

**Report of the Expert Group Meeting on Envisioning Women's
Rights in the post-2015 Context**

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*The views expressed in this document are those of the experts and do not necessarily represent the views of the United Nations.

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INTRODUCTION

Twenty years have now passed since the Fourth World Conference on Women, which set out an expansive vision and set of commitments for achieving gender equality in the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (BPfA), adopted by 189 Member States in 1995. The identification of 12 critical areas of concern regarding women's rights, gender equality and the empowerment of women set an ambitious agenda for States. The strategic objectives and action plans in each of the critical areas of concern provided concrete agreement on the types of actions needed by States and other relevant stakeholders at national, regional and global levels.

The BPfA affirms that women's rights are human rights, and are universal, meaning that they apply to women everywhere. It recognizes that global action on the rights of women locally is a legitimate interest of the international community. It provides a framework of action that holds States accountable for addressing and prioritizing women's rights and gender equality.

The Beijing Platform for Action was a critical achievement of the women's movement, which built coalitions across geographic and thematic boundaries, bringing in influential allies, and achieving collaboration among civil society, governments, and international organizations. It was a victory for the women's movement that had long sought to make substantive gains for women's rights in the global arena.

The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), adopted a decade and a half earlier, is an international bill of rights for women's equality that defined what constitutes discrimination against women, and set up an agenda for national action to end such discrimination. The BPfA is critical for the implementation of CEDAW itself as a framework for action. The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) also establish a set of rights that State Parties must respect, protect and fulfill, and which provide for the enjoyment of these rights without discrimination on the basis of sex.

Building on previous conferences of the 1990s, women's movements brought to the fore the oppression experienced by women and girls and the need to transform institutions, both formal (e.g. States, markets, national and global governance) and informal (e.g. family, community), to achieve substantive equality for women. The critical battles won and the international agreements reached at the conferences in Mexico (1975), for the International Women's Year; Nairobi (1985), at the conference to review the UN Decade for Women; Vienna (1993), at the World Conference on Human Rights; and Cairo (1994), with the Declaration on Population and Development, cumulated, and were consolidated and developed in the Beijing Platform.

Progress in implementing the BPfA has not been as expected. Over the past 20 years, gains have been made for gender equality, but there are persistent struggles, as well as new challenges that have emerged. Much has changed since the adoption of the BPfA, including major economic and social transformations, as well as crises in global security, food and the economy. New technologies, national and transnational business enterprises, the fracturing of the nation state and the increasing dominance of the neoliberal economic paradigm are re-shaping the structures and institutions that affect women's lives. Trends such as urbanization, demographic changes, changes in family and household structures, migration, displacement and the impact of climate change are posing new challenges to women's rights as well as new possibilities for gender

equality. The rise of extremist ideology and armed non-state actors across many regions is also having a severe impact on women's rights and security.

Despite some welcome achievements, participants at the Expert Group Meeting expressed their grave concern with the lack of progress towards implementing the BPfA, and the persistent obstacles, and sometimes outright resistance, to delivering on these commitments. While the normative framework for women's rights and gender equality has been well established in the BPfA and other agreements, progress has not been made towards achieving the commitments to many areas of this framework. The vast majority of States have failed to honor the commitments made in Beijing, and there has even been regression in some areas.

Beijing +20 is therefore a time for renewed commitment for gender equality; a time to reflect on the limited progress that has been made in implementing this framework, while strengthening and reinvigorating this agenda. The BPfA crystallized normative human rights standards, which are inherent, inalienable, and universal, prioritizing an end to inequality and to discrimination. The Beijing conference proposed joint global action for equality between women and men. The original vision, centered on equality, development and peace, remains deeply relevant today.

Achieving gender equality is a multi-layered endeavor that requires a multi-dimensional perspective. On one hand, it is important to recognize the diversity of women, in race, ethnicity, age, class, disability and sexuality, amongst other factors. Differences between women need to be taken into account, especially for those women who have been marginalized or rendered invisible in policy documents in the past, including lesbian and trans women. On the other hand, it requires holistic multisectoral policies and interventions. Integrated approaches for the delivery of services (e.g. health care and justice), coordination mechanisms and long-term collaborations are needed to achieve gender equality. This entails the coordination of resources and initiatives across sectors, involving both government institutions and civil society.

Policy language on gender has tended to use binary terms (male/female), but if we are to address deep-rooted discrimination on the basis of gender, it is vital to recognize that multiple masculinities and femininities exist, as well as that relationships, structures and institutions embed patterns of gender.

Achieving gender equality now poses new challenges for States and civil society including women's movements. Solidarity with other struggles for social justice is required. Participatory mobilizations, and the networks of personal connection that support them, are vital. New forms of feminism have emerged, for example women organizing around issues of austerity or in the Arab Spring, and women engaged in online activism. International and intergenerational links are necessary, including the involvement of young women and men in conversations for change.

