



Socialist International Women

CSW64 / BEIJING+25 (2020)
UNITED NATIONS, NEW YORK, 9 TO 20 MARCH 2020

**CHALLENGES TO THE ACHIEVEMENT OF GLOBAL
GENDER EQUALITY, SOCIAL DEMOCRACY AND GENDER
EQUAL POLITICAL PARTICIPATION BY 2030**

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Beijing+25 marks the 25th anniversary of the presentation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (BPA-1995) at the 4th World Conference on Women held in Beijing, China and adopted by 189 governments. This is a hugely significant milestone for the global community of the women's rights movement which has continued to grow in influence over the years and tirelessly highlights and pushes for action on the most critical issues affecting women and girls today. This powerful movement is also sowing the seeds for lasting gender equality changes for our future generations of women and girls which benefits all of our communities and nations. Socialist International Women (SIW) warmly honours the tenacious, sustained efforts of the millions of women and men who have remained committed to implementing the essential wide-ranging gender equality principles and frameworks detailed in BPA-1995. These crucial recommendations affect all areas of women's private, public and political lives, including enabling access to good quality education and healthcare, being protected from gender based violence and exploitation and being free to participate in political processes with a meaningful voice within decision making discussions which affect their bodies, environments and livelihoods. BPA-1995 remains a powerful blueprint for the creation of gender equality and supporting a worldwide culture which respects, nourishes and nurtures women and girls as equals to men and boys.

Immense progress has definitely been made in some regions and on several specific issues, such as the continuing increase in levels of primary education for girls and an increased number of countries which have outlawed domestic violence and rape within marriage. However, the rate of change towards more gender equal societies remains disappointingly uneven around the world. Some regions have barely advanced at all on gender equality issues in the last 25 years, while others are showing alarming signs of regression towards attitudes of shockingly misogynistic gender inequality. In almost all cases the rate of change has simply not been radical enough or fast enough, which means that governments and communities must do much, much more as soon as possible to push the gender equality agenda into reality. The lack of meaningful action worldwide is evidenced by the latest United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Gender Inequality Report figures which show that at present there are still significant gaps in achieving gender equality by 2030. This demonstrates that the need to accelerate urgent, radical action to implement gender equality measures remains a critical concern. Overall, there are several key challenges which 25 years after BPA-1995 have still not been adequately addressed at a global level and strongly inhibit gender equality progress. These include the continuing pandemic of violence against women, the gender pay gap which still sees the majority of women worldwide earning significantly less than men – at the current rate of change gender pay parity will not be achieved until 2086² - and the still very low numbers of women worldwide in government positions, or with gender parity within their government representatives. Without immediate action to address these issues, the achievement of all of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) is in jeopardy and global gender equality will not be achieved by 2030. Women and girls will remain, in effect, second class citizens unable to achieve personal fulfilment and wellbeing, full educational and earning potential, personal and financial independence and freedom from violence. The absence of the energy and balancing influence of women leaves the global community much poorer socially, intellectually and economically and contributes to the fragility of peace within and between nations which is an incalculable loss for all of us.

One of the biggest challenges affecting gender equality and specifically attitudes towards women has been the enormous impact of technological changes over the last 25 years. This is particularly the case with the internet and social media. Social media giant Facebook was only created in 2004, YouTube in 2005 and Twitter in 2006, but the unprecedented level of user influence on applications like these and the effect on the opinions and actions of communities and nations has been enormous.

Worldwide women are still being left behind here, for example 184 million fewer women than men own a mobile phone and 1.2 billion women do not use mobile internet, so cannot access any of the multiple benefits available.¹ These women, many of whom are in remote rural areas, have no access to anything that is being shared and discussed online. They lose out on opportunities for learning and social support, initiatives such as micro-bank funding and have no voice or influence on decisions directly affecting them. This factor alone puts them at a significant disadvantage and increases their vulnerability and isolation.

