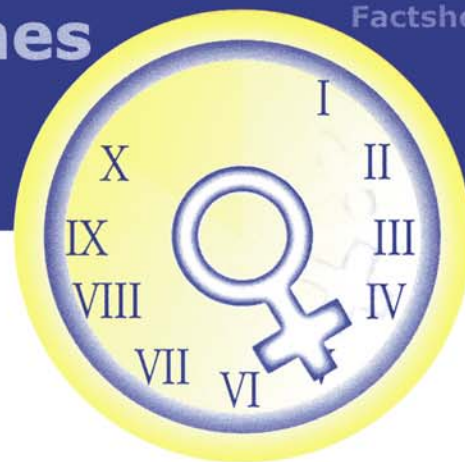


Current and Emerging Global Challenges

In 2000, the world's governments converged at New York to engage in a mid-term review process dubbed the Beijing + 5. The objective was to assess progress made in implementing the Beijing Declaration and Platform For Action (BDPFA). The general observation was that the goals and commitments made in the BDPFA had not been fully achieved and the pace had been much too slow. The New York process identified the challenges and obstacles, and proposed further actions and initiatives to overcome the barriers in order to accelerate the implementation process for the target set for gender equality by 2005 to become a reality.

The deliberations and resolutions made at New York were captured in the Beijing + 5 Outcome document, which was adopted by the United Nations (UN) General Assembly. This document provides highlights of the gaps, challenges and emergent issues as the world moves towards 2005, the next UN women's decade.

The review at New York was a critical process of stock-taking, five years into the decade of implementing the BDPFA. Progress was measured and reviewed within the context of the 12 critical areas identified at Beijing, focusing on the actions taken, results attained and also the barriers and obstacles met in the process. The observation was that although there have been significant positive developments globally, barriers remain to the full implementation of the commitments made at Beijing. Some of the challenges highlighted in the document are:



- **Globalization presents new challenges for the fulfillment of the commitments.** In most countries, especially developing ones, it has resulted in policy shifts in favour of more open trade and financial flows, privatization and lower public spending on social services. However, the benefits of this global economy have not been evenly distributed, resulting in widening of economic disparities, increased gender inequality and the feminization of poverty. Women are the first to lose jobs and education, and are squeezed out of fast-growth sectors fixing them in a vicious cycle of poverty. The gender impact of these global changes has not yet been fully and systematically evaluated. There is need for women's empowerment workshops in relation to globalization and increasingly poverty, to facilitate full understanding of the processes and issues and how they can possibly deal with the challenges.
- **Economic disparities among and within countries are increasing.** This has been precipitated by high costs of debt servicing especially for developing countries, declining terms of international trade between developed and several developing

countries and the negative consequences of Economic Structural Adjustment Programmes (ESAPs). These hardships have reduced the ability of States to provide social protection, social security and financial resources for implementation of the BDPFA. States, under pressure from international financial institutions to recover costs, have responded by shifting the cost of social security, social protection and other welfare provisions from the public sector to the household, which disproportionately affects women. This has contributed to the increasing feminization of poverty which has undermined efforts to achieve gender equality.

- **The debt burden for most developing countries is increasing.** This hinders people-centred sustainable development and poverty eradication, thus curtailing the promotion of social development and provision of basic services. This further aggravates the feminization of poverty, making women suffer more, as they take over more of the burden of care for the sick and orphans.
- **Developments in science and technology are transforming the patterns of production.** This is defining a new working order, creating new jobs and new job classifications, and contributing to the creation of a knowledge-based society. Imbalances in access to this technology have widened the gaps between the informed and the less informed and has further marginalized women in general and those in developing countries even more. There is a need to deal with the gender gaps in information and communications technology.
- **Changing patterns of migratory flows of labour.** Women and girls are increasingly becoming involved in internal, regional and international labour migration, especially in farm and domestic work, exposing them to health risks, poor working conditions, and risk of being trafficked for economic and sexual exploitation, racial and other forms of abuse and violation of their rights.
- **Lack of co-ordination and collaboration between and among gender players and governments.** This results in duplication of efforts, waste of valuable resources and general disharmony. There is need for innovative ideas and approaches to collaborate with governments, which have the primary responsibility to develop and implement policies that promote gender equality.
- **The Human Immunodeficiency Virus/Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (HIV/AIDS) pandemic.** This and other

sexually transmitted diseases and infections, especially in the developing world, and its gendered dimension are increasing the burden of care on women and orphans, with the resultant need to empower women to have more control over their sexuality. HIV/AIDS has posed both health and development concerns, where the gains that had been made in the health sector have been reversed and the economically productive age group is the worst affected in most countries. Women bear the brunt for their social role of care-giving and their reproductive role, which puts them at a greater risk of getting infected and being affected. There is need to engage in research to fully establish the link between gender violence and HIV/AIDS and seek solutions.

- **Growing problems of drug and substance abuse among young women and girls.** This puts them at a higher risk of HIV infection.

- **Increases in the number of casualties of natural disasters.** Women are more affected by natural disasters as they are the ones who do most of the care-giving and food provision for the casualties. There is therefore a need for a gender perspective to be incorporated whenever disaster prevention, mitigation and recovery strategies are being developed and implemented.
- **The context of gender relations is changing.** This is accompanied by discussions on new gender roles and unremunerated work, where most of women's work is still unremunerated.

These are some of the major emerging challenges that the Southern African Development Community (SADC) and the rest of the world are facing in their endeavors to achieve gender equality for development.

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