PROGRESS IN THE PAST 20 YEARS

Progress towards gender equality has been made over the 20 years since the Beijing Conference. The normative framework for addressing women's rights in law and policy has developed through a number of international and regional treaties, and agreements. These reaffirm the centrality of women's and girls' human rights, as well as making specific gains in domains such as violence against women, and peace and security. Special mechanisms for accountability on issues concerning women have been created nationally, regionally and globally. Most countries

have ratified the CEDAW with a few removing reservations to it. The Beijing call for an Optional Protocol to strengthen CEDAW was adopted in 2000. The CEDAW Committee and other treaty bodies have made significant advances. Special procedures dealing with women's rights have been created at the UN and regional levels. Gender-based crimes that have been recognized as crimes against humanity, such as sexual violence, were incorporated in the Rome Statute that created the International Criminal Court (1998).

A normative framework addressing women, peace and security has developed. In 2000, the landmark Resolution 1325 was adopted, which brought for the first time women's rights and gender equality into the domain of the Security Council. This resolution highlighted the necessity of women's participation, including civil society actors, in decision-making pertaining to the prevention of war, conflict resolution and all aspects of post-conflict peacebuilding, as well as ensuring that women's experiences in conflict, and their legal and physical protection, are taken into account. Since 2000, six more Security Council resolutions have been adopted that prioritize ending sexual violence in conflict, ensuring women's participation in all stages of peace processes, and the need to provide multisectoral services for women. Moreover, a Special Representative of the Secretary General on Sexual Violence during Armed Conflict has been appointed who monitors and reports on this issue to the Security Council.

Regional mechanisms have been created in the past 20 years to advance women's rights and gender equality. These include the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa (2003), and the Istanbul Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence (2011).

At the national level, changes in laws and policies to improve women's rights have been passed, especially on violence and rape, as well as other aspects of the BPfA. These standards have contributed to women's awareness of their rights, and to some social acceptance that violations against women are serious crimes. Still the gap between standards set and implementation remains a considerable challenge. Women face continuing legal discrimination in some areas, such as family law.

At the level of practice, progress – however uneven – is also seen in areas such as education, ending violence against women, and increasing women's political participation. Women are increasingly able to participate in local and national governments, and, some countries have increased women's representation, often as a result of quotas and parity laws. However, this has not necessarily led to greater substantive representation for women, or to greater legislative support in realizing women's rights and gender equality. There have been significant gains in women's literacy and girls' enrolment in formal education. In some countries, a small female advantage has emerged with more girls than boys enrolled in schools and colleges. However, in many regions there are still persistent inequalities in enrolment and retention of girls in schools, especially in rural areas and amongst poorer households.

Education has been important in improving women's access to the labour market. However, progress in the labour market in terms of gender equality is still limited. In all parts of the world, larger percentages of men than women participate in the labour market, especially in developing countries and even in places where girls' education rates are higher. In some cases, women's labour force participation has even declined, not risen. Women are still less likely than men to

find employment and among those finding employment, women are more likely than men to be found in precarious and unsafe jobs in the informal market, lacking security of employment, social security or even secure incomes. Women's educational attainment and rising participation in the labour market have not regularly translated into better conditions, prospects for promotion or equal pay for jobs of equal value. In most countries of the world, women continue to undertake the bulk of unpaid care work (e.g. for children, the elderly, the sick) limiting their economic participation and the enjoyment of several rights while often creating a double workload. Overall, despite the progress achieved, after 20 years, the great majority of women and girls continue to be trapped in poverty and are often condemned to die of preventable causes such as birth complications or respiratory infections. The lack of a comprehensive approach to gender equality has prevented women from lifting themselves out of poverty.

Social movements among women, to claim rights and resources and advance gender equality, have continued to diversify. These movements have produced a wealth of information about the intersection of gender with other social relations and divisions such as race, socioeconomic class, and migration. There have been growing demands for recognition of the diversity among women: policies concerning women should actively include those who may be poor, indigenous, immigrant, disabled, lesbian, youthful or old, as well as women of racial, ethnic and cultural minorities. Women have become more visible as leaders in labour, peasant, indigenous and land rights movements, which bring gender equality into connection with other claims for social justice.

The mobilization of women in social movements is widely recognized as the most critical factor for the adoption of gender equality policies. Evidence shows that women's autonomous organizing and activism plays a more important role than other factors, such as national wealth, in promoting positive change for women's rights. It is as a result of the mobilization by feminist organizations, coalitions and networks that some key changes have been made globally for women's human rights, including the recognition of women's rights as human rights, recognition of violence against women as a public concern, and the recognition of unpaid care work as having value and as a public good. Still, in some cases, the mobilization of women continues to be prevented or is actively repressed.

