



All India Women's Conference

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ALL INDIA WOMEN'S CONFERENCE

Position Paper

On

STRENGTHENING WOMEN'S VOICES IN POST 2015 DEVELOPMENT AGENDA

The two-day consultation workshop hosted by All India Women's Conference on July 21-22 in New Delhi with support from Asia Pacific Forum on Women, Law & Development, was an attempt to create a dialogue to influence national deliberations on the Post 2015 development agenda. AIWC has been involved with UN processes since the 1940s with stalwarts like Lakshmi Menon, Vijaylakshmi Pandit, Rajkumari Amrit Kaur and Hansa Mehta being part of significant historical developments. AIWC in the past has made its presence felt in landmark meets of the Rio Conference, 1992 and Beijing Conference, 1995. These international commitments have not yet resulted in significant change, and huge gaps remain in majority of factors impeding gender equality. The demands of the present workshop resonate themes similar to the ones raised by senior activists in the movement.

Beijing Platform for Action 1995 is a historical process that brought international governments to a common platform, and sought commitments from governments within a human rights framework. It was for the first time that such an extensive consultative process was being conducted in the Eastern Hemisphere of the globe, where diversity and inclusivity were practiced within every stakeholder group. Indian feminists were also extremely active in this process and a large delegation of members from India was part of the Meet. Indian Government was also proactive and chose to make statements in the Beijing Platform on several of the goals assigned.

The era of optimism has certainly been dissipated with a number of promises and goals of the Beijing Platform of Action unmet by the Indian government. Government shifted its focus on to MDGs and this did not lead to fulfillment of the promises made under the Beijing declaration. The five main unmet promises are elaborated as follows:

- a) Maternal Mortality rate: It has reduced, however India still has not been able to reduce it to significant level. India does not report on MDG5b even now, and in issues of reproductive health, maternal mortality is the only issue being discussed.

- b) Unpaid Work: Women's unpaid work has become an important aspect with increasing talks around indirect taxation. It is necessary to bring women's issue to the centre stage of tax policy. Women are mostly confined to the informal sector, and also in labour intensive work which does not get accounted. There is no clarity around what exactly the means of implementation are in the scenario of unpaid work. There is a need to increase the range of occupations for women, which also directly affects her access to resources.
- c) Women's participation in politics: Participation at the highest levels is not being discussed. The Women's Reservation Bill is still pending in Parliament even after one and a half decades. Mostly women's political participation is being manipulated by male family members.
- d) Gender Budgeting: It is necessary for Civil Societies to be included in the post and pre budget consultations.
- e) Access to economic resources – Land ownership is still a struggle for most of the women in rural India. In spite of laws and policies encouraging women to own resources, very little percentage of women can claim ownership to land.
- f) People with disabilities, women with disabilities in particular, are still not part of the discourse and discussions.

With the proposed Sustainable Development Goals there is a sense of optimism again that governments can be held accountable and CSOs can demand renewal of commitments that were not fully met under the Beijing Platform of Action. Sustainable Development Goals are goals recommended by Open Working Group after an unprecedented scale of global consultations over 3 years with various diverse stakeholders, UN-led thematic consultations, and the report of the High Level Panel of Eminent Persons,. The final list of SDGs recommended consists of 17 goals and 169 targets. As agreed by the Open Working Group on the SDGs, the goals will aim to not only eradicate poverty and deprivation, but also assist our economies to grow, protect our environment and promote peace and good governance. The Member States have continued a full intergovernmental negotiation process since March 2015 and the final outcome document from this negotiation will form the basis of an SDG Declaration, to be endorsed by Heads of State at a Summit in September 2015.

SDG does support the call for Development Justice. The goals re-iterated are less ambitious than the international summits in the 1990s. SDGs have focused on the economic, social and environment concerns. It leaves out the political aspect of development. In its attempt to cater to all the nations, it tends to leave out the voices from the global south, especially the voices from the marginalized sections. It does not lead the discussion on changing the power relationships between south and north.

