

UK Women: Rights & Progress

Beijing + 20



Beijing + 15

Beijing + 10



Beijing + 5



Executive Summary
NGO Review and Report
Produced by Members of the
UK NGO CSW Alliance
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UK Women: Rights and Progress Beijing + 20: Executive Summary

Progress over 20 years

Since 1995, the greatest change has been the exponential growth of the internet and all forms of mobile communication. To positive effect, inexpensive communication infrastructures have been developed, and social media has permitted unprecedented levels of political engagement and participation. However, this technology has also led to misuse, including the online harassment and abuse of women and girls, and has provided new mediums for the sale and coercion of human beings and the invasion of privacy.

In the 20 years since Beijing, the world has seen a series of internal and inter-state conflicts, leading to mass displacement of people, especially women and children, economic turbulence, deepening religious fundamentalism and heightened terrorism. These events have in turn offered opportunities for powerful interests to develop global trade in small arms, drugs and human trafficking. Women in particular are trafficked for sexual exploitation, and demand is fuelled by increasingly dehumanising and violent pornography, readily accessible to all. Modern slavery occurs on a domestic, as well as international scale; we want to see problems '*over there*' understood as part of *our* problem.

The three 'women's conferences' preceding Beijing had already paved the way for a thorough understanding of women's inequality and experience of discrimination at every level. We congratulate the governments of the interim period since 1995 on the range of legal and policy steps taken to strengthen women's rights and position, and welcome more recent achievements cited in the UK Government review. Until the global recession of 2008, these initiatives made a positive impact on women's economic position, however the advent of austerity, cuts to benefits and services, and the weakening of equalities legislation, have disproportionately affected women and rolled back progress.

Women globally share the burden of gender inequality, hence we seek consistency from the UK Government between its domestic and overseas policy. It is critically important that the post-2015 agenda is transformative and universal, and given the impetus to end with a rights-based approach, we urge the Government not to relax its support for women's rights, and in particular for sexual health and reproductive rights to be at the centre of the new agenda.

Key Recommendations

Overall:

- Strongly support rights-based work of the Government overseas and their commitment to pursue this approach in the post-2015 agenda. Recommend the same resources employed overseas be applied domestically within the UK to invest in a culture which rejects all forms of misogyny and sexism.
- The UK Government and those in Scotland and Wales developed welcome equalities strategies. In Northern Ireland, the strategy was gender neutral and insufficient. The training of officials on gender equality practice is required.

- Further resources and high priority be given to the prevention of all forms of VAWG. Taking the excellent *This is ABUSE* campaign into schools would be a useful step.
- Programmes to increase employment by changes in flexible working and parental leave, the provision of affordable quality childcare, and appointment of Women's Business Council are all important measures. However, the utility of employment is limited on low pay, zero hour contracts.
- Efforts to increase the representation of women in decision making positions has been met with limited success. The overall goal of 25% is too low; we recommend the goal be raised to at least 40% and 'temporary special measures' like quotas, be applied.
- Legislation permitting political parties to employ women-only short lists for nominations for candidates will expire in 2015, unless the Government continues the period to 2030. We encourage the extension of such powers to devolved administrations.

We recommend:

- A more coherent and integrated approach to the whole arena of gender inequality. To include commitments to use 'temporary special measures', as proposed by CEDAW, and positive action.
- Greater engagement with civil society and resources for women's organisations to involve women of all ages and girls in all their diversity in developing policy and setting agendas for engagement with governments.
- Ensuring that women's organisations are pro-actively funded and commissioned to provide expert services overall and in specific areas of VAWG and healthcare.
- Strengthening the key departments working on gender equality, including the Government Equalities Office.
- In relation to the increasing poverty of women and children, who are unfairly and disproportionately impacted by austerity measures, the application of routine and careful gender impact assessments including gender budgeting, with regular reviews of the impact of policies which cut spending and public services, and of raising taxes.
- In order to provide the necessary data, strengthening the disaggregation of statistics to inform the complex analysis needed for gendered policies across the ranges of age, marital status, family form, socio-economic status, ethnicity, sexuality, religion and belief.
- In relation to rural women, respective governments should require broadband services to be installed to minimise isolation and increase access to learning, while enabling access to paperless systems and communications. Governments should subsidise transport to enable integration, and to improve access for emergency and health services.
- In relation to a culture that increasingly sexualises both women and children and permits easy access to pornographic images which degrade women:
 - Make PSHE education compulsory in all schools, with strong emphasis on understanding gender inequality, the meaning of consent, and modern technologies.

- Make it a requirement that all technologies profiting from the use of porn be sold with access to such sites switched *off*.
- Given the links between the porn industry and the trafficking of women and girls for sexual exploitation, both domestically and across borders, we note that most women's organisations working in the field of VAWG strongly support the 'Nordic Model'. This model penalises the buyers and those that profit from the sale of women's bodies, and decriminalises and supports those involved in prostitution.
- In relation to an ageing population, part of a demographic global shift, which has not been mentioned in the Government's report, we ask that the contribution of older women to problem solving and to the whole society is recognised while problems they face are addressed. The BPFA explicitly refers to the needs and concerns of older women and CEDAW has a special recommendation on this group. Issues of gendered violence against older women, mental health issues specific to older women, and the economic considerations of this group including; pensions, capital assets and the effect of sustained lower income than men over their lifetimes, must be acknowledged, further researched and policies implemented to address them.