PERSISTENT AND EMERGING CHALLENGES

Selective Application of Human Rights Law and Retrogression on Gender Equality

While the past 20 years have witnessed an increase in States' legal commitment to women's rights and an increasing rhetoric around the importance of gender equality from a broad range of actors, this progress has often not translated into implementation. Paradoxically, the rhetoric of gender equality has been coupled with a rise in resistance to the implementation of the BPfA and women's human rights obligations, undermining the basic underlying principles of universality, interdependence and inalienability of human rights. At the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW), it has been noted that some countries seek to regress on women's and girls' rights, including by trying to rely on arguments based on 'national sovereignty', 'culture', 'religion' and 'tradition' to stall consensus on urgent issues such as widespread violence against women. Conservative religious and right-wing political forces are increasingly able to mobilize new forms of resistance to women's rights, in a context of even wider rhetorical support for the

principles of human rights. This failed implementation of women's rights as a universal norm reflects a gap between commitments made by States at the international and regional level, and their inability or unwillingness to implement those same commitments in the national context.

States are also often selective in their support of key human rights for women, such as sexual and reproductive rights, and are thus undermining the principles of indivisibility and interdependence of human rights. The selective approach to human rights has also been reflected within the UN system where, as a result of geopolitical dynamics, issues such as sexual and reproductive rights are held hostage in negotiations. There is a willingness to put aside certain women's rights in political negotiations to make gains on others, when human rights are, in principle, universal and indivisible. Human rights principles apply to all countries, and yet they have been used by some States in the Global North as a tool of dominance to police the Global South, for example, through selective conditionality placed on foreign aid allocations.

Issues about women's bodies, sexual rights and women's sexuality are persistently contested in debates about women's human rights. This has been an important arena for international developments in human rights law; human rights are now understood to include protections relating to sexual health and decision-making. Some of the most serious violations of sexual rights affect impoverished and marginalized groups, including women in same-sex relationships and sex workers. All people with the capacity to consent have the right to control and decide freely on matters related to sexuality, to choose their sexual partners, to choose whether or not to marry, whether or not to found and plan a family, when to have children and to decide the number and spacing of their children freely and responsibly. Establishment of such rights has not been easy. It is not acceptable when conflict over sexual rights has been used to deflect attention from other issues of gender equality.

Recent discussions of human rights have highlighted the broad diversity among women. It is important to recognize the principle that women with bodies differing from the norm, including disabled women and trans women, are covered by a mandate on women and gender equality and a commitment to ending discrimination on the basis of gender.

Since 1995, substantial shifts have taken place in the configuration of international and local actors engaged in policy formation, lobbying and advocacy for women's human rights. The terrain of contestation that was "gender equality" has become ever more complex. Powerful actors such as market institutions, including banks, philanthro-capitalists and corporations, have coopted the 'gender equality agenda' and are presenting themselves as 'investing in women and girls'. Their work often distracts from or is in direct tension with the work of transnational, regional and local feminist organizations which work within a framework of women's human rights rather than an instrumental approach of 'tapping into women's potential'. These tensions have increased with the marketization of gender expertise.

While civil society and the women's movement have been the primary engine behind progress in women's rights, there is a backlash against women's movements and restriction on civil society spaces that limits the advances that they can make. Advances are most likely to occur when social movements are involved in demanding change, and when coalitions and alliances by those working on social justice are formed to support gender equality. Alliances are needed across social sectors, between generations, and also across national borders. To this end, women's rights organizations and movements require secure funding and resources to be able to function

effectively. The implementation of the Beijing Platform will continue to be limited without dedicated funding for these groups. This is, in part, due to a lack of appropriate support for women's movements and organizations that would permit them the autonomy that is vital for their effectiveness. As well as diminishing funds for women's movements and organisations, donor funding is now more often distributed based on whether organizations can meet quantifiable targets and indicators. This leads to the selective funding of groups most able to present their work in quantitative ways – not necessarily the groups who need funding most. This also comes into tension with the fact that changes in gender equality may require more intangible qualitative measures that are not captured by quantitative indicators and targets.

Neoliberal Economic Paradigm

The neoliberal economic model, in the form of the “Washington Consensus” and structural adjustment policies, had achieved global hegemony by the time of the Beijing World Conference on Women. These neoliberal economic policies have eroded social safety nets and deepened inequalities within most countries, increasing the economic vulnerability of marginalized groups, including many women, who predominate among the world's poor. These problems were dramatized by the global financial crisis of 2007-8 and its aftermath, but have over a longer run been deepened by volatilities in food prices.

