
The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action: a guide for women and women's groups

From the Village Council to the Negotiating Table: the international campaign to promote the role of women in peacebuilding

“From the Village Council to the Negotiation Table”

An international campaign

This campaign is addressed to, among other international bodies, the Commission for the Status of Women on the five-year review of the **Beijing Platform (Beijing +5)**.

Women’s organisations around the world are monitoring their governments and the United Nations.

They are asking the international community to fulfil their promises and implement recommendations on women and armed conflict.

“From the Village Council to the Negotiation Table: - Women Building Peace” is a campaign sponsored by over 100 organizations worldwide.

It is an attempt by women and concerned citizens to raise awareness about women’s unique contribution to peace processes.

This campaign seeks to:

- ensure that women are at the heart of the peace agenda
- promote women’s peacebuilding activities around the world
- ensure that women are included in all levels of peacemaking
- call for the implementation of pledges made to women by the international community

Campaign demands:

“Equal access and full participation of women in power structures and their full involvement in all efforts for the prevention and resolution of conflict are essential for the maintenance of peace and security”.
[Beijing Platform for Action 1995 UN]

This promise needs to be fulfilled by action. The United Nations, other international and regional organisations, and governments must:

1. Include women in peace negotiations as decision-makers
2. Put women at the heart of reconstruction and reconciliation
3. Strengthen the protection and representation of refugee and displaced women
4. End impunity for crimes committed against women and ensure redress
5. Give women and women’s organisations the support and resources they need to build peace.

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The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action

A Guide for Women and Women's Groups on Armed Conflict and Peacebuilding

This Guide to the themes of peacebuilding and conflict resolution in the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action is written to help you realise and actualise the roles for women and women's groups in peace processes and in creating positive social change.

Without positive peace, the welfare of all women is at risk. Without positive peace the human rights of women and girls are constantly being violated. Without positive peace, there can be no human-scale development, and no satisfaction of basic human needs.

This Guide will help you understand and make use of the Platform for Action.

Positive peace requires not only that all types of violence are minimal or non-existent, but also that the major potential and structural causes of future conflict are removed. For positive peace to take place, all forms of inequality, and major social divisions and exclusion of groups must be removed, or at least minimised.

The Platform for Action is an agreement between members of the United Nations. It is also a document for governments, outlining the critical concerns of women and the urgent social, economic, and political needs they have.

It makes explicit recommendations and details active steps, while identifying the responsibilities of governments and the UN. It also provides opportunities for other non-state organisations to contribute to the empowerment of women.

This Guide to the Platform is written with conflict resolution and peacebuilding in mind. The Platform analyses women's issues and challenges, identifies strategic objectives, and proposes actions that directly relate to issues of armed and violent conflict, conflict resolution and transformation, and women's roles in peacebuilding.

This is your guide to making the Platform a resource for your peacebuilding.

This Guide has several objectives:

- ⊙ To introduce the Platform for Action, and summarise what it identifies as the 12 critical areas of concern
- ⊙ To illustrate the links between the 12 critical areas and deep-rooted conflict, and make explicit the impact of violence and destructive conflict on women and women's agendas
- ⊙ To identify some of the actions proposed in the Platform for governments, international institutions, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), and civil society structures to take in order to promote and achieve peacemaking and conflict resolution, and including women's groups in that process
- ⊙ To provide you with questions, suggestions, ideas and actions that you and women's groups can use to help your governments follow through on their commitments, and help other organisations, NGOs, or interest groups do effective peacebuilding work

The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action

Beijing, China hosted the UN Fourth World Conference on Women in 1995. The three previous conferences were held in Mexico City, 1975; in Copenhagen, 1980; and in Nairobi, 1985. Each conference produced a policy document, and Beijing's was the Platform for Action.

The Mission Statement of the Platform says:

- ⊙ The Platform for Action is an agenda for women's empowerment
- ⊙ Equality between women and men is a matter of human rights
- ⊙ Equality between women and men is a condition for people-centred sustainable development

The Platform for action requires immediate and concerted action by all to create a peaceful, just, and humane world based on human rights and fundamental freedoms.

The Platform is a statement of problems and issues. If you live in a society not at peace, you will recognise how many of those problems impact your community.

The Platform tells governments and other types of organisations how to move forward with the agenda of empowering women and achieving equality, development and peace.

The 12 Critical Areas of Concern

The members of the United Nations have committed themselves to achieving the goals and objectives outlined in the Platform for Action.

In June, 2000 a special session will be held at the UN in New York to review their progress. This meeting will be known as Beijing +5 (years).

At that meeting, women will have a chance to present successes and failures from their own countries, evidence that women's issues are being advanced, and stories explaining where and why obstacles remain or progress is too slow.

