

In Beijing, we envisioned a world where women and men have equal access to opportunities — a world where women's voices would be recognized and respected. We are still pursuing that vision, with more energy and enthusiasm than ever. Together, we can realize a future where women's rights are unquestionably, unshakably and permanently recognized as full and equal human rights.



Hillary Rodham Clinton
Secretary of State

Hillary Rodham Clinton was sworn in as the 67th secretary of state of the United States on January 21, 2009. Secretary Clinton joined the State Department after nearly four decades in public service as an advocate, attorney, first lady and senator.

Solutions to Global Challenges Require Women's Participation

Interview with Ambassador Melanne Verveer

In April 2009, Melanne Verveer was appointed ambassador-at-large for global women's issues by President Obama to promote women's empowerment in U.S. foreign policy. She shares her passion for achieving the political, economic and social empowerment of women in this interview.

Q: You are the first ambassador-at-large for global women's issues. Why are these issues so important to address now?

Ambassador Verveer: There is recognition today that we cannot possibly solve our global challenges, whether they concern the environment, governance, economic policy or security, unless women are full participants. We have to move "women's issues" from the margins to the mainstream and recognize that the issues are not only about women's roles, but are about the kind of world we want to create. To the extent that women participate, succeed and help make a difference, everyone benefits — men and women, boys and girls.

Q: Why is women's participation so vital to the well-being of all societies?

MV: There is a mountain of data that correlates investments in women to poverty reduction — even to decreases in corruption — which I think we need to take very seriously. Similarly, there are studies on the consequences of gender inequality.



Melanne Verveer is the first ambassador-at-large for the U.S. State Department's Office of Global Women's Issues.

For example, the World Economic Forum puts out an annual report called the Gender Gap Report. It measures the progress of men and women in terms of economic participation and opportunity, educational attainment, political participation, health and survival. Where men and women are closer to equal achievement in all of those areas, those countries are far better off.

Where that gap is wider, it's a different story. This has been repeated in study after study. We have to pay attention to the hard data, and what the data tell us is this is the smart thing to do, to invest in women and provide them with opportunities to fully participate in their societies.

Q: In 1995 the landmark U.N. Fourth World Conference on Women was held in Beijing. What did it accomplish, and is it still relevant?

MV: It brought together 189 countries to really look at the progress of women and specifically to adopt a Platform for Action. That Platform for Action focused on a number of critical areas, including women's access to education, health care, economic and political participation; women's ability to be free from violence; to have legal rights; the girl child; the role of women in conflict societies; and the role of women in peace and security. It was a major, ambitious blueprint that the United States and 188 other countries signed on to, making commitments to go back to our own countries to chart progress for women and girls. That was significant then, and it continues to be extremely significant today. Fifteen years later, the Platform for Action is still the blueprint against which many of our countries, NGOs and others measure the advancement of women. There has been a lot of progress, but there still are challenges. Laws have been passed. They haven't always been implemented, but much has changed for the better.

Q: Where has the most progress been made, and where does the world still have work to do?

MV: Girls' education is in a much better place than it was when the Beijing Platform was adopted, but we are not where we need to be. While more and more girls are in primary school, we don't have anywhere near the numbers with access to secondary education. Investing in a girl determines what her future will be like — and

her potential family's future — her economic possibilities, her health and her children's education. More women are being elected to parliaments, but the numbers are still below what they should be, given that women make up half the population of the world and it is important to have their experiences and talents involved in policymaking.

Economically, women are participating in more significant ways. Microcredit, for example, has had a transformative impact, lifting up the poorest of the poor and creating livelihoods so people can sustain themselves and their families. Laws have been passed dealing with violence against women, family law reform and other intractable issues. Now such laws must be better implemented and enforced. There is a definite record of progress. Governments, civil society and those who have charted this path toward a better future can take justifiable pride in that, but we have to keep at it to reach our goals.

Q: What are the most important emerging global women's issues?

MV: We still have an agenda to complete. We have to be more creative. One of the challenges is to bring new tools to the table, tools that do a better job enhancing economic progress. Microcredit is one of the great financial tools, but we need broader financial inclusion: savings and other ways that poor people can be insured against cataclysms of one kind or another. Financial tools can bring creative solutions, as can technology. I personally think that mobile technology has the potential to be as transformative as microcredit has been. Cellphones are more accessible to the poor. Cellphone applications are being developed to help improve health care. The cellphone is being used for banking, teaching literacy, safeguarding women from violence and creating economic opportunities.