Under neoliberalism, the market is understood as the main mechanism for growth, development and social equity. However, the idea that economic growth will necessarily lead to gender equality is problematic. Research suggests that gender equality probably contributes to growth, but the reverse does not hold: the forces that lead to gender inequality are not the same forces that lead to aggregate wealth. Economies may experience economic growth without a corresponding shift towards gender equality and gender justice. Yet many debates about women's rights and gender equality fail to bring broad economic structures and the principle of economic justice for women, into focus.

To build the state capacity and accountability that are required for gender equality and social justice, it is necessary to move beyond the preoccupation with balancing national budgets, and focus on public (as well as private) investment for long-term gains. Social protection is particularly important considering women's persistent responsibility for unpaid care work. Policies of this kind are being rolled out in some countries and are proving important for women's sense of citizenship as well as for their economic empowerment. Economic policies can be informed by human rights and gender equality principles. Regular “women's budgets” are helpful for making this connection and strengthening the accountability of States to deliver on their obligations to women. It is equally important to build the capacity of workers, in all sectors of the economy, to mobilize to articulate their own needs and make their own demands on public policy.

Research has shown that women's participation in paid work often leads to increases in women's agency, and has substantial benefits for children as a result of women's tendency to invest their income in the wellbeing of their children. But research internationally has also shown a dearth of well-paid, stable and safe employment for women. One reason is shrinking public sector employment. It is a widespread experience that women face more discrimination and disrespect in private sector employment, especially when it is under-regulated. Women, and especially

young women, generally experience higher rates of unemployment than men. Where the “gender gap” in labour force participation rates seems to have narrowed, this is in some contexts due to declining participation among men. It is important to examine absolute, rather than just relative, gains for women in the economy.

States are increasingly emphasizing micro-enterprise and entrepreneurship for women as essential to empowerment. But large numbers of women can only find vulnerable and insecure work in the informal sector, or part-time work in the formal economy. When women emerge as entrepreneurs, it is often in a context of limited labour options, when they need work for sheer survival. States have a responsibility to ensure safe and decent employment for women, and to transform institutional policies that threaten or limit women’s ability to engage in paid employment. Definitions of ‘fair work’ require normative recognition of the right to organize, and agreements that include maternity and paternity leave, as well as amendment or repeal of sex discriminatory laws limiting employment, so that women have full, equal and independent access to the economic sector. Well-functioning social services and infrastructure are critical for women to be able to gain access to ‘fair work’, including childcare, but also water, sanitation, and well-functioning health systems. Decent work is also dependent on the reduction and redistribution of unpaid care work.

Inequalities are found not only between men and women, but also between different groups of women. The rising number of middle-class women employed in the formal sector has created a growing demand for domestic service, mainly informal employment for migrant or poor women, as middle-class women navigate their entry into the formal labour market while continuing to shoulder the burden of an unequal distribution of unpaid care work.

The proportion of people living in urban areas has grown significantly with more than half of the world’s people now living in cities. A large part of this increase has been in informal settlements, producing new kinds of urban spaces marked by destitution and insecurity on a vast scale. In rural contexts, women frequently have unequal ownership or limited control over land and other productive resources, keeping them vulnerable to poverty. Under the neoliberal paradigm, international flows of capital, commodities and transient labour have increased but so have many restrictions on migration. New risks have emerged for migrant women workers, who are often subjected to immigration controls and are often poorly paid, and lacking job security and safe working conditions.

Changing Nature of the State and Global Arenas

In addition to the shrinking of welfare provision by many States as a result of the neoliberal economic framework, the conditions for State action on gender equality have changed since the Beijing Conference as a result of changes in States themselves. In the 1990s, a principle of “gender mainstreaming” was widely adopted, which spread responsibility for gender equality and women’s rights more widely through public sector machinery. However, specific-purpose agencies for gender equality that had been created in the previous generation were often downgraded and sometimes abolished.

Many changes within States are associated with the dominance of the neoliberal economic framework. Many public services have been wholly or partly privatized. Public sector agencies have been widely re-designed along the lines of the profit-making corporation, with similar

management structures and priorities. In some parts of the developing world there has been a severe loss of state capacity, as a result of drastic restructuring and economic downturns. These changes affect women and girls in a number of ways: for example, women may be more likely to lose jobs, given that women are traditionally employed in certain public sector services such as health and education, and they can also face limited access to these essential services.

These trends, including the privatization of State services such as education and healthcare, have created problems of accountability, accessibility, affordability and quality, especially for the most marginalized groups. When public services and functions are outsourced to private sector or not-for-profit sector actors, it is much more complex to hold States accountable for their human rights obligations. The decline of an ethos of public service, and a general context of profit-seeking, are connected with the scale of corruption within many government apparatuses today. Public sector corruption makes it more difficult for women in grassroots movements to establish their claims, and biases the provision of services for women away from those in greatest need.