The Platform identifies 12 critical areas of concern:

1. The burden of poverty on women
2. Inequalities, inadequacies, and unequal access to education and training
3. Inadequate conditions of health for many women
4. Violence against women
5. The impact of armed conflict and other deep-rooted conflicts on women
6. Inequality in all realms of economic structures and policies
7. Inequalities in all power and decision-making structures and processes
8. Insufficient mechanisms to promote the advancement of women
9. Lack of respect and inadequate protection of the human rights of women
10. Media stereotyping and inadequate access for women to communications systems
11. Gender inequalities in the management of natural resources and the environment
12. Discrimination and violation of the rights of girl children

The Link Between Armed Conflict, Violence, and the Critical Areas of Concern

Hopefully, you live in a peaceful place. But if you have lived in circumstances of armed and destructive conflict and violence, you know that conflict impacts women in your community in many ways. Some dangers and costs are obvious. Other effects of conflict are more subtle. The work you can do in conflict transformation and peacebuilding is absolutely critical to achieving the goals of the Beijing Platform for Action.

Some of the links between the critical areas of concern in the Platform and violent conflict are:

A. The welfare of women is always threatened by violence and destructive conflict. Armed conflict and violence directly impact the physical, psychological, and emotional health of women and children, leading to traumatising, disability, even death. Without positive peace, women are at risk, so peacebuilding work is fundamental to the health and welfare of women living in communities and societies suffering from deep-rooted, violent conflict.

B. The human rights of women and girls are denied by all types of destructive conflict. It is very difficult to protect human rights during modern armed conflicts. All types of individual and collective rights are violated, and the structures meant to protect women sometimes do not.

C. Economic, social and human development are all disrupted by violence and conflict. Aspects of an economy that flourish during war, including prostitution, drug use and smuggling, weapons trafficking and black markets, all have negative consequences for women. A few months or years of war can set the social

and economic development of a society back by decades.

Conflict management skills are life skills - we use them every day. Inadequate and unequal training and education in those life skills prevent women's participation and success in resolving and transforming conflicts.

Conflict transformation work seeks to reinvent economic and political power structures. The participation of women in this work is critical to achieving the goals of the Platform for Action. The Platform itself is a tool for peacebuilding.

When you think about your own welfare, rights, and human development, you are certainly aware of all the ways that armed conflict and violence threaten you and those you love.

In each of the 12 critical areas of concern in the Platform for Action, there are issues and steps that need to be taken that are specifically linked to conflict transformation and peacebuilding.

It is up to all human beings to be committed and creative in doing the work of building positive peace and transforming conflicts. Women and women's groups have a vital and indispensable role to play in this process.

THINK OF YOUR OWN COMMUNITY OR SOCIETY. CAN YOU DESCRIBE THE WAYS THAT EACH OF THESE CRITICAL CONCERNS AFFECT THE WOMEN WHERE YOU LIVE?

COULD YOU DESCRIBE THESE CRITICAL CONCERNS IN TERMS OF YOUR OWN SOCIAL ENVIRONMENT?

Critical area 1

Women and poverty

Poverty is a symptom of deep-rooted, structural conflict, and is sometimes a cause for conflicts to become violent.

The Platform states:

"...all types of conflict, displacement of people and environmental degradation have undermined the capacity of governments to meet the basic needs of their populations...women bear a disproportionate burden, attempting to manage household consumption and production under conditions of increasing scarcity...Poverty can also force women into situations in which they are vulnerable to sexual exploitation...The risk of falling into poverty is greater for women than for men."

If you live in conditions of abject poverty you are very vulnerable to suffering from violence that often comes with conflict. Sometimes people who suffer through poverty become tools for manipulation when powerful individuals and interest groups compete for political or economic advantages.

The absence of political or organised violence is not the absence of conflict. If poverty persists, there is structural conflict that should be transformed. Poverty marginalises and excludes some people. Exclusion due to economic factors is an important cause of violent conflict.

Economic and social structures can be reformed or reinvented as part of all peacebuilding and conflict transformation processes, so that those structures exist for the satisfaction of basic needs, for the eradication of poverty, for the inclusion of the poor and for the empowerment of women.

What Governments and Others should do:

The Platform calls for creating and strengthening economic policies and development strategies that address the needs and efforts of women in poverty.

- Modify macroeconomic and social policies with the full and equal participation of women
- Restructure and target the allocation of public expenditures to promote women's economic opportunities and address basic social, health, and educational needs of women
- Create social security systems, with the purpose of placing individual women and men on an equal footing at every stage of their lives
- Mobilise new and additional financial resources that are both adequate and appropriate, in such a way as to contribute to the eradication of poverty, especially for women
- Strengthen gender perspectives and integrate them into the design of lending programmes, including reconstruction and development programmes
- Mobilise all parties involved in development processes, including grass-roots and women's groups, to improve the effectiveness of anti-poverty programmes for the poorest and most disadvantaged groups of women, such as rural and indigenous women
- Engage in lobbying and establish monitoring mechanisms to ensure implementation of the recommendations on poverty eradication outlined in the Platform
- Co-operate with the government and private sectors in developing a comprehensive national strategy for improving health, education and social services so that girls and women of all ages have full access to such services

WHAT ARE THE LINKS BETWEEN POVERTY AND VIOLENT CONFLICT IN
YOUR COMMUNITY OR SOCIETY?

HOW ARE PEOPLE MADE VULNERABLE BY ONGOING CONFLICT AND
VIOLENCE WHERE YOU LIVE?