The discussion around introduction of private players in the implementation, and lessening the burden of state governments, reduction of role of state etc. raise doubts on the aspects of Development Justice. Transformative justice needs a much more comprehensive understanding of concepts, which does not get reflected in the document. There is a need to take a re-look at the development paradigm and understand the difference between development and empowerment models. It should not be used to fulfill the needs of the donors and technocrats, who are pushing for a development model, without understanding the ground realities. The current workshop by AIWC was part of a national effort to disseminate information about the SDG processes with members from different region and take a stand on some of the issues discussed over the span of the two-day workshop including issues around mechanism for implementation, development justice and interventions at this stage of the SDG processes.

Global Policies in Domestic Spaces

The effect of global policies in domestic spaces leads to conversations around the need for Civil Society members to be more alert and aware of the stand taken by the government, and hold it accountable for all the international treaties it becomes member of. Deliberations in Addis Ababa on Taxation were raised during the course of the discussion with aspects of tax evasion and economic justice taking center stage. Global policies are not getting translated into national commitment due to lack of implementation as well as lack of understanding of the local practices. Knowledge production is being conducted in the Northern Hemisphere without the Global South being able to incorporate their demands. Gender mainstreaming is an important aspect, where women's local groups are able to bring forth the issue of women's rights into the political spheres. The women's groups are able to work with national commissions, think tanks for planning commission and provide actionable points. There is a need to raise again the issue of inter-sectionality and bring it back to discussions.

Access to Education and Health

The discussion around Access to Education and Health through a gender lens emphasizes the lack of conceptual understanding of these services by the state which results in poor implementation of the policies. Gender as a component is generally being relegated to a chapter in the educational modules, without incorporating its essence in the overall curriculum, which fails the purpose. Budget allocated for education is getting reduced, and most of the recently introduced programmes are quick fix solutions. There is a need to assess the meaning of education and quality education being imparted at school level. The realities of women and the health services solutions are offered in the form of schemes without assessment of the needs of women. Private sector is promoted and women are being pushed to using private services which are expensive. The MDG goals are only being modified to suit the needs of the government without being implemented in a full and effective manner.

Investment in Gender Equality

The gender budgeting aspect in investment is missed out in most of the national programmes. Each year, ministries are asked to submit requests for allocation for gender; however it does not get allocated in the final budget. Even if there is money allocated, it is not getting translated into budgetary commitments and administrative processes. The patriarchal set up and institutions with an absence of gender sensitization lead to wastage of resources and futile allocation of resources. The recent cuts in the budget for Ministry of Women and Child, and closure of Integrated Child Development Scheme indicate a trend. Various states were not willing to commit funds on issues of women post decentralization by the central government. At an international level, the recent meeting at Addis Ababa was focused mainly on international financial flows and resource mobilization without including the gender element. It was modeled on a business analogy where women were being seen as the instruments towards reaching the goals of development. There has not been sufficient evidence to support that PPP model helps gender equality. An analysis of gender budget allocation was presented where India's spending on SDGs were less than 28 % of the GDP. This is far less in comparison to countries in BRICSAAM. There is also not enough institutional support to implement schemes. The 14th Finance Commission has increased state's shares, and provides them increased autonomy, which also means more burden on states to provide more resources. It seems like gender budgeting is in contest with decentralization, which is doing harm for gender budgeting.

Women's Access to resources

At the ground level, the realities and schemes are not in consonance with each other. The range of occupation for women is limited which also affects their access to resources. In cases of women's participation in politics, they are still being used by men for their own benefits. However it is observed that if women participated in politics, women focus on services and larger socio-economic issues, which results in holistic development. There is a need to focus on the skill development of women, and also on capital resources. It is important to remember the caste and class analysis while discussing access to resources in the Indian context. There is an emphasis laid on focusing on media as well, as it is media which is projecting the results of the schemes and plans. There is a need to sensitize media as well on issues of gender budgeting. Mr. S.P. Singh, a Scientist from Pusa Institute of Agriculture, New Delhi, discussed the use of ergonomics in the field of agriculture and how farming equipments were being made keeping in mind the women farmers who use these equipments. As a solution, it is observed that activities like community farming should be encouraged as it catered to the economic rights of women, looked after the health aspects and even pushed for environmentally sustainable plans.