At the time of the Beijing Conference, transnational corporations were already the leading actors in economic change. The global linking of economies has continued since, with dramatic effects in the 2007-8 crisis and the slow recovery since. Transnational corporations are gendered organizations in themselves, being overwhelmingly controlled by men, while relying on and reproducing unequal conditions for women workers in the local economies they draw from (garment manufacturing being a well-known example). New problems of gender justice and accountability have thus appeared in the changing world economic system.

There is a significant challenge in ensuring the accountability of powerful actors in transnational contexts. Traditional mechanisms of accountability focused on the national state are no longer sufficient for the protection of human rights. New and improved mechanisms are required to ensure accountability in the context of a proliferation of international actors, including intergovernmental organizations, military and paramilitary forces, transnational corporations, religious organizations and other non-state actors that may operate far beyond territorial boundaries.

Women in general are not participants with equal power in political and economic decision-making, and women's interests are not adequately represented in these key arenas. There has been an increase in women's participation in national governments, parliaments and other public decision-making bodies, helped by gender quotas and parity laws, yet women remain under-represented in these fields. Men in public life (as well as corporate management) have benefited from mentors and long-established networks, while women new to decision-making positions often have difficulty in accessing informal power networks.

The accountability of States and other actors requires adequate data. It is therefore important to increase the collection of gender-disaggregated statistics, now including intersectional information about race, class, age, sexuality, and migration status. Multi-method research is increasingly regarded as state-of-the-art requirement for policy research on gender equality. Statistical reporting must systematically include measures of variation as well as measures of central tendency so as to highlight the extent of inequality; and reporting economic growth should use measures such as medians that are less affected by extreme values (i.e. disparity in income and wealth) than the usual averages in the form of means.

Extremisms, De-secularization and Militarism

The important commitments and obligations for gender equality and women's rights articulated in global and regional treaties and agreements are currently under threat from the mobilization of extremist groups, across a range of contexts. The phenomena discussed as extremisms, ultra-conservatism and fundamentalisms are varied, and are much debated. However there are evidently common characteristics, that include: belief in a stark dichotomy of moral good and bad; pressure for an attachment to one identity beyond all others; a sense that they can act with impunity; and, most importantly for this analysis, deep intolerance of plurality and women's rights. A common feature of extremist movements is resistance to gender equality and women's rights. Movements led by intolerant men have a record of limiting women's and girls' autonomy and engagement in the public sphere including to jobs and services through a mix of legislation and other coercive tactics, restricting girls access to education and women's sexual and reproductive rights as well as tolerating (if not condoning) violence against women.

Given the rise of such movements, it is important to emphasize that religions, cultures, tradition and ethnicities are not monoliths, and in fact have great diversities within them. Therefore, neither States nor other actors, including the UN, should accept the use of religious, cultural, ethnic or tradition discourses to violate women's rights, or to deny women's participation in social, cultural, economic, and political life.

The continued focus in the Global North on Muslim fundamentalism obscures the similar dangers for gender equality arising from fundamentalist movements identifying as Christian, Buddhist, Judaic or other, as well as of ethnic nationalisms. Such movements emerge first in the fringe, then gain a presence in larger communities, giving them political traction and access to funding. Twenty years ago such movements were primarily understood to be national or local: now there is a global fluidity and dynamism in the way these groups engage in politics and build alliances, both within their chosen identity-group and with other fundamentalisms. Some of them are even involved in transnational illegal activities, moving money, arms and people beyond national borders. New sections of the population, including some wealthy and educated groups, as well as the poor, have become associated with fundamentalisms for varying reasons. In many contexts where States have retreated from the provision of services, extremist groups have stepped in to fill the gap, thus gaining legitimacy. These groups are fulfilling many human rights norms by providing support to poor communities. But they also promulgate their own values and ideologies that often have a direct negative impact on women.

Many development actors, including UN organizations, promote working with mainstream religious groups, as part of efforts to combat religious fundamentalisms. In the development arena, there has been a certain shift to engaging religious leaders, organizations and religious texts. This approach poses its own problems for gender equality, as it legitimizes (reinforces) and funds "mainstream" religious organizations, which may themselves be discriminatory and opposed to women's rights, autonomy and empowerment, especially personal, sexual and reproductive rights.

Similar questions arise about strategies of legal pluralism, when courts or councils are formally or in practice authorized to apply "traditional" or "customary" values, norms and practices. The existence of multiple legal systems that include discriminatory customary and religious laws and practice has a negative impact on women. However, some constitutional frameworks that

provide for legal plurality have managed to institute a balance between gender equality and recognizing cultural and religious identities.