For women who do have access the internet is a mixed blessing with both positive and negative aspects that governments and communities are struggling to fully understand or control. The issue is that while both the internet and social media have enabled the positives of solidarity across geographical divides, social cohesion and the sharing of knowledge and support, they have equally enabled the sharing and support of highly negative, inflammatory, disruptive and horrifyingly racist and misogynistic opinions, information and behaviours. There is no doubt that the sharing of material which demeans and vilifies women is a breeding ground for subversive populist views against women and a serious challenge to the promotion of gender equality.

The media and broadcast industries in general have long had serious issues of gender inequality bias, but with the rise of the internet and social media technologies which any private individual with an internet connection can access these issues are now outside the control of any one company or organisation. Unfortunately, this is new territory for all of us; none of us has enough past experience to guide us. This is perhaps why so far politics and legislation have failed to keep up with the gross infringements on human rights occurring on a daily basis. This is now such a critical issue we are at a decisive moment in our global evolution. Together we must decide how best to proceed to ensure these technologies serve us for the better. It is therefore critical that the human rights, concerns and needs of women and girls are strongly voiced and heard from the very beginning to ensure that they are firmly embedded within the wording, intentions and implementation of solutions. The input of women is vital while discussions proceed on how to ensure the virtual world online reflects the fair, inclusive and gender equality principles within BPA-1995 and remains in line with the SDGs and the achievement of global gender equality by 2030.

It is SIW's vision that the benefits of ICT and the internet are available to all women and men equally. SIW strongly believes that a global society where all citizens have access to education, information, support and the ability to participate in decision making from their own homes, or while working in a field if needed is an achievable goal. Within this vision, all aspects of society - including the multiple features of online activity that are an integral part of millions of people's reality and life experience from a very young age - reflect and support a global culture of inclusive social democracy which respects women and men as equals and honours the human rights and dignity of all citizens.

For many women the impact of demeaning attitudes regarding the value of women and their status in society starts within the family hierarchy and continues throughout their lives. However, the structure of family units and the role women play is rapidly changing. These changes are in response to changes in the wider world, such as men leaving families to find work elsewhere, increased care-giving tasks for extended family members and an increase in single parent families, where the sole provider is female. This leaves many women with more responsibilities, but without the support and resources to meet these additional responsibilities.

Sadly, women under 40, who are more likely to be supporting children, are also more likely to be poorer than men. The latest available figures show an estimated 4.4 million more women than men surviving on less than US\$1.90 a day.² A combination of the continuing gender pay gap, occupational segregation, women being time-poor and inequalities in access to good quality healthcare, education and cash benefits continues to create impoverished families where women, their children and extended families are unable to support themselves. This perpetuation of generations of impoverished women and children is entirely unacceptable and contributes to the creation of disenfranchised and un-stable communities. It is also a stark reminder of continuing global gender inequalities as well as gross inequalities in the distribution of wealth.

It is SIW's vision that the social democratic principles of shared wealth, shared responsibility and support for all members of society, including vulnerable groups, particularly women and children, are prioritised within all political agendas to strongly influence economic and budgetary decisions which create and maintain fair and just societies where all citizens are valued equally.

The disruption and suffering caused by conflict and war has led to 70.8 million people being forcibly displaced worldwide.³ Women and children are the most vulnerable groups in cases of mass exodus and are more likely to suffer violence, hunger and disease. Violations of human rights are widespread and for women in particular a lack of basic hygiene and sanitation facilities mean a loss of personal dignity while a lack of maternity care increases mortality rates for mothers and babies. It is imperative that these most vulnerable of groups are prioritised and funding for humanitarian initiatives continues and increases.

The impact of climate change and its potential to destroy homes, livelihoods and food sources is becoming an increasingly urgent issue. Women and children, particularly in rural communities, often have no access to transport and are less likely to be able to access early warning systems, such as mobile phone text alerts, making them particularly vulnerable in an emergency. It is vital that plans for the potential displacement of vulnerable groups and communities are prioritised.