Critical area 2

Women in education and training

That women and girls often do not have equal access to effective, life-long educational opportunities is a symptom of many deep-rooted, structural conflicts. When schooling or training opportunities do exist, they can be disrupted by communal and other violence.

The Platform states:

“Education is a human right and an essential tool for achieving the goals of equality, development and peace...Literacy of women is an important key to improving health, nutrition, and education in the family and to empowering women to participate in decision-making in society...”

If women in your community are left undereducated, they are vulnerable to the same manipulations that leave those living in poverty at risk of being used for unethical, divisive, and hateful power-political agendas. Limited and unequal access to life skills training and continuing education leave women at a disadvantage when coping with interpersonal, family, organisational, and community conflicts on a daily basis.

How are limited opportunities to formal education affecting women’s roles in reconstruction? Is women’s education a priority?

Negotiation and problem-solving are life skills. We use them every day. All cultures and all communities have practices and processes for handling conflict.

Sometimes those practices or processes have been lost, or resources taken away. Sometimes cultures change.

It is through education that we learn and practice the appropriate ways to address conflicts. Therefore, women must have equal access and opportunities to learn and practice the skills of responding to both daily conflicts, and the larger, more difficult, deep-rooted conflicts that can become violent.

What Governments and Others should do:

The Platform calls for action to ensure equal access to education, to eradicate illiteracy among women, and to improve women’s access to vocational training, science and technology, and continuing education.

- Eliminate discrimination in education on the basis of gender, race, language, religion, national origin, age, disability, or any other form of discrimination
- Improve educational quality and ensure equal opportunities, so that women of all ages can acquire the knowledge, capacities, aptitudes, skills and ethical values needed to participate fully under equal conditions in the process of social, economic and political development
- Introduce and promote training in peaceful conflict resolution

ARE THERE OPPORTUNITIES IN YOUR COMMUNITY OR SOCIETY FOR WOMEN TO LEARN PEACEMAKING, CONFLICT RESOLUTION, NEGOTIATION, OR PROBLEM-SOLVING SKILLS?

CAN YOU NAME ANY RESOURCES IN YOUR COMMUNITY WHERE PEOPLE, ESPECIALLY WOMEN, CAN GET HELP RESOLVING CONFLICTS?

Critical Area 3

Women and Health

Armed conflict and structural violence are serious causes of physical, psychological, and emotional health traumas for women.

The Platform states:

“Health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity. Women’s health is determined by the social, political and economic context of their lives.”

“The prevalence among women of poverty...their experience of violence, negative attitudes towards women and girls, racial and other forms of discrimination, the limited power many women have over their sexual and reproductive lives have an adverse impact on their health.”

You can be sure that issues of reproductive rights, sexually transmitted diseases, sexual abuse and prostitution, sexual and gender-based violence, are all related to deep-rooted conflicts and are all complicated when overt political violence, conflict, or war are prevalent. There is nothing more directly connected to women’s welfare than their health.

Good health is a basic human need. Communities and societies need social structures and institutions that address the many and complex health needs of women.

Conflict transformation is the work people do to create, invent, or reform those social structures so that they address the health needs (and other basic needs), concerns, and problems of women.

What Governments and Others should do:

The Platform calls for increasing women’s access to good health care throughout their entire lives. Existing programmes that promote women’s good health need to be strengthened. Research on women’s health issues needs to be expanded.

- Design and implement, in co-operation with women and community-based organisations, gender-sensitive health programmes that address the needs of women throughout their lives, include women, especially local and indigenous women, in the identification and planning of healthcare priorities
- Provide more accessible, available and affordable primary healthcare services of high quality, including sexual and reproductive healthcare
- Ensure that all health services and workers conform to human rights and to ethical, professional and gender-sensitive standards in the delivery of women’s health services

WHAT ARE THE HEALTH PROBLEMS IN YOUR COMMUNITY OR SOCIETY THAT YOU BELIEVE ARE LINKED TO VIOLENCE AND VIOLENT CONFLICT?

WHAT EXAMPLES DO YOU KNOW OF WHERE WOMEN ARE TRAUMATISED AND THEIR HEALTH SUFFERS AS A RESULT OF CONFLICT AND VIOLENCE?

DO WOMEN HAVE ACCESS TO HEALTH SERVICES AND SUPPORT?

Critical Area 4

Women and Violence

It is through direct violence against women that their health is harmed and their human rights violated.

The Platform states:

“Violence against women is an obstacle to the achievement of the objectives of equality, development and peace...”

“In all societies...women and girls are subjected to physical, sexual and psychological abuse that cuts across lines of income, class and culture...acts of violence against women include violation of the human rights of women in situations of armed conflict, in particular murder, systematic rape, sexual slavery and forced pregnancy...”

“Violence against women is a manifestation of the historically unequal power relations between men and women, which have led to domination over and discrimination against women by men and to the prevention of women’s full advancement...”

“Women may be vulnerable to violence perpetrated by persons in positions of authority in both conflict and non-conflict situations”.