Issues about extremism link to issues about militarism, not only through militarized responses to some forms of extremism, but also through trends to close down civil society spaces, with gender-specific exclusions of women. The Beijing Platform for Action, supporting a women's peace movement, called for a reduction in military expenditures, noting the power of militarism to perpetuate discrimination against women. Regrettably there has been a heightened, not a reduced, focus on the armed forces of States. Militarism generally reinforces a logic of domination and constructs violent norms of masculinity. Not surprisingly, in a militarized society there is likely to be greater violence against women, including violence in the home. While the 'women, peace and security' agenda in the global system on a normative level has expanded, the peace agenda as a broader social justice and democratic agenda has not progressed. The focus on ending conflict-related sexual violence, while important, has eclipsed justice for all victims, and the diverse violations that many women and men experience in conflict, such as displacement and forced recruitment.

Discriminatory Norms and Stereotypes, and Conflict over Norms

United Nations instruments and policy documents concerned with gender equality and the rights of women – including the Beijing Platform for Action - have regularly named social norms, stereotypes, and related aspects of culture and communication as areas of critical concern. These issues have not been seen in isolation, but as integral parts of the gender order, connected with issues such as economic participation and political participation. They are part of the weave of everyday life in which gender equality or gender inequality are realized.

Social norms are part of every social interaction and institution. They can be found in the presence or absence and the normative portrayal of women and men in mass media; in education systems and curricula; in explicit statements about men and women in laws and religious teachings; in the unwritten but powerful rules about hiring and promotion in workplaces; in the everyday practices of legislatures; and in the layout of urban space. The social relations of gender are interwoven with issues of wealth and poverty, race and ethnic inequalities, disability and social inclusion or exclusion. The histories of women and girls, men and boys, differ in these different social contexts.

Discriminatory social norms and gender stereotypes continue to hold back progress towards gender equality. Practices of unequal inheritance and access to land and other productive resources limit rural women's resources and standard of living. Social norms that condone domestic violence or public harassment against women and girls hinder full participation in social, economic and political life. Such norms prevent the changes in gendered power relations that are necessary to realize substantive equality for women.

Norms embedded in labour markets continue to produce major economic inequalities and structure women's participation in the labour market. Such norms materialize as the gendered divisions of occupations; higher wages and responsibilities for men; limited (or completely absent) promotion prospects for women; and perceptions of management as necessarily masculine.

Stereotypes of women as caregivers and men as breadwinners powerfully reinforce the unequal division of unpaid housework and care responsibilities, as well as directing women's employment towards the care economy (e.g. as child care and domestic workers). Despite a generation of critique, and explicit statements in documents such as the Beijing Declaration, the domestic burden still primarily falls on the world's women.

Norms are not static, and are not automatically reproduced; they are actively produced and disseminated, and they are often actively contested. There is abundant evidence that norms are not singular and monolithic in any society; rather they are multidimensional, diverse, and sometimes clashing. There are both persistent stereotypes and norms, but also new and emerging norms. It is important to recognize that some social norms and traditions *support* gender equality. In thinking about how to change discriminatory social norms, it is important to build on traditions that support more gender equitable laws, policies and practices. It is also necessary to consider how norms work with, challenge or reproduce economic, cultural and social structures, especially those of market economies. Normative change does not come from one single strategy, but from social processes in which multiple strategies of change are being pursued, at the individual and family level, and also in social, economic, political and cultural institutions.

Gender norms and stereotypes are often reproduced through the content of education and the organization of educational institutions. Education has always been seen as a major field of action for gender equality. There have been long-term gains across the developing world in school participation for girls, literacy for women, and access to advanced levels of education. Higher levels of education have meant empowerment and agency for girls and women, and an increasing capacity to bargain in the labour market. These gains, however, have not necessarily meant change in the *content* and quality of education, or equivalent change towards gender equality in realizing benefits of education (such as access to secure employment).

There is a concern that the quality of education in many regions has been compromised in the rush to meet equality in education participation targets in the Millennium Development Goals. Many parts of education systems still have strongly marked and unequal normative systems, for instance the implicit gender rules operating in vocational education (e.g. steering young women towards hairdressing, young men towards mechanics), or in university courses such as engineering and management training. There has undoubtedly been progress in curriculum reform, for instance in reducing the stereotyped representation of women and girls in school textbooks. Yet much remains to be done in eliminating gender stereotypes and also in making educational resources and course design genuinely inclusive in gender terms.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Human Rights Law and Accountability

States must respect, protect and fulfill the human rights of all women and girls, ending discrimination on the basis of gender, recognizing the universality, indivisibility and interdependence of all rights. They should build state capacity to ensure proper programmes and policies for women's rights and gender equality. A multidimensional approach that incorporates diverse sectors of the State is necessary.