It is SIW's vision that the needs of acutely vulnerable groups displaced by conflict, war or climate change related events are prioritised for discussion and action within the global community. SIW strongly believes it is vital to ensure that funding and resources for humanitarian aid are sufficient and ready to be mobilised to reach those who need it, particularly women and children who invariably suffer the most when these incidents occur.

At the heart of SIW's philosophy is the firm belief that the meaningful participation of women in political life is the essential key to lasting gender equality changes. The imbalance of power in political spheres, strongly biased towards men, has existed for far too long. Women have proven time and again their immense value as equal participants within communities wherever they have been enabled to do so. Women's full participation within political decision making is vital in achieving all of the SDGs and ensuring the sustainability and peaceful co-existence of all our citizens.

It is SIW's vision that women and men govern their communities and nations together in equal partnership for the benefit of all citizens. To this end, SIW remains strongly committed to the full

participation of women within all political and decision making processes with gender parity for members of governmental and community leadership groups.

In support of the fight for gender equality SIW warmly welcomes the UN initiative

“Generation Equality: Realizing women’s rights for an equal future” which demands women’s rights to ‘equal pay, equal sharing of unpaid care and domestic work, an end to sexual harassment and all forms of violence against women and girls, health-care services that respond to their needs, and their equal participation in political life and decision-making in all areas of life.’ SIW remains committed to strongly supporting all initiatives which are in alignment with gender equality goals.

With just ten years left until 2030 it is now more important than ever for all SI members, affiliated women’s groups, NGO’s and governments to insist that the required changes for lasting gender equality within society at all levels are implemented as soon as possible. The rise of populist politics has proved to be a huge blow to the women’s movement, but working together in solidarity we can use this to strengthen our resolve and create a powerful call to action to re-commit to the fight for concrete gender equality changes that positively impact on women’s lives by 2030.

SIW calls upon all governments, member parties of SI, the UN, state structures and NGOs to take urgent action to accelerate the rate of gender equality change in their regions and nations by implementing the actions and recommendation detailed in the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. SIW also urges support for the UN’s Sustainable Development Goals, with specific emphasis on taking urgent action on vital issues by:

- Prioritising actions to enable political participation of women at local and national level;
- Demonstrating the principles of BPA-1995 within political party activities and policies including achieving gender parity in governing membership and prioritisation of gender equality issues in manifestos and speeches;
- Challenging inaction and demanding progress on critical gender equality issues such as childcare provision, access to ICT, appropriate availability of healthcare provision and legalisation of protection from sexual harassment and domestic violence;
- Initiating meaningful discussion of the BPA-1995 agenda and social democratic principles of wealth sharing, social responsibility, gender equality and inclusivity at all levels of society;
- Encouraging accountability of the media and social media industries to counteract demeaning attitudes towards women and gender equality to ensure the safety of women and girls.
- Insisting that the UN’s Sustainable Development Goals are incorporated into all local and national policies and legislation with specific focus on Goal 5: Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls.

SIW reiterates its recommendation of focussing on the four priorities for women’s emancipation mentioned in its ‘Vision for Beijing+20’ publication:

1. Equality: this is not a utopia but the precondition of a fair and equal society.

2. Women's participation in political decision-making: this is the precondition for a democratic society.
3. The promotion of a culture of democracy, respect for rights, including those of women, and of tolerance: the foundations for living together in harmony.
4. The equitable distribution of income and resources between nations and between men and women, in order to overcome global, regional and local imbalances and to prevent conflict, which is generally economic in essence.

¹ www.gsma.com/mobilefordevelopment/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/GSMA_The_Mobile_Gender_Gap_Report_2018_32pp_WEBv7.pdf page 5

² www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/multimedia/2018/7/infographic-why-gender-equality-matters-to-achieving-all-17-sdgs

³ www.unhcr.org/uk/figures-at-a-glance.html