All types of violence against women, including political, criminal, domestic and sexual, are either symptoms of, or are exacerbated by deep-rooted social conflict.

You cannot participate in community life or feel free in society without a sense of personal security and safety. In many societies, security structures such as the police and military are not accountable or adequate to ensure the security for less empowered or less recognised identity groups, such as women, ethnic minorities, or members of certain social classes.

Peacebuilding requires a reform of the security forces and a commitment on their part to support women’s efforts to stop violence against women. Until there are protections for all people in a community or society, especially women, violence will persist as a symptom of conflict, it will prevent human development, and it will cause trauma.

What Governments and Others should do:

The Platform calls for integrated measures to prevent and eliminate violence against women. Research should be done on the causes and consequences of violence against women and the effectiveness of preventative measures.

- Condemn violence against women and refrain from invoking any custom, tradition or religious considerations to avoid their obligations with respect to its elimination
- Provide women who are subjected to violence with access to the mechanisms of justice and to just and effective remedies for the harm they have suffered
- Punish police, security forces or any other agents of the State who engage in acts of violence against women in the course of the performance of their duties

CAN YOU DESCRIBE THE CLEAR LINKS BETWEEN VIOLENT CONFLICT AND VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN IN YOUR COMMUNITY OR SOCIETY?

DO YOU THINK THE EXISTING RESOURCES FOR ADDRESSING VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN ARE SUFFICIENT?

WHAT DO WE NEED TO DO IN ORDER TO ENSURE VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN IN WAR IS PROPERLY TACKLED AT NATIONAL AND COMMUNITY LEVELS?

Critical Area 5

Women and armed conflict

This is the section of the Platform for Action dealing most directly with the issues of women and peacebuilding, women and conflict transformation, and women's responses to conflict.

The Platform states:

"In a world of continuing instability and violence, the implementation of co-operative approaches to peace and security is urgently needed".

"The equal access and full participation of women in power structures and their full involvement in all efforts for the prevention and resolution of conflicts are essential for the maintenance and promotion of peace and security. Women are still underrepresented in decision-making positions".

"If women are to play an equal part in securing and maintaining peace, they must be empowered politically and economically and represented adequately at all levels of decision-making."

"Women and children constitute some 80 percent of the world's millions of refugees and other displaced persons... They are threatened by deprivation of property...and deprivation of their right to return to their homes...as well as by violence and insecurity...Refugee, displaced and migrant women in most cases display strength, endurance and resourcefulness and can contribute positively to countries of resettlement or to their country of origin upon their return."

"During times of armed conflict and the collapse of communities, the role of women is crucial. They often work to preserve social order in the midst of armed and other conflicts. Women make an important but often unrecognised contribution as peace educators both in their families and in their societies... Education to foster a culture of peace that upholds justice and tolerance...is essential to attaining lasting peace...It should include elements of conflict resolution, mediation, reduction of prejudice and respect for diversity."

You have experience of the particular conflict-resolving, and reconciling roles that women and women's groups play in your own community or society. In all cultures, and in many social situations, women play a critical and sometimes the most powerful role in creating peace or advocating co-operation rather than competition.

Women must be empowered to assert themselves and own this role with respect to conflicts within social and political environments where their influence and capacities are excluded.

One framework for describing conflict resolution and transformation recognises that when social structures and institutions are dysfunctional, they do not provide for the satisfaction of basic human needs such as security, identity, development, recognition and freedom. Such institutions need to be reformed, re-invented, fundamentally changed, or newly created, so that they provide for the satisfaction of basic needs.

This is all the more critical when structural conflicts have become violent and destructive. The equal and active participation of women in all social change processes is, in itself, an act of transformation and peacebuilding.

The Platform identifies five strategic objectives for improving the situation of women threatened by armed conflict:

- 1. Increase the participation of women in conflict resolution at decision-making levels and protect women living in situations or armed conflicts*
- 2. Reduce excessive military expenditures; promote non-violent forms of conflict resolution and reduce human rights abuses in conflict situations*
- 3. Promote women's contributions to fostering a culture of peace*
- 4. Provide protection, assistance and training to refugee women, internally displaced women and others in need of international protection*
- 5. Provide assistance to women of the colonies and non-self-governing territories.*

Action to be taken by governments and others

Promote equal participation of women and equal opportunities for women to participate in all forums and peace activities at all levels.

Peacebuilding happens at different social levels, through both formal and informal structures. Some conflict resolution activities are done by diplomats and governments. There may be national peace accords, regional peace committees and local mediation centres.

Many crucial opportunities to build peace occur at the grass-roots level, where violence can be addressed as "community conflict". Women can and must play a part in all of these roles.

Integrate a gender perspective in the resolution of armed and other conflicts.

The war experiences of women are different than those of men. Women have different perspectives to offer, suffer from different risks and costs, and respond to conflict differently.

The only way to have a gender perspective integrated into conflict resolution is to have women participating at every level of every resolution and transformation process. Without this, peace processes lose their legitimacy.

Promote non-violent forms of conflict resolution and reduce the incidence of human rights abuse in conflict situations.