State and non-state actors, including the United Nations and other inter-governmental organizations, NGOs, transnational corporations and business enterprises, religious organizations, donors and philanthropic institutions, should be held accountable for human rights violations, whether committed within the jurisdiction of a state or extraterritorially.

States should both strengthen existing human rights institutions and develop new approaches for ensuring the accountability of a diverse set of actors to gender equality issues in international contexts. Existing transnational accountability mechanisms also require strengthening.

States must strengthen their efforts to ensure women's effective political participation, from parliaments to local governments. Quotas, parity laws and other temporary special measures to promote women's representation should be adopted more widely and configured to ensure that women are able to act autonomously, and are enabled to work effectively through capacity-reinforcement and other mechanisms.

States and other stakeholders must continue to invest in the gathering and compilation of sex-disaggregated data as well as data that is disaggregated along other axes of inequality, such as age, race, disability and sexuality. Any development of new data or statistical sources by the UN and inter-governmental organizations must also include sex and gender indicators.

States, donors, international financial institutions, and the private sectors including philanthropic institutions should make budgetary commitments to ensure that women's and girls' rights and gender equality priorities are reflected through the amendment or repeal of sex discriminatory legislation, and can be translated from law and policy statements into effective implementation in practice.

States and other stakeholders should ensure that monitoring mechanisms of women's rights are well funded and that women's organizations are involved in monitoring the implementation of women's rights instruments including the Beijing Platform. States must increase funding for their gender machineries and for applying a multi-sectoral framework to fulfill State obligations on the human rights of women.

The prevention of wars and violence and promotion of peace must be emphasized and prioritized. Conflict and violence are among the greatest threats to women's and girls' physical well being, their security, and their social, legal and political rights.

States must ensure that women enjoy the right to an effective remedy through judicial, quasi-judicial, administrative and political mechanisms in the event of actions and omissions that undermine or jeopardize their human rights. Redress mechanisms should go beyond merely legal justice.

Donor states and development organizations should ensure that any political or economic pressure to other States, including through sanctions and aid conditionalities, are in compliance with human rights obligations and should not increase the suffering of the most vulnerable groups within the targeted country. Instead, donor States should ensure the positive support that recipient States require, such as the strengthening of women's human rights advocates and protection of human rights defenders.

Women's Agency and Collective Action

States and other stakeholders should ensure sustained funding for women's movement building, especially considering that autonomous women's movements and organizations are so critical in advancing women's rights and gender equality. It is the responsibility of the State to allow space for the women's movement and for civil society.

To be inclusive of the voices of all women, including young and old, poor, rural, indigenous, disabled, trans and lesbian women and women from all ethnicities and races, the women's movement needs to be responsive to intersectional dimensions of difference.

It is necessary for women's movements to build alliances with other feminist and social justice movements and to embrace diversity. Common ground will be found in commitment to grassroots participation, human rights, democratic control, and in shared opposition to prejudice and discrimination. In the long run, broad popular support for gender equality is required and this will be built through social activism, education, communications media, and the many forums of social life.

It is important that women should not only be elected to office, but should have the resources necessary to support each other and to promote policies for gender equality, services for women, and strengthening of women's rights. Specialist gender equity units in the public sector, and experienced gender equality practitioners among civil servants, are important resources for this.

A Transformative Economy

States, intergovernmental organizations such as the United Nations, and international financial institutions such as the IMF and the World Bank should reform the national and global macroeconomic structures and systems that lead to increasing gender inequality and the perpetuation of discrimination against women and girls.

Macroeconomic policies should be subject to human rights tests, with a particular focus on the provision of the maximum available resources, the responsibility to protect and the immediate application and progressive realization of economic, social and cultural rights.

National social protection floors, comprising pensions, unemployment benefits, child allowances, and access to affordable health care, for example, should be put in place to ensure transformative social protection for the most marginalized groups of people, with specific attention to women facing poverty and precarious living conditions.

State must promote employment and income generation activities of all women including rural and migrant women and expand their access to social protections. They should take a comprehensive set of measures aimed at ensuring quality job creation, improving working conditions, equal rights at work, and to better recognise, reduce and redistribute unpaid care work.

To achieve gender equality, there is a vital need to redistribute unpaid care work between women and men and end the double burden for women. This redistribution, requiring negotiation and

action in many forums, needs to be encouraged and supported by States through public services and infrastructure, as well as through economic and labour reforms.

Pervasive Stereotypes and Norms

States should recognize the diversity of family forms and intimacy between and among women and men. All appropriate measures must be taken to ensure that women and men have equal rights and authority in household arrangements, child guardianship and custody, divorce, inheritance, domicile, taxation and social protection benefits.

