

## Making Women Count: The Beijing Process

*"Human Development, if not engendered, is endangered"*

Human Development Report 1995.

*"Poverty has a women's face – of the 1.3 billion people in poverty, 70% are women."*

*"We need a new way of thinking – in which the stereotyping of women and men gives way to a new philosophy that regards all people, irrespective of gender, as essential agents of change."* United Nations Human Development Report 1995

### Beijing+5 Process and beyond

In June 2000, five years after the **UN Fourth World Conference on Women** took place in Beijing, a UN Special Session in New York examined how women's equality had advanced since the 1995 Conference. This review process, entitled "Women 2000: Gender Equality, Development and Peace for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century", is generally referred to as **Beijing+5**.

The 1995 Beijing conference strengthened women's rights to civic and economic participation, and to education and reproductive health. These impacts are still taking effect throughout the world. Representatives from 189 countries adopted an extensive document known as the **Beijing 'Platform for Action'**, a new international commitment reflecting the goals of equality, development and peace for all women everywhere. This built on commitments made during the UN Decade for Women, 1976-1985 and during the UN global cycle of conferences in the 1990s.

The Platform identified 12 Critical Areas of Concern for women's advancement and empowerment. These are:

**Poverty; education and training; healthcare; violence against women, armed conflict inequality in economic structures and policies; power and decision-making; institutional mechanisms; human rights of women; communication systems; environment and natural resources; and the rights of the girl child.**

The Platform defines strategic objectives and spells out the actions to be taken by governments, the international community, non-governmental organisations and the private sector (WomenWatch).

### Where are we heading?

Chapter 24 Agenda 21 called for action to facilitate *"the full participation of women in sustainable development and in public life"*.

At the launch of the 1995 Human Development Report, its author Mahbub ul Haq, commented that the "relentless struggle for gender equality will go on beyond the Beijing Conference." The Report pointed out that there is no universal model of gender equality – each nation has to remove the barriers to equal rights – calling upon Beijing to mark a departure from the past by initiating a number of concrete steps for change. "Too much has already been said about gender equality. There is a time when eloquence must give way to action." Without the full involvement of women, sustainable development will not happen.

### From words to action – who's involved

*"The burden of environmental degradation and crises has always fallen and is still falling on women, especially in developing countries. Women who are in positions of influence have a special duty to represent those at the sharp end of the environmental crises."* Dr. M. Tolba, Director of UNEP, 1985 UNEP Conference.



# The Beijing Process

Briefing Sheet



Mainstreaming gender equality and development is everyone's business. It is a cross-cutting issue that has been addressed at all UN Summits and conferences in the 1990s and needs to permeate every aspect of society. It is about women's everyday lives and real transformation. We all have a role in holding our governments and decision-makers accountable in recognising the importance of women's full and equal participation.

### **The Beijing+5 process**

By comparing experiences, examining obstacles and looking at good practice, the Review process hoped to find out just how far the recommendations made at Beijing had been taken. As part of the preparatory process, the UN Division for the Advancement of Women sent out a questionnaire to governments to assess their progress on the Critical Areas of Concern. This questionnaire sought answers in three sections: Successful policies, programmes and projects; obstacles encountered; and commitments to further action/initiatives. Completed questionnaires went back to the UN (UNED 1999/2000).

Progress reports compiled by government departments used information from official sources whilst non-governmental organisations drew up their own alternative reports – the view of civil society – to ensure their views reached the UN. Various consultation methods (meetings, questionnaires, roundtables, extensive use of groups' networks etc) were used to gather comments.

The Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) was nominated as the Preparatory Committee for Beijing+5. Since 1995, each of the 12 Critical Areas of Concern has been discussed and reviewed in their meetings. The Beijing+5 review process included 3 formal PrepCom meetings. During some of the early preparatory processes, there had been good communication and collaboration between NGOs and governments, but by June 2000 a lot of the openness had evaporated. The event itself has been described as one of the most difficult UN negotiating sessions, with a sense of hostility around the process, partly due to a lack of consensus on some of the very contentious issues, and dissatisfaction over some of the material prepared by the Secretariat (UNED Forum 2000).