There are many non-violent ways to approach problem solving and conflict resolution. Even when people believe themselves to be justified in the use of violence, it is hard to control, and usually results in many abuses of human rights. Women are often the first and strongest advocates for using non-violent methods of social change.

Urge the condemnation of the systematic practice of rape and other forms of inhuman and degrading treatment of women as a deliberate instrument of war and ethnic cleansing.

Human rights laws are meant to protect women and girls from crimes committed against them during war. Women's groups must work in support of strengthening these human rights laws and instruments through lobbying, education and participation in the structures that uphold human rights conventions.

ARE WOMEN PLAYING A PEACEBUILDING ROLE IN YOUR COMMUNITY OR SOCIETY? IF SO, HOW DO THEY FULFIL THAT ROLE?

WHAT ARE WOMEN DOING TO CREATE SAFE SPACES FOR CO-OPERATION AND TO PROMOTE A CULTURE OF PEACE?

WHAT RESOURCES DO THEY NEED SO THAT THEY COULD DO MORE?

Critical Area 6

Women and the economy

Sustainable, human-centred economic development is necessary to bring women and communities out of poverty, and to support all social change activities and peacebuilding processes.

The Platform states:

“There are considerable differences in women’s and men’s access to and opportunities to exert power over economic structures in their societies.

In most parts of the world, women are virtually absent...in economic decision-making...although many women have advanced in economic structures...continuing obstacles have hindered their ability to achieve economic autonomy and to ensure sustainable livelihoods for themselves and their dependants...

In countries that are undergoing fundamental political, economic and social transformation, the skills of women, if better utilised, could constitute a major contribution to the economic life of their respective countries.”

You might think of the absence of violence as a kind of “negative” peace. “Positive” peace requires economic growth and human development that is not exploitative but rather, is sustainable.

Economic activities and structures necessarily support all efforts to transform conflict, achieve self-sufficiency or autonomy, and satisfy human needs systematically. Even in the absence of overt violence or armed conflict, failed or exploitative economies are a symptom of

structural conflict.

What Governments and Others should do:

The Platform calls for the promotion of women’s economic rights and independence. Women must have equal access to resources, employment, markets and trade. Occupational segregation and all forms of employment discrimination should be eliminated.

- Enact and enforce legislation to guarantee the rights of women and men to equal pay for equal work or work of equal value
- Take positive action to enable women to gain access to full and equal participation in the formulation of economic policies and structures
- Promote and support women’s self-employment and the development of small enterprises
- Safeguard and promote respect for basic worker’s rights, including the prohibition of forced labour and child labour.

HOW DO WOMEN PARTICIPATE IN IMPORTANT STRUCTURES, INCLUDING DECISION-MAKING STRUCTURES, IN YOUR COMMUNITY OR SOCIETY?

IS IT POSSIBLE FOR WOMEN TO BE SELF-SUFFICIENT IF THEY WANT TO BE? WHAT PREVENTS THIS?

HAVE STRATEGIES TO ADDRESS ECONOMIC PRIORITIES IN RECONSTRUCTION BEEN DEVELOPED?

ARE THEY EFFECTIVE IN ADDRESSING WOMEN’S NEEDS? WHAT WOULD YOU LIKE TO SEE DONE?

Critical Area 7

Women in power and decision making

Serious conflict can never be resolved without the participation of the parties involved. As women are involved in all deep-rooted social conflicts, they must be involved in the processes of resolution, and in all social decision-making.

The Platform states:

“Everyone has the right to take part in the Government of his/her country. The empowerment and autonomy of women and the improvement of women’s social, economic and political status is essential for a transparent and accountable government...and sustainable development in all areas of life...”

Women’s equal participation in decision-making is not only a demand for simple justice or democracy but can also be seen as a necessary condition for women’s interests to be taken into account...”

Democratic institutions sometimes act as “winner-take-all,” adversarial decision-making structures. Alternatively, they can work towards consensus, recognise and promote interdependencies, and strive for collaborative, co-operative decision-making and problem-solving strategies, including women in every process.

Organisation is a form of political power, and can be used in co-operative processes just as effectively, or more effectively, as in adversarial processes. Well organised women and women’s groups can contribute to constructive and empowering

decision-making and problem-solving, and help communities and societies avoid destructive, adversarial, divisive power-political agendas and processes.

What Governments and others should do:

- Take positive action to build a critical mass of women leaders, executives and managers in strategic decision-making positions
- Develop career advancement programmes for women of all ages that include career planning, tracking, mentoring, coaching, training and retraining
- Develop communications strategies to promote public debate on the new roles of men and women in society, and in the family

ARE WOMEN IN DECISION-MAKING ROLES? ARE THERE STRUCTURES TO GIVE THEM THE SUPPORT THEY NEED?

ARE IMPORTANT BUT DIFFICULT DECISIONS IN YOUR COMMUNITY OR SOCIETY MADE THROUGH ADVERSARIAL PROCESSES OR GENUINELY REPRESENTATIVE, CONSENSUS-BUILDING PROCESSES?

DO YOU HAVE EXAMPLES TO SHARE OF CO-OPERATIVE, “WIN-WIN” PROBLEM-SOLVING WHERE WOMEN ARE INVOLVED?