Melanne Vermeer with PepsiCo Chairman and Chief Executive Officer Indra Nooyi.

There was and is an environmental component of the Beijing Agenda, but climate change itself was not specified. It is something that we have come to understand better in the time that's elapsed since 1995. Here again we see the role that women have to play, particularly in regions most severely affected by climate change and vulnerable to natural disasters such as drought or floods. We need to engage women as agents for adaptation and mitigation.

One important example concerns cookstoves. The black carbon emitted from dirty cookstoves — on which millions of poor people cook — is detrimental to the health of millions of people. The Global Alliance for Clean Cookstoves is creating a market for low-emissions cookstoves, to help reduce the damaging health and environmental impacts of black carbon. It's an economic empowerment issue because selling and maintaining cookstoves is a new green industry, especially for women. Cooking is not the major contributor to climate change, but low-emissions cookstoves can address one aspect of it.

Q: What role must men play in ensuring women’s empowerment and advancement around the world?

MV: Men have a central, critical, important role to play. Women’s progress has never come through women’s efforts alone. We cannot possibly solve some of the most serious challenges that women confront — the inequality of women around the globe, the scourge of violence against them — unless men are involved in solutions. The way boys are raised, the image of what a man should be and how that’s presented, are opportunities to develop good habits in the next generation. We know the critical role that religious leaders — who are mostly men — can play. We need political will and enlightened male leaders at the highest levels of government, multilateral institutions and companies to become full participants in the advancement of women’s empowerment.

Q: The United States does not have a perfect record on women’s issues. Our Congress has a lower percentage of female elected officials than some foreign parliaments and has not ratified the U.N. Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). Domestic violence and human trafficking are issues in the United States. Is the United States in a position to lead the world on women’s empowerment?

MV: We have a lot of work to do at home, as every other country does. In no country in the world are men and women equal. But I think the fact that we address many of our problems or are working at addressing them does certainly resonate internationally. We’ve created legislation to combat violence against women, which was first adopted in the 1990s. Our trafficking law wasn’t passed until 2000, but we worked at it and it is a model for the world. It may help other countries to see the path we took to address the

challenges, how we created coalitions, and why we set prevention, prosecution and protection as lynchpins in the violence against women law and in the trafficking law (Victims of Trafficking and Violence Protection Act of 2000).

I often talk about the women who, in 1848, traveled to that first equal rights convention in Seneca Falls, New York. And I often think of the diary of a young girl who looked back on the course that she chose to take, which was to get in a stagecoach, leave her home and to make that trip. She did it because in the United States at the time, women could not vote. She could not keep her meager earnings — if she had meager earnings. She could not access formal education; she could not get a divorce if she found herself in a terrible marriage. She knew life needed to be better and she went off on that journey to the equal rights convention not knowing, as she said, if anybody else would be on that road. Well, we know what progress our country has made. We are still on that road. Women everywhere are on that journey and we need each other. And — just as importantly — we need good men to join us as they, too, traveled to the Equal Rights Convention. We may be in different places on the journey. The United States has come a long way from 1848, when that young woman decided to make the trip to Seneca Falls, but we still have a ways to go. All over the world, women who face difficult situations need to chart progress. So we’re not perfect, but we work at these issues and in many ways we have succeeded and can help others address similar challenges.





CHAPTER

1



WOMEN AND POVERTY

Women constitute a majority of the poor and are often poorest of the poor. A woman hugs her granddaughter in their shack near Castelli, Chaco, Argentina.

WOMEN AND POVERTY

By Geeta Rao Gupta

Women constitute a majority of the poor and are often the poorest of the poor. The societal disadvantage and inequality they face because they are women shapes their experience of poverty differently from that of men, increases their vulnerability, and makes it more challenging for them to climb out of poverty. In other words, poverty is a gendered experience — addressing it requires a gender analysis of norms and values, the division of assets, work and responsibility, and the dynamics of power and control between women and men in poor households.

In most societies, gender norms define women's role as largely relegated to the home, as mother and caretaker, and men's role as responsible for productive activities outside the home. These norms influence institutional policies and laws that define women's and men's access to productive resources such as education, employment, land and credit. There is overwhelming evidence from around the world to show that girls and women are more disadvantaged than boys and men in their access to these valued productive resources. There is also ample evidence to show that the responsibilities of women and the challenges they face within poor households and communities are different from those of men. Persistent



gender inequality and differences in women's and men's roles greatly influence the causes, experiences and consequences of women's poverty. Policies and programs to alleviate poverty must, therefore, take account of gender inequality and gender differences to effectively address the needs and constraints of both poor women and men.