Over 2000 women's groups and NGOs attended Beijing+5, but not all had access to the UN. Unlike the Rio+5 review, restrictions were placed on who attended the meetings. Organisations were limited to two representatives each; NGOs were excluded from negotiations unless they were on government delegations; a minority of states held back the progress. For example, a group of 10 countries blocked progress on issues such as reproductive rights and sexual orientation. Whilst the Beijing review document is full of government reservations, some gains were made and the language is stronger than the original Platform for Action. The document now shows an awareness of the effects of globalisation on women, and the identification of rape in war is a significant development. Disappointments include the weak section on Women and the Environment (due to a lack of joined-up thinking in the Beijing and Commission for Sustainable Development processes), and the fact that governments have not been bound by any implementation targets. Many references to the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) were also removed.

The negotiated Outcomes document on the implementation of the 1995 Platform for Action was approved at the end of the session; no ten year review was written into the original Beijing process.

The work programme for the 46th session of the Commission on the Status of Women will include the items of poverty and environment.

### **Getting involved**

The Platform for Action provides the bottom line for lobbying and negotiations with decision-makers. The CEDAW, adopted in 1979 as a treaty, remains the strongest document on women's rights and governments must report every four years on progress made in implementing it. There is an Optional Protocol which gives women the right to go directly to the UN if they feel that their governments have not dealt with complaints of gender discrimination properly. Earth Summit 2002 processes need to ensure that measures to encourage women's participation are to the fore. Nationally, professional and grass-roots women and development groups will be actively working on this in the run up to 2002. Locally, policies and programmes need to ensure there is political will for creating an enabling environment, and practical support for building people's capacities to participate fully in society.

**Glossary**

**Sustainable Development:** "Development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (Brundtland Report, 1987) also "development which improves people's quality of life, within the carrying capacity of the earth's life support system." 2<sup>nd</sup> World Conservation Strategy (UNEP)

**Sustainability:** Working towards sustainability involves:

- Social development: increasing social equity
- Environmental protection: protecting and improving the environment
- Economic development: developing economic security for everyone

**Stakeholders:** Groups or organisations who have influence in a particular area of policy or are affected by policies. Agenda 21 identified 9 Major Groups: women, children and youth; indigenous peoples; NGOs; local authorities; trade unions; business and industry; science and technology, and farmers. This is not an exhaustive list; at any stage in a process there can be other specific stakeholder groups.

**Helpful links and information sources**

Beijing+5 Outcome document: [www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/followup/finaloutcome.pdf](http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/followup/finaloutcome.pdf)

Stakeholder Toolkit for Women: [www.earthsummit2002.org/toolkits/women/index.htm](http://www.earthsummit2002.org/toolkits/women/index.htm)

UNED Forum Central information resource with document downloads (UN etc), newsletters, briefing material, national reports plus links to the Road Map of how all the processes fit together: [www.earthsummit2002.org](http://www.earthsummit2002.org)

UN CSD Women's Caucus: go to [www.csdngo.org/csdngo](http://www.csdngo.org/csdngo) and click on "Women" under Major Groups.

Women's Environment and Development Organisation (WEDO): [www.wedo.org](http://www.wedo.org)

WomenWatch: [www.un.org/womenwatch/](http://www.un.org/womenwatch/)

**References**

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UNED Forum. Connections Newsletter Nov 99-January 00. [www.unedforum.org](http://www.unedforum.org)

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UNDP 1995 Human Development Report. Oxford University Press. Oxford.

Various official documentation, adapted by UNED Forum, for its web sites at [www.unedforum.org](http://www.unedforum.org) and

[www.earthsummit2002.org](http://www.earthsummit2002.org)

WomenWatch [www.un.org/womenwatch/](http://www.un.org/womenwatch/)

This short Briefing Sheet is one in a series specially prepared by UNED Forum for Life II. It aims to outline key issues covered within the topic and to act as a sign-posting service to further information sources and official documentation. Many issues are cross-cutting so we encourage you to investigate the other material available. Other sheets include:

- **Cities as Symbols of Hope: The Habitat and Istanbul+5 Process**
- **A World of Difference? The Earth Summit 2002 process**
- **Investing in the Future: Financing for Development Process**
- **Promoting Development with a Human Face: The Social Summit Process**
- **Whose Decision it is Anyway?**  
**Decision-making Processes at the national & international Level**
- **Promoting Involvement in the Search for Sustainability - We are all Stakeholders Now**
- **Resource Sheet - more Background Information and Inspiration**
- **Frequently Asked Questions**

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