Critical Area 8

Institutional mechanisms for the advancement of women

The participation of women in all aspects of conflict resolution, of social transformation, of decision-making bodies, requires institutionalised, structural change. The roles for women, their inclusion and their legitimacy, need to be fully integrated into the legal, political, and economic systems of society.

The platform states:

“National machineries for the advancement of women...to design, promote the implementation of, execute, monitor, evaluate, advocate and mobilise support for policies...are diverse in form and uneven in their effectiveness...often marginalised in national government structures...frequently hampered by unclear mandates, lack of adequate staff, training, data and sufficient resources, and insufficient support from national political leadership.”

It is one thing to propose or promise greater opportunities and wider access to women and women’s groups, to the structures of power and the processes of social change. It is another thing to deliver on those promises.

Women must share responsibility for institutionalising the changes to social change structures and processes.

If you think of participation as a basic human need, and of conflict resolution as a process for changing social structures so that basic human needs are satisfied, then the full inclusion and integration of women into political and economic structures is a form of conflict resolution.

What Governments and Others should do:

The Platform calls for creating or strengthening national machineries and other governmental bodies, integrating gender perspectives into legislation, public policies, programmes, and projects, and generating better research and data on how public issues affect women.

- Based on a strong political commitment, create a national machinery where it does not exist, and strengthen, as appropriate, existing machineries, for the advancement of women at the highest possible levels
- Ensure that before policy decisions are taken, an analysis of their impact on women and men, respectively, is carried out
- Develop improved data on the victims and perpetrators of all forms of violence against women, such as domestic violence, sexual harassment, sexual abuse, rape, incest and the trafficking of women and girls, as well as on violence by agents of the State

WHAT MECHANISMS ARE WORKING IN YOUR COMMUNITY OR SOCIETY, THROUGH WHICH WOMEN ARE MAKING THEIR CONTRIBUTIONS AND TAKING RESPONSIBILITY FOR PEACEBUILDING, RECONCILIATION AND RECONSTRUCTION?

WHAT POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC STRUCTURES ARE NOT INTEGRATED, NOT OPEN TO WOMEN AND NOT IN COMPLIANCE WITH COMMITMENTS THAT HAVE BEEN MADE?

Critical Area 9

Human rights of women

Individual and collective human rights are at risk whenever armed conflicts rage. There are no deep-rooted social conflicts that do not threaten the protection of human rights.

The Platform states:

“Human rights and fundamental freedoms are the birthright of all human beings; their protection and promotion is the first responsibility of Governments...all human rights - civil, cultural, economic, political and social, including the right to development - are universal, indivisible, interdependent and interrelated... Governments must not only refrain from violating the human rights of all women, but must work actively to promote and protect these rights...The gap between the existence of rights and their effective enjoyment derives from a lack of commitment by Governments...”

Like all people, you have basic human rights. One function of governments is to protect these rights which include the human rights of women and girls.

The instruments, structures, and processes for protecting and promoting human rights are at the same time satisfiers of some of your basic human needs - security, identity, recognition, participation - when they function well.

A dilemma exists between human rights processes, which call for the prosecution and punishment of transgressors of human rights, and the construction of peace and reconciliation during and after war.

Sometimes it may appear that impunity for human rights abuses can be a trade-off with reconciliation. However, justice and fairness are needed for positive peace.

Women have a contribution to make in reconceptualising peace processes, especially with regard to the need for reconciliation and justice.

What Governments and Others should do:

- Review, ratify, promote and comply with the various international and regional human rights agreements, treaties and instruments
- Develop a comprehensive human rights education programme to raise awareness among women of their human rights
- Make widely available and fully publicise information on the existence of national, regional and international mechanisms for seeking redress when the human rights of women are violated
- Establish effective co-operation between human rights and humanitarian assistance organisations, taking into account the close link between massive violations of human rights, especially in the form of genocide, ethnic cleansing, systematic rape of women in war situations and refugee flows and the fact that refugee, displaced and returnee women may be subject to particular human rights abuses
- Take urgent action to combat and eliminate violence against women, which is a human rights violation, resulting from harmful traditional or customary practices, cultural prejudices and extremism
- Promote education on the human rights of women in school curricula at all levels of education and undertake public campaigns, using the most widely spoken languages in the country.

ARE HUMAN RIGHTS RESPECTED OR ABUSED IN YOUR COMMUNITY OR SOCIETY?

WHAT STRUCTURES EXIST TO PROTECT WOMEN'S HUMAN RIGHTS?
CAN YOU EXPLAIN THE WAYS AND REASONS WHY THE STRUCTURES MAY BE FAILING WOMEN IN YOUR ENVIRONMENT?

ARE WOMEN'S HUMAN RIGHTS ABUSES BEING ADDRESSED IN THE RECONSTRUCTION AFTER WAR?

Critical Area 10

Women and the media

The media shapes our views of society, our responses to conflict, and the processes of political decision-making in the age of information.

Women must have increasing access to the media as a resource and a tool, including the use of the media as a resource for peacebuilding.