States and private actors should ensure that education programmes are designed to ensure gender literacy, i.e. awareness of issues about gender norms and stereotypes, rights, and competence in dealing with them. Teacher education should be designed to familiarize future teachers with socially inclusive educational materials and teaching strategies. States agencies should take responsibility for producing safe and gender-inclusive educational environments. This responsibility extends to non-state and religious schools as well as public schools, and at all levels of education.

In order to ensure that the dominant culture of the world's societies is based on gender equality, the tendency to marginalize women's concerns and silence their voices should be overcome, obstructions impeding their equal participation in public life eliminated and their underrepresentation in the institutions and processes defining the culture of their communities surmounted. Women should be recognized as, and supported to be, equal spokespersons with men, vested with the authority to determine which of the community's norms, values, and traditions are to be respected, protected and transmitted to future generations. Measures are required to support and enhance the cultural legitimacy and symbolic validation of new tools and interpretations that enable practices harmful to women to be surmounted.

Creating societies based on gender equality requires work and thought by men as well as by women. The role of men and boys in achieving gender equality, noted in the Beijing Declaration and UN documents since, should be recognized and encouraged through action programmes, educational work and policy settings.

ANNEX I

List of Participants

EXPERTS

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ANNEX II

Programme of Work

Sunday, 2 November	
Time	Agenda Item
6:00- 9:00	<i>Dinner- Optional</i>
Monday, 3 November	
Time	Agenda item
7:00-9:00	<i>Breakfast</i>
9.00-9.30	Registration of experts
9:30 – 10.00	Briefing of experts (organization of work) and election of co-chairs of drafting committee – Closed Meeting
10:00 – 10:30	Welcome and opening of the meeting <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Begona Lasagabaster, Officer in Charge, Director, Policy Division, UN Women - Shahra Razavi, Chief, Research and Data, UN Women
10:30 – 11:00	<i>Coffee/tea break</i>
11:00 – 1:00	Panel discussion: Reinvigorating the Beijing Platform for Action in the post-2015 context <i>Panelists will reflect for 5 minutes each on how the world has changed in the last 20 years and why the vision and content Beijing Platform for Action is relevant and useful for the realization of women’s and girls’ rights in the post-2015 context</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shireen Huq • Charlotte Bunch • Teresa Valdes • Faiza Mohamed • Ayesha Imam
1:00 – 2:00	<i>Lunch</i>
2:00 – 3.30	<i>Discussion of background paper:</i> Strategies and pathways to make states more accountable for women’s rights Author presentation: Andrea Cornwall Respondents: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cecelia Sardenberg

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Magdalena Sepulveda
3.30 – 4.00	<i>Coffee break</i>
4.00 – 5:30	<p><i>Discussion of background paper:</i> Feminist responses to extremism and backlash against women’s rights Author presentation: Sanam Naraghi Anderlini</p> <p>Respondents:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mariz Tadros • Ali Miller • Janet Jakobsen
5:30 – 6:00	Wrap up and close
6:00- 9:00	<i>Dinner</i>

Tuesday, 4 November	
Time	Agenda item
7:00- 9:00	<i>Breakfast</i>
9:00 – 9:30	Summary of key points from Day 1 (Co-Chairs)
9.30-11.00	<p><i>Discussion of background paper:</i> Understanding discriminatory social norms and gender stereotypes Author presentation: Raewyn Connell and Rebecca Pearse</p> <p>Respondents:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Marai Larasi • Fareda Banda
11:00 – 11:30	<i>Coffee/tea break</i>
11.30-1.00	<p>Discussion: Transforming the economy for the realization of women’s rights</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Naila Kabeer • Dorit Posel • James Heintz
1:00 – 2:00	<i>Lunch</i>
2:00 – 3:30	Plenary brainstorm of themes for break-out discussions of recommendations
3.30-4.00	<i>Coffee/tea break</i>
4.00– 6:00	Break-out working groups on recommendations
6:00- 9:00	<i>Dinner</i>

Wednesday, 5 November	
7:00-9:00	<i>Breakfast</i>
9:00 – 11.00	Presentation and discussion of working groups on recommendations 3 groups (20 minutes each) Discussion (1 hour)
11:00 – 11:15	<i>Coffee/tea break</i>
11.15 – 1.00	Presentation of draft outline of report (Co-Chairs) Discussion
1:00 – 2:00	<i>Lunch</i>
2:00 – 3:30	Discussion and adoption of draft outline of report and key recommendations
3.30-4.00	<i>Coffee/tea break</i>
4:00 – 4:30	Closing Remarks - Co-Chairs - Begona Lasagabaster, UN Women
6:00- 9:00	<i>Dinner for those staying the night</i>