



## Beijing Platform for Action and its Follow - up

Centre for Women  
UN- ESCWA

A quarterly ECW issuance aiming at raising the gender awareness and responsiveness through highlighting the gender dimensions in various fields.

### **International Efforts to Achieve Gender Equality and Women Empowerment**

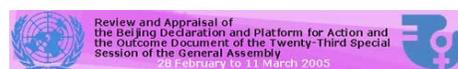
In 1975, the First World Conference on Women was held in Mexico City to remind the world that discrimination against women still persists and that women are at the core of the development agenda. Over thirty five years has passed since then but the discussion on gender equality remains vivid among the international community, governmental and civil society organisations with some successful experiences as well as increasing challenges.

The Fourth World Conference on Women was held in Beijing 1995 and marked the renewal of the international community's commitment to a unified agenda for the advancement of women through the adoption of 189 member states of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action.

Although the Beijing Platform for Action was the product of hard negotiations between the various national, regional and international stakeholders, it did represent a continuation of a process that started two decades before and provided a strong and holistic framework to transform the vision to the human rights of women and the means to ensure that gender equality and women empowerment are at the heart of the development processes.

The twelve critical areas of concern and the accompanied strategic objectives covered multifaceted socio-economic aspects and requested governments, civil society organisations and the international community to accelerate its efforts to implement the Beijing Platform for Action.

This last issue of the ESCWA Centre for Women newsletter for the biennium 2008 - 2009 is dedicated to look more closely at the Beijing Platform for Action and its follow up that is scheduled in March 2010, i.e. Beijing + 15. The sections in this newsletter, will try to frame the Beijing Platform for Action in its historical perspective, linking it to other international conferences and conventions such as the Convention for the Elimination of All forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), and highlighting major aspects of the Arab regional report on the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action.



**Forthcoming publication  
for the  
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- ▶ **Study on the Status of Women: "Means to Strengthen the Role of Women in Conflict Resolution and Peace Building"**
- ▶ **Technical Paper: "Economic and Social Situation of Palestinian Women"**
- ▶ **Study on "Protection of the Rights of Women in the ESCWA Region through the Proper Use of UN Resolutions and International Protocols on War and Armed Conflict"**

#### Highlights:

- 1- Historical Overview
- 2- Linkages between BPA, CEDAW and MDGs
- 3- ESCWA Region's Review of BPA
- 4- A Questionnaire to Measure Progress

# Beijing Platform for Action, CEDAW Convention and MDGs

*“The Platform for Action represented the beginning of a new phase in the history of international women’s movement and its attempts to influence the course of development”*

*Naila Kabeer*

It is well recognized that the Beijing Platform for Action was the most comprehensive document referring to gender equality in a constructive framework outlining the role of the governments, international community, the civil society and even the private sector in enhancing the status of women. The mission statement as outlined by the Beijing Platform for Action laid down the principles for gender equality by stating: The principle of shared power and responsibility should be established between women and men at home, in the workplace and in the wider national and international communities. Equality between women and men is a matter of human rights and a condition for social justice and is also a necessary and fundamental prerequisite for equality, development and peace. A transformed partnership based on equality between women and men is a condition for people-centered sustainable development.

The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) has also been a key milestone in international efforts to ensure women advancement and equal access to resources and development objectives.

To that extent, monitoring countries’ progress in relation to women rights as stipulated by CEDAW articles or to fulfilling the strategic objectives spelled out in the Beijing Platform for Action contributes to accelerating the progress in one particular area. Three examples on the similarities between the CEDAW convention and the Beijing Platform for Action and its strategic objectives are provided in the following table.



CEDAW Articles	Beijing Platform for Action
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Eliminate discrimination against women to ensure the same rights for men and women in employment (article 11)</li> <li>◆ Eliminate discrimination against women to ensure equal rights between men and women in education (article 10)</li> <li>◆ Eliminate discrimination in the field of health care, to ensure equality between men and women in access to health-care services, including those related to family planning (article 12.1)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Revise laws and administrative practices to ensure women’s equal rights and access to economic resources (strategic objective A.2)</li> <li>◆ Eliminate discrimination against girls in education, skills development and training (strategic objective L.4)</li> <li>◆ Increase women’s access throughout the life cycle to appropriate, affordable and quality health care, information and related services (strategic objective C.1)</li> </ul>

Similarly, in measuring progress for both CEDAW and Beijing Platform for Action, explicit referencing has been made to ensure that states reporting on progress for each of these international documents must also entail and refer to the other document.

For example, in 1996, CEDAW committee revised its guidelines and invited state parties to take the twelve areas of concern into consideration when preparing for the report and in 2002, this was further revised to ensure that the reports submitted to the CEDAW committee have clear reference to progress made in implementing the Beijing Platform for Action.

In contrast, linkages between the Beijing Platform for Action and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) are not clearly defined. Certainly, as many activists argue, gender equality is not well reflected as a cross-cutting concern for MDGs achievement and although the MDGs sets specific, time-bound targets and indicators to measure developmental progress, only two of the eight indicators have a clear reference to gender equality and women’s advancement.