The platform states

“...information technology...has an impact on public policy, private attitudes and behaviour. Everywhere the potential exists for the media to make a far greater contribution to the advancement of women...the continued projection of negative and degrading images of women...must be changed...Women should be empowered by enhancing their skills, knowledge and access to information technology.”

Just as the media plays a role in projecting negative stereotypes of women, so the media can create or distort perceptions of conflict. The media can glorify combat, while minimising the impact of war and violence on women and children. The media can also be used to spread inflammatory propaganda or distorted information.

When used properly and ethically, the media can also play a role in reducing the threat of violence, or the dangers of rumour mongering and misinformation. These are ways that women’s groups might use the media in peacebuilding work.

With creativity and transparency, the media can be included in all peacebuilding work, to promote women’s welfare, to educate people on human rights issues, to enhance human scale development and to benefit constructive social change.

Your access to political processes and structures, your participation in peace processes and conflict resolution, and your access to all forms of media and information technology go together in the empowerment agenda.

What Governments and Others should do:

The Platform calls for increasing the participation and access of women to expression in and through the media, and promoting a balanced and non-stereotyped portrayal of women in the media.

- Promote women’s full participation in the media, including management, programming, education, training and research
- Encourage and recognise women’s media networks, including electronic networks and other new technologies of communication, as a means for the dissemination of information and the exchange of views
- Encourage the use of communication systems, including new technologies, as a means of strengthening women’s participation in democratic and peacebuilding processes

WHAT TYPES OF MEDIA ARE WIDELY USED IN YOUR COMMUNITY OR SOCIETY?

WHAT ACCESS DO YOU HAVE TO THAT MEDIA?

IS YOUR ACCESSIBLE MEDIA GENERALLY USED TO INFLAME CONFLICT, OR TO REDUCE ITS DESTRUCTIVE CAPACITY?

HOW ARE WOMEN PORTRAYED?

Critical Area 11

Women and the environment

War and violent conflict often devastate the environment. The use of landmines and some types of poisonous weapons can make land unusable for farming and other economic activities. Sustainable development depends on the creation of a healthy environment for all people, including women.

The platform states:

“Human beings are at the centre of concern for sustainable development... Awareness of resource depletion, the degradation of natural systems and the dangers of polluting substances has increased markedly in the past decade. These worsening conditions are destroying fragile ecosystems and displacing communities, especially women, from productive activities and are an increasing threat to a safe and healthy environment. Poverty and environmental degradation are closely interrelated.”

Abuse and exploitation of the environment is one symptom of structural conflict. Women are extremely impacted by those conflicts where the environment is threatened or damaged, resulting in the destruction of opportunities for development and economic activity.

Human-scale development is a way of describing the result of having basic human needs satisfied.

If your security needs, including economic security, your creative needs, including employment, and your participation needs, including equal access to power, politics, and peacebuilding, are being satisfied,

then human development can flourish. When basic human needs go unsatisfied as a result of serious conflict, then human development is impossible.

What Governments and Others should do:

The Platform calls for actively involving women at all levels of environmental decision-making and integrating gender concerns and perspectives in policies and programmes for sustainable development.

- Ensure opportunities for women, including indigenous women, to participate in environmental decision-making at all levels, including as managers, designers and planners, and as implementers and evaluators of environmental projects
- Integrate rural women's traditional knowledge and practices of sustainable resource use and management in the development of environmental management and extension programmes
- Encourage consumers to use their purchasing power to promote the production of environmentally safe products and encourage investment in environmentally sound and productive agricultural, fisheries, commercial and industrial activities and technologies

HOW IS CONFLICT DAMAGING OR THREATENING THE ENVIRONMENT
IN YOUR COMMUNITY OR SOCIETY?

CAN YOU EXPLAIN THE LINKS BETWEEN VIOLENCE AND THE
ENVIRONMENT, OR BETWEEN STRUCTURAL CONFLICTS AND
ENVIRONMENTAL DAMAGE WHERE YOU LIVE?

IS DEVELOPMENT AT RISK?

Critical Area 12

The girl child

Violence and war put women at risk. Children, too, - especially girls - are impacted. In fact, girls are often the victims of direct and structural violence.

The platform states:

"...in many countries available indicators show that the girl child is discriminated against from the earliest stages of life, through her childhood and into adulthood...among other harmful attitudes and practices...female infanticide and prenatal sex selection - early marriage including child marriage, violence against women, sexual exploitation, sexual abuse, discrimination against girls in food allocation and other practices related to health and well-being. As a result, fewer girls than boys survive into adulthood."

Many of the abuses identified above are endemic to armed conflict, or made worse by structural conflict. The harm inflicted on girls will last into adulthood, and magnify the disempowering effects of destructive conflict on women.

The experiences of childhood affect our ability to participate in society as adults. Access to social powers and opportunities will always be limited for women who have had exploited or violent childhoods. If girls and all children are not protected from the consequences of destructive social conflict and violence, the equality of women will be impossible.

What Governments and Others should do:

The Platform calls for the elimination of negative cultural attitudes and practices against girls, the elimination of economic exploitation of child labour, the protection of girls at work and the eradication of violence against the girl-child.

