

Communicating for Change: Voice, Visibility and Impact for Gender Equality newsletter



Giving voice to gender equality

Accountability for Gender Equality Commitments Vital

by Inés Alberdi, Executive Director, UNIFEM



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Since 2000, gender equality and women’s rights advocates have been saying that progress on normative frameworks and agreements has been steady, but that implementation has lagged far behind.

Today, 15 years after Beijing, women are still outnumbered 4 to 1 in legislatures around the world; the proportion of women’s work in vulnerable employment is increasing

in almost all parts of the developing world, reaching 85 percent in some regions; women’s wages still lag behind those of men; and millions of women endure some form of gender-based violence, often on a daily basis.

During nearly three decades of struggle, women’s rights activists have succeeded in making violence against women a national and global human rights issue.

Special IPS TerraViva Beijing +15 – Daily IPS Coverage from CSW

On the occasion of the 54th session of the U.N. Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) in New York (1 - 12 March), an international team of journalists provided special coverage from New York through the IPS TerraViva Beijing +15 website (www.ips.org/TV/beijing15/).

The IPS TerraViva Beijing +15 included analyses of the latest developments from our team in New York, as well as gender stories from the global IPS Gender Wire.

Two printed editions of IPS TerraViva have been published and

distributed in New York during the CSW (1 March and 8 March). They are available for download at the IPS TerraViva Beijing +15 webpage.

The website also includes an archive looking back at how IPS reported from Beijing and Huairou in 1995 and the five and ten-year reviews in 2000 and 2005

The TerraViva Beijing +15 is part of the IPS programme “Communicating for Change: Getting Voice, Visibility and Impact for Gender Equality”. The IPS cast of stories includes independent

coverage financed through the Dutch Government’s MDG3 Fund: Investing in Equality, and through the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM).



Through CEDAW and other human rights instruments governments are responsible for preventing, responding to and punishing all forms of violence against women and girls, a responsibility endorsed by the UN Secretary-General's UNITE to End Violence Against Women campaign in 2008 and supported by UNIFEM's Say NO-Unite global action and advocacy platform. Security Council Resolutions 1325 and 1820 recognize the impact of war on women and call for an end to impunity for sexual violence as a tactic of conflict. Yet marital rape is still not considered a crime in many cases, particularly where control over women's sexuality is basic to widely held beliefs in male entitlement. And sexual violence in conflict has reached historic proportions.

The 'frontline' institutions responsible for protection and support are in many cases weak lines of defence. According to a 2008 multi-country survey, only a third of women experiencing male violence report their case to the police. Among those reported, less than 5 percent lead to charges and even fewer result in convictions. And women are still on the margins of peace processes, comprising less than 10 percent of negotiating delegations on average and fewer than 2 percent of peace agreement signatories.

Gender gaps on this scale indicate a serious accountability crisis.

Governments and multilateral organizations, including the UN, have a responsibility to do a better job in terms of delivering on commitments to women. UNIFEM's experience has shown that accountability mechanisms work for women when they can ask for explanations and information from decision makers, initiate investigations or get compensation. Women must be included in oversight processes, and

advancing women's rights must be a key standard against which the performance of public officials is assessed.

As efforts to accelerate progress intensify in the five years remaining for achieving the MDGs, attention is focusing on examples of what has worked. These include the stories of millions of women who expose discrimination, demand redress and have challenged the meaning of accountability. Good governance needs women's engagement – just as gender equality requires states that are accountable and capable of delivering on promises of women's rights.

But, while improving accountability to women begins with more women in decisionmaking, it cannot end there. It needs clearer performance indicators, better incentives and stronger mandates. Can the proposed gender entity make these happen?

The goal of a strengthened gender equality architecture is to provide coherent, timely support to Member States to advance gender equality, in line with national priorities and international norms and policies. Headed by an Under-Secretary-General, it would deal with problems of inadequate authority and positioning within the UN system as well as lack of resources to scale up promising initiatives; and be able to provide more systematic support to country-driven demands for

assistance. By merging the existing gender-specific entities (OSAGI, DAW, UNIFEM and INSTRAW), it will be able to bring together analysis, standard setting and programmatic work to advance gender equality and become the driver for advancing women's rights and gender mainstreaming in the UN system.

It is also designed to ensure accountability of the UN system, including through oversight, monitoring and reporting of system-wide performance, and towards this, will be charged with developing an accountability framework with goals and indicators. In order to meet this challenge it will draw on the advice, experience and expertise of the gender equality organizations and networks that have been the driving constituency for women's rights and gender equality since the First World Conference on Women in 1975, including through an advisory board to the USG.

This is a strong mandate, which will go a long way towards the accountability that is so necessary. But it can only do so if it is fully resourced. The Beijing Platform for Action called for resources to be mobilized from all sources and across all sectors for its implementation, yet the four gender-specific entities together have been consistently under-resourced, representing together only a small fraction of other UN agencies. Women's groups have been clear from the beginning that if it is to live up to its potential, the entity will need a budget of US\$1 billion, perhaps to be achieved in phases over the first few years. This is a formidable challenge – but one which I am convinced that people and governments everywhere will rise to, making it possible to realize the commitments in the Beijing Platform for Action.

(This UNIFEM opinion piece also appeared in NGLS Roundup 138).

CSW 54, According to MDG3 Networks



Opening of the 54th Commission on the Status of Women

Credit: Bomoon Lee/TerraViva

Beyond the endless queues to get registered at CSW, the exceptional networking opportunities (to which the queues also contributed), and the general feeling that after 15 years Beijing promises are far from being a reality, the 54th U.N. Commission on the Status of Women the first two weeks in March in New York was a rich and inspiring opportunity for the global women's movement.