Critical Areas of Concern

Area A: Women and Poverty: Gendered analysis of poverty and welfare reforms must be embedded in policy making. The impact of fiscal policy on women must be accounted for and regular equality impact assessments should be undertaken to ensure that the most disadvantaged are not additionally burdened by cuts to public services and benefits. Measures to alleviate poverty should be taken and barriers to women's entry to the labour market should be removed, including through public funding of child care and retraining opportunities following periods out of employment.

Area B: Education and Training of Women: Teaching about gender equality, VAWG, international human and women's rights and the Beijing Platform for Action, should form part of the core curriculum in schools and in teacher training. Access to English language lessons for migrant women, which constitutes an obstacle to further training and employment, should be provided. Measures should be taken to counter the gendered options offered to women, particularly regarding vocational training options and school and tertiary education subjects.

Area C: Women and Health: Ensure that women-only services and spaces are lawful and supported. Support and resource training programmes for agencies to build trust and provide services for minority women. Within Northern Ireland: lead change to grant fundamental rights to reproductive health; abortion should be legalised. Across the UK, non-custodial sentences should be utilised where possible, including diverting women out of the criminal justice system to services that provide them with health services and support for rehabilitation.

Area D: Violence Against Women: Ratify and implement the Istanbul Convention. Require local authorities to preserve funding for refuges and Rape Crisis Centres; increase the Rape Support Fund. Meet the need for training and education of

professionals. Reverse cuts to legal aid and provide relief from the overly stringent requirements of proof of abuse for victims of violence. Access to justice is vital, and independent non-statutory services must be recognised as an essential part of the State's response to VAWG. This is particularly important while women lack trust in the criminal justice system.

Area E: Women and Armed Conflict: Implement UN SCR 1325, ensuring women's involvement in peace-building, the maintenance of peace and political representation. Build a database to ensure qualified women are known, listed and appointed. Implement and report on aspects of the UK National Action Plan.

Area F: Women and the Economy: Undertake a gender equality impact assessment of public funding cuts, and gendered assessment of economic strategy. Proactively address the gender pay gap. Take measures to redress the unequal division of labour – both paid and unpaid – and to account for women's unpaid work. Invest in national systems of child care. Address barriers to accessing justice for discriminatory dismissals and abuse, including tribunal fees and limited time bars.

Area G: Women in Power and Decision-Making: Implement programmes which help a diverse range of women into political office. Maintain legislation allowing political parties to take positive action on gender equality. Introduce time-bound targets of 40% with regard to women on public bodies.

Area H: Institutional Mechanisms for the Advancement of Women: Implement gender mainstreaming across all government departments according to clear definitions in the BPFA. Undertake training of all officials, raise awareness and understanding of continuing gender inequality. Ensure differences across devolved nations are understood and resource women and their organisations in developing an architecture for working cohesively across an emerging quasi-federal constitutional settlement in the UK. Ensure the Government's gender machinery is properly resourced.

Area I: Human Rights of Women: Recognise human rights of all women including refugee and asylum women, who were omitted from the UK Government review. Urge the UK to bring in guidelines/practice direction for immigration judges dealing with gender issues. Apply the International Protocol on preventing sexual violence in conflict to women seeking asylum, including training for interviewers on trauma and sexual violence. UK Government must ensure vital rights and mechanisms in HRA remain part of UK law.

Area J: Women and the Media: Implement recommendations made by women's organisations to the Leveson Inquiry, including: effective regulation of the press and, a code in line with equalities legislation and international obligations, including strong rules on sexism and gender discrimination. Develop journalistic guidelines recommendations. Ensure greater representation of women in all aspects of media production and representation, if necessary by temporary special measures and positive action. Develop a strong programme to change damaging social norms and stereotypes.

Area K: Women and the Environment: Support research to understand the gender differential impacts of climate change. Continue to invest in the education and training of girls and women in STEM subjects to provide necessary expertise to engage at every level in environmental policies. Provide funding for women's entrepreneurial work in green tech.

Area L: The Girl Child: Serious investment in destroying the misogyny and objectification of the girl child through a fundamental culture change. Establish mechanisms at Government level to include voices of girls in policy development. We are concerned about the rise of "revenge porn", in which explicit images are published without the permission of the subject, which are usually young women. Teach children about gender inequality and sexual consent in schools, including revenge porn, to counteract pervasive sexism. Pass specific legislation to criminalise all parties who share such images without reasonably believing consent has been obtained. Professionals providing services, or pursuing criminal convictions, must be trained and supported to engage with the families as well as the girls and young women subject to forced marriage or FGM with sensitivity, whilst insisting on maintaining a gendered perspective.

Produced by: Members of the UK NGO CSW Alliance

Special thanks to: Megan Brady-Clark, Dr. Annette Lawson and Janet Veitch

For the full report, please see:

<http://www.nawo.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2011/12/Feb-2015-CSW-Alliance-Beijing-+20-Report.pdf>

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