- Develop and implement comprehensive policies, plans of action and programmes for the survival, protection, development and advancement of the girl-child to promote and protect the full enjoyment of her human rights and to ensure equal opportunities for girls
- Encourage and support, as appropriate, non-governmental organisations and community-based organisations in their efforts to promote changes in negative attitudes and practices towards girls
- Take steps so that tradition and religion and their expressions are not a basis for discrimination against girls

<p>HOW ARE GIRLS THREATENED BY VIOLENCE AND CONFLICT IN YOUR COMMUNITY OR SOCIETY?</p> <p>ARE THERE ANY STRUCTURES THAT PROTECT GIRLS FROM VIOLENCE, FROM HARMFUL CULTURAL PRACTICES OR FROM ABUSE?</p> <p>DO THEY HELP?</p>
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What can you do?

The campaign Women Building Peace: From the Village Council to the Negotiating Table is working at all levels to promote action on the part of governments in line with the recommendations made in the Beijing Platform for Action.

You, either as individuals or as groups or NGOs, also have a key role to play in ensuring that women are equal partners in peacebuilding.

What can you do?

Add your signature to the campaign postcard appeal which calls on Secretary-General Kofi Annan to promote the ideals of the campaign through greater action within the United Nations system.

You can show your support by signing either the electronic postcard, which can be obtained by visiting the women building peace campaign website on www.international-alert.org/women or signing the postcard portion attached to the leaflet, which can then be mailed back to the campaign Secretariat in London. You can also encourage others to sign the appeal.

Call for your government to implement the policies that it committed itself to during the Beijing Meeting in 1995. This guide provides a number of recommendations on what governments should be doing in order to take the key issues forward, which you can utilise.

Get involved in local advocacy activities aimed at promoting specific actions to be taken by governments on a specific policy area/s. You may want to focus on those areas that particularly affect women in your region or country and then consider engaging with key politicians, either local or national, to support and push forward the recommendations that you are making.

This would involve:

- ♦ Developing recommendations for concrete action by your government on the issue/s you decide to focus on and promote.
- ♦ Producing information for politicians and other key people that demonstrate the position of women related to the issue of most relevance to you.
- ♦ Working with other local or national organisations to create wider support and strengthen your recommendations.
- ♦ Building political support for your recommendations, for example, arranging meetings with local politicians and with your local government representatives.
- ♦ Finding out the members of your government who will be negotiating the Beijing + 5 in New York in June and sending them information you have produced, including your recommendations for action. Arrange to meet them.
- ♦ Linking up with professional bodies related to the issue that you are focusing on, e.g. health workers, lawyers, media, human rights organisations etc.
- ♦ Using key international events as a platform on which to lobby politicians.

Increase public awareness by building support through popular activities which will raise the public awareness of the role of women in peacebuilding.

This would involve:

- ♦ Organising high profile events on women in peacebuilding, with keynote speakers such as women ministers and/or key politicians.
- ♦ Arranging your own launch of the campaign Women Building Peace.
- ♦ Getting well-known personalities, such as artists, writers, religious leaders and business leaders, who can attract media and public attention, to be spokespeople for your activities.
- ♦ Organising events such as a 'signatures' ceremony to collect signatures for the appeal to Kofi Annan; a Women Building Peace campaign march; a 'Women's' day, involving local artists and writers.

- ♦ Use the CD-ROM if you are able to. Play it at key meetings and events, to other women and women's groups and at schools and universities. Invite debate on the issues surrounding women's role in peacebuilding.

Publicise your work by using all forms of the media.

This would involve:

- ♦ Meeting with journalists interested in women's peace initiatives and talk to them about writing feature articles in magazines and newspapers on the work that women are doing in your area/region/country.
- ♦ Inviting journalists to any events or meetings which you hold.
- ♦ Conducting interviews, on the radio and/or television, to publicise the issues you are advocating on and to publicise the role of women in peacebuilding in general.
- ♦ Produce a leaflet or book documenting your experiences of conflict and peacebuilding or those of other women and women's organisations.

If you would like to link up with the campaign activities of other organisations in your region, then you can get in touch with the focal points which are located around the world. Contact the Campaign Secretariat for information on this.

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Summary

The Platform for Action from the Beijing Summit is an important set of agreements, a valuable reference document for women's groups and a powerful tool for helping women empower themselves.

The objectives and actions found throughout the Platform are strongly linked to the work which women are doing in peacebuilding and conflict transformation.

The governments that have pledged their commitment to the success of the Platform for Action have promised to include women more completely and systematically in every possible aspect of conflict resolution, peacebuilding, problem-solving, education for peace, building a culture of peace and the transformation of inadequate social structures.

This Guide was written to highlight the conflict resolution and peacebuilding aspects of the Platform for Action. We hope that it will also become a resource and a tool for deepening and strengthening the work women are doing - and must do more of in the future - if we are to meet the challenges of violent and deep-rooted conflict, if we are to have safe and secure communities and societies where women's basic human needs are met and if we are to create a genuinely universal and sustainable culture of peace.