Pakistani women are paid about US\$2 for every 1,000 bricks they make at this brick kiln in Multan, Pakistan.



Women's Experience of Poverty

Girls and women in poor households bear a disproportionate share of the work and responsibility of feeding and caring for family members through unpaid household work. In poor rural households, for example, women's work is dominated by activities such as firewood, water and fodder collection, care of livestock and subsistence agriculture. The drudgery of women's work and its time-intensive demands contribute to women's "time poverty" and greatly limit poor women's choice of other, more productive income-earning opportunities.

Faced with difficult time-allocation choices, women in poor households will

often sacrifice their own health and nutrition, or the education of their daughters, by recruiting them to take care of siblings or share in other household tasks. This is just one piece of a pattern of gendered discrimination in the allocation of resources in poor households. Evidence shows that the gender gaps in nutrition, education and health are greater in poorer households. This lack of investment in the human capital of girls perpetuates a vicious, intergenerational cycle of poverty and disadvantage that is partly responsible for the intractable nature of poverty.

Women in Gadabeji, Niger, cope with a food crisis created by drought. Worldwide, women are driven further into poverty by inflated food prices.

Why Focus on Women in Poverty?

A focus on poor women as distinct from men in efforts to reduce poverty is justified because women's paid and unpaid work is crucial for the survival of poor households.

Women are economic actors: They produce and process food for the family; they are the primary caretakers of children, the elderly and the sick; and their income and labor are directed toward children's education, health and well-being. In fact, there is incontrovertible evidence from a number of studies conducted during the 1980s that mothers typically spend their income on food and health care for children, which is in sharp contrast to men, who spend a higher proportion of their income for personal needs. A study conducted in Brazil, for example, found that the positive effect on the probability that a child will survive in urban Brazil is almost 20 times greater when the household income is controlled by a woman rather than by a man (Quisumbing et al., 1995).

Yet women face significant constraints in maximizing their productivity. They often do not have equal access to productive inputs or to markets for their goods. They own only 15 percent of the land worldwide, work longer hours than men and earn lower wages. They are over-represented among workers in the informal labor market, in jobs that are seasonal, more precarious and not protected by labor standards.

Despite this, policies and programs that are based on notions of a typical household as consisting of a male bread-winner and dependent women and children often target men for the provision of productive resources and



A child “rag picker” collects refuse for recycling at a garbage dump in Hyderabad, India.

services. Such an approach widens the gender-based productivity gap, negatively affects women's economic status, and does little to reduce poverty. Addressing these gender biases and inequalities by intentionally investing in women as economic agents, and doing so within a framework of rights that ensures that women's access to and control over productive resources is a part of their entitlement as citizens, is an effective and efficient poverty reduction strategy.

Ways to Reduce Women's Poverty

Over the years there have been many efforts to reduce women's poverty. Investments to increase agricultural productivity, improve livestock management and provide livelihood opportunities are key ways to address the needs of poor rural women. Another, more popular and effective intervention that currently reaches millions of women worldwide is microfinance — small loans and other financial services for poor women who



have no access to the formal banking system. Microfinance programs have succeeded in increasing the incomes of poor households and protecting them against complete destitution.

Yet another strategy to improve the economic status of poor women has been to increase women's access to and control of land. Women who own or control land can use the land to produce food or generate income, or as collateral for credit.

These strategies are promising and offer potential for meeting the international community's commitment to gender equality as demonstrated most recently through the inclusion of Goal 3 in the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). All that remains now is for that commitment to be transformed into action.

Geeta Rao Gupta is a senior fellow at the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation's Global Development Program and an internationally recognized expert on gender and development issues, including women's health, economic empowerment, poverty alleviation and gender equality. Prior to joining the foundation, Rao Gupta was president of the International Center for Research on Women (ICRW). She also serves on the Steering Committee of aids2031, an international initiative commissioned by UNAIDS, USAID's Advisory Committee for Voluntary Foreign Aid and the boards of the Moriah Fund, the Nike Foundation, the MAC AIDS Fund and the Rural Development Institute.

A girl helps a woman prepare food in Guatemala.

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