Here are some lessons we learnt from the family of MDG3 networks and organisations in New York.

AWID's daily blog posts provided key insights from parallel and official sessions at the CSW. Like this one on the impact of the global financial crisis on women and women's rights. AWID's studies show how women's rights activists have been denouncing the underlying model leading to the crisis decades before the collapse, while proposing alternative frameworks and visions. Without being heard, evidently. Read more at www.awid.org.

As the US delegation circulated a resolution on maternal mortality at the Beijing+15 review, activists from around the globe called on governments to accompany this with strong language on sexual and reproductive rights. To know more, you can read the [daily report by GenderLinks](http://www.genderlinks.org.za/page/beijing-15) - <http://www.genderlinks.org.za/page/beijing-15>.

For more than six hours many of us listened to the testimony of 12 women who had suffered every kind of violence under the military dictatorship of Burma. A special panel of judges, including Nobel Prize winners Shirin Ebadi and Jody Williams listened to personal stories of physical abuse, but also civil and political violations, and asked the UN Security Council to implement its own resolutions on violence against women in the country. Read the IPS story 'Burmese Rape Survivors Speak Out' <http://www.ipsnews.net/news.asp?idnews=50588>. More information on the International Tribunal on Burma can be found on the Nobel Women's Initiative website <http://www.nobelwomensinitiative.org>.

Media and communication have been turned upside down since Beijing '95 and many women's rights organisations are now using social networking tools to support women whose lives are threatened, and to prevent violence against women and girls.

But "judging from the numerous observations by advocates present

at the 54th CSW as documented by the GenderIT team, it seems that the elusive Section J is still hard to pin down, whether in terms of sessions, mentions or locations," says Jac Kee of APC.

Finally, the Women's Learning Partnership (WLP) – an organization established after the Beijing Conference, 15 years ago – met on March 5 at the New School in New York to celebrate its own anniversary and discuss ways for mobilizing women's rights and eliminating violence against women.

"We work hard for the kind of world that we want to be in and that is why it is better we work in partnership with men and boys," said Mahnaz Afkhami, President of WLP to a crowded auditorium. "We believe in the power to change traditions and cultural practices that are harmful and autocratic. This is an opportunity for us to chart a new future."

You can follow the most interesting exchanges of the panel through the WLP Twitter page: twitter.com/wlp1.

The MDG3 Gender Portal provided space for women's networks to express their views and expectations directly about the meeting. Check our [News from Featured Partners](#) page to read about our global MDG3 friends in New York -- <http://www.ips.org/mdg3/Category/featured-partners/>.

We are happy to give voice to other related news you want to spot! Write to: mdg3@ips.org.



Thoraya Ahmed Obaid and Mary Robinson at the WLP event.

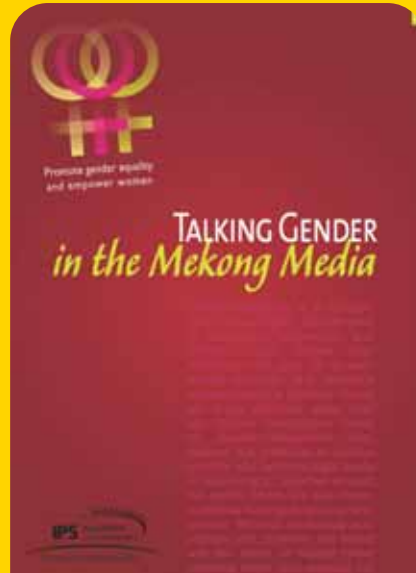
Credit Sonam Ongmo/UNFPA.

Talking Gender In The Mekong Media

BANGKOK - Do media organisations in the Mekong Region think that gender sensitivity, including giving voices to women, is part of doing better stories? How do they define it within the context of their societies and how do they report on different genders and sexuality? Do they include the use of gender-friendly language in their stylebooks and training programmes? How much is using a gender lens a news habit?

These are some of the questions asked by 'Talking Gender in the Mekong Media', a report that IPS Asia-Pacific carried out as part of the IPS network's 'Communicating for Change' project, in order to help

identify areas for future news work and capacity-building, as well some practical and professional approaches to doing these.



The 54-page report scans the media in the six Mekong countries - Cambodia, China, Laos, Myanmar, Thailand and Vietnam.

The report finds that the perceptions of what makes for gender-friendly media vary, and that the mainstreaming of gender awareness and sensitivity is far from assumed as an accepted editorial or news standard in the Mekong region.

Discussions of gender and media are also different across the region, whose countries have political and economic systems that range from socialist to military-dominated to free-market or a mix of these, and thus have different kinds and degrees of space for media.

International Women's Day



On International Women's Day, IPS talked to Iranian Nobel Prize Winner Shirin Ebadi and new UNESCO Director General Irina Bokova about their efforts to champion women.

Both were in New York, with thousands of others, to review what

progress women have made since the landmark Beijing Conference on Women, fifteen years ago.

Read or download the special 8th March newspaper and website at [IPS TerraViva Beijing +15](#) and find out if women's rights have become human rights yet.

Headlined with a story from Haiti on how women are rebuilding, IPS TerraViva relates the continuing challenges of holding governments accountable to the promises they made fifteen years ago in Beijing.

Activists reflect on the extent that the fourth World Conference on Women back in 1995 helped Chinese women to change their legal and social context, and whether Chinese investment is better or worse for African women than

Western practices.

Ending violence against women, the unequal impacts of disasters on women and men and whether there is still a chance to use the economic crisis to develop a more sustainable and equal way of doing business are some of the other stories you can read at [IPS TerraViva Beijing +15](#).

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