An adverse impact of the shift in focus might be the marginalization of the holistic framework of the Beijing Platform for Action and the collaborative process among the various stakeholders including the civil society. This is particularly true in light of the shift in the resources mobilized to achieve international commitments.

## Millennium Development Goals



*“The MDGs must incorporate strong gender equality initiatives if they are to be successful”*

UNIFEM & GTZ (2005)

## Arab Regional Report on Beijing + 15

In October 2009 representatives from ESCWA member countries along with other Arab countries met in Beirut to discuss the Arab Regional Report on the implementation of Beijing Platform for Action + 15. The Arab regional report was based on national reports prepared by Arab countries that responded to a common questionnaire developed by United Nations regional offices and highlighted progress in achieving the twelve critical areas of concern and key challenges facing the Arab world in gender equality and the advancement of women and was later discussed and endorsed by the participants in the Fourth meeting of the Committee on Women. A set of recommendation were also developed to address the gaps and challenges hindering the implementation of the Beijing platform for Action. Some major outcomes of the report are included hereunder.

Recent years have witnessed an increase in the number of Arab states ratifying the CEDAW convention, including UAE, Oman, and Qatar. Similarly, some countries have lifted their reservation on some of CEDAW articles, particularly article 9 (2).

Many countries have made progressive steps towards changing legislation to enhance the equality of women in labor law, social security and introducing more protection to women against violence.

In the area of women and poverty, many countries have developed new policies to target marginalized groups with emphasis on poor women and female headed households.

Perhaps, women education and training remains one of the key successes for Arab countries whereby some Arab countries modified their legislation to increase the age of basic education to reach 16 years, while other countries created programs to encourage female students to enroll in non-traditional and market related specializations.

Similarly, maternal and infant health as well as access to health services have witnessed an increased attention from Arab government leading to a decrease in maternal and infant mortality rates.

More attention has been exerted to combat violence against women at the policy and programmatic level in most of the Arab countries, marking the governments' explicit interest in addressing this issue.

However, although some measures have been taken to enhance women representation in decision-making and increase women's economic activities, women presence in the political and economic arena remains limited and requires further efforts from the governments, civil society

The report also pointed out to several challenges hindering the full implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action and the relevant strategic objectives. These included: stereotypical media messages on the role of women in the society, existing gaps between legislation and social practices and the ongoing conflicts in many parts of the region.

Finally, a set of recommendations were developed to guide future actions taken by governments to address existing gaps and challenges and contribute to gender equality and the advancement of women. Most prominently, the recommendations highlighted the importance of continuing the revision of existing legislation in line with international conventions and conferences, the need to increase the knowledge and skills of judiciary and law enforcement institutions in the area of women rights and the need to consolidate the relationship between the various stakeholders (governments, the civil society and the private sector) to ensure better cooperation to fully implement the Beijing Platform of Action.



### Critical Areas of Concern

- ◆ Women and Poverty
- ◆ Women Education and Training
- ◆ Women and Health
- ◆ Violence against Women
- ◆ Women and Armed Conflicts
- ◆ Women and Economic Participation
- ◆ Women in Power and Decision-making
- ◆ Institutional Mechanisms for the Advancement of Women
- ◆ Human Rights of Women
- ◆ Women and the Media
- ◆ Women and the Environment
- ◆ The Girl-Child

## A Questionnaire to Measure Progress

To measure progress made in achieving the strategic objectives of the Beijing Platform for Action, the United Nations regional commissions (ECA, ECE, ECLAC, ESCAP, ESCWA) prepared a common questionnaire to access information from Governments on major achievements and remaining gaps and challenges in implementation at national level.

The questionnaire aimed to review and appraise progress covering the five-year period between the responses submitted by Member States to the questionnaire in 2004 and the end of 2009 and to identify achievements, gaps and challenges and provide an indication of areas where actions and initiatives are most urgent to further implementation.

The four parts of the questionnaire invite countries to reflect on overall achievements and obstacles encountering the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action; to provide concert examples on legislative change, policy development, advocacy, awareness-raising, capacity development and programs and projects undertaken to implement the critical areas of concern; to focus on institutional development put in place to support promotion of gender equality and women's empowerment; and to provide information on the remaining key challenges and constraints as well as plans for future actions and initiatives to address these challenges and ensure full implementation and accelerate implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action.

In March 2009, ESCWA held a training workshop in cooperation with the League of Arab States, UN Development Fund for Women, the Centre for Arab Women Training and Research and the Arab Women Organization to train Arab countries on how to prepare national reports based on the questionnaire and its relevant guidelines as well as how to identify major areas and developments on the national, regional and international levels and reporting on them in the national reports.



### We're on the Web!

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[www.escwa.un.org](http://www.escwa.un.org)

### About Our Organization...

The ESCWA Centre for Women was established on October 1, 2003, following the Commission's adoption of Resolution 240(XXII). This resolution, recognizing that a fundamental part of development is the empowerment of women, called for the creation of a Committee on Women comprising the member countries, and for the establishment of a women's Centre at ESCWA. The Centre continues and expands on the work carried out by the Women Empowerment and Gender Mainstreaming Team, formerly a part of the Social Development Division at ESCWA.

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