Accountability Architecture

The focus needs to be on the future steps to be taken by the CSOs and different level of engagement required by them. There are some goals important in the context of India which needs to be pushed. Global Partnership is required to implement SDGs. India has to imbibe the principles of Human Rights, just governance, gender transformative and gender inclusive

pathways. The focus on inclusion of youth in this process of SDGs discussion also plays an important role. The role of youth in the recent global movements brought them at the center stage of development. Were the concerns of youth raised and shared in SDGs? Issues of unemployment, access to health services and changing economic scenarios affects the youth in the harshest manner. It is necessary to include youth based perspectives and solutions in assessing SDGs and include youth in future discussions around SDGs and development of indicators, as priorities of youth affects the long term implementations of various plans.

Recommendations that emerged out of the two days Consultative process:

- a) Government needs to appoint a nodal agency that is responsible for implementation of SDGs and future review processes. With SDGs, one of the most common difficulty is the lack of accountability at the central level, as there is no specific ministry assigned for implementation of the SDGs. The Planning Commission, in the past, was responsible for planning and implementation of the proposed SDGs, however, the current status of 'Niti Aayog' in India is still unclear. .
- b) GOI need to allocate specific budget to facilitate the SDG implementation process, particularly incorporating gender element in the proposed budget. There also needs to be a stricter mechanism to monitor the way gender budget is being processed and implemented under these goals.
- c) It is important to increase the share of allocation in the budgets on issues of health and education. Gender budgeting needs to be located in the fiscal policy. We also need to push for spending in women centric institutions. Ministry of Women and Child and Ministry of Finance needs to come together and take the responsibility of Gender Resource Budget, and work together.
- d) Government needs to renew its Beijing commitments and layout its concerns and voice them at international portals.
- e) UN Statistical Commissions' list of indicators for assessing SDG goals and targets would be out by September, 2015. Government needs to start an inclusive process to develop alternative list of indicators to assess SDG goals and invite Civil Society Members to be part of it and submit a report by March, 2016. For example, indicators can be developed around women in rural India owning lands as collectives, and promoting organic farming.

- f) Civil Society needs to work with Ministry of Finance to develop Monitoring and Evaluation tools for assessment. CSO should push for government to come up with roadmap for a Gender Resource Budgeting for the next 10 years.
- g) Every SDG has corresponding local laws and policies. Government needs to identify the 17 goals and try to match them with the local legislations, and use the local tools and language to implement these goals. It is necessary that Government disseminates information around these international commitments with the citizens of the country.
- h) We seek for accountability by the government to commit to some actionable goals. Government needs to prioritize on specific goals and need to commit to these goals. The accountability towards these goals cannot be only at international level, it needs to be assessed even at the local levels. There is a need to strengthen the means of implementation in case of SDGs at the national level.
- i) Government needs to focus on intersectional issues, and emphasis on development justice, by employing a cross cutting approach to various issues. Role of Public in the PPP model needs to be spelled out clearly and there needs to be an outline for CSOs to hold State accountable.
- j) Government needs to work with UN bodies and bring back the UN practice of holding yearly and theme based meetings with stakeholders of the South Asian region.
- k) CSOs need to work with the government to create awareness about changing stereotype mindsets through equal access to education, health care and occupation. This would lead to greater and transformative gender equality and gender equality will not remain 'just a slogan'.
- l) Gender disaggregated data to be maintained by government and disseminated in relation to women's ownership of property and resources.
- m) In agricultural field, where women are working in large numbers but are still passive workers, use of farm equipment by women is to be encouraged through application of the principles of Ergonomics.
- n) There should be equal pay for equal work and equal voice at work and trade unions to be provided with a collective bargaining capability.

- o) We recommend rights over resources and tools of resource generation should be the same for both the sexes.
- p) We recommend that women should be able to own assets and government should provide schemes for such provisions. This should also be reflected in the data collection around resource ownership
- q) Women should get land in women's names and banks should formulate schemes to provide loans to women on low interest rates.
- r) States with the new found autonomy, need to also be allocated with more funds, which would help them develop better mechanisms for implementation of the programmes.

AIWC believes that a better informed Civil Society with a better mechanism for monitoring would lead to effective implementation of SDG goals in the coming 15 years. Commitment from the Indian government on some of the goals is essential to take on issues like poverty and inequality. AIWC aims to be part of this process of change with equal support and co-operation from the government.