

Beijing at ten

achieving gender equality, development and peace

Story Ideas

A wide range of issues relating to women's empowerment and gender equality will be discussed as part of the Beijing Review and Appraisal. Here are some examples of story ideas and references for further information.

Girls' Education: **a fundamental human right**

In his address to the Millennium Assembly in 2000, UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan pointed out that there can be no lasting poverty reduction or sustainable development until girls around the world have access to education. Only through acquiring the skills they need can women become equal partners in development and advance in achievement. Recognizing this, Governments agreed that universal primary education should be one of the Millennium Development Goals.

Discrimination and poverty continue to be the most important barriers to girls' attending and finishing school. Often, girls' time and energy are required at home or they must work outside the home to supplement family income. If a family can afford to send only one child to school, the opportunity will usually be offered to a son rather than a daughter, since boys are considered a more secure long-term investment.

Girls who possess at least a primary education tend to marry later, have fewer children and are more likely to protect themselves against HIV/AIDS and other diseases.

Through a variety of international partnerships and goals, such as the *Dakar Goals* and the *World Fit For Children Goals*, UNICEF is working towards increasing girls' enrolment in primary and secondary school. The World Bank supports projects such as the *Girl-Friendly School Initiative* and the *Girls' Scholarship Trust Fund* in the Gambia and encourages Governments to invest more in girls' education. The UN Relief Agency for Palestine refugees (UNRWA) has had full gender equity in its education programmes in the Middle East since the 1960s.

While many countries are on track to achieve universal primary education, there is still significant progress to be made in the area of secondary education and beyond.

Did you know?

- Of the 150 million children aged 6-11 not in school, over 90 million are girls.
- In sub-Saharan Africa, less than 60 per cent of girls go to school (female gross primary enrolment).
- Two thirds of the world's 875 million illiterate adults are women.

For further information:

www.unicef.org/girlseducation | www.undp.org | www.un.org/unrwa/programmes | www.un.org/womenwatch | www.worldbank.org | portal.unesco.org/education

Equal Land and Property Rights: **an ongoing challenge**

There is widespread cultural resistance in many countries to equal land and property rights for women. While women widely enjoy civil and political rights, family and marital rights—including the right to own and inherit property—are often neglected. Traditions and practices that discriminate against women often violate statutory national law designed to protect women's rights. In many societies, land and assets are registered in the name of male heads of household. As a consequence, women depend on their husbands and family relations for access to property, housing and inheritance. They are vulnerable to landlessness and extreme poverty, particularly after a divorce or their husband's death. According to the UN Special Rapporteur on Adequate Housing, "a separated or divorced woman with no land, assets or family to care for her often ends up in urban slums."

The UN Human Settlements Programme (*UN-HABITAT*), together with various Governments and partner organizations, is working to ensure women's universal access to land, housing and property rights. *UN-HABITAT's Global Campaign for Secure Tenure* is a prime example of this effort. The World Bank is providing women with land use and ownership rights through support to such programmes as the *Laos Land Titling Project* and other initiatives.

The devastating impact on women of laws and customs that deny them the right to own and inherit land, housing and property was highlighted in the recent report of the *UN Millennium Project*, which included among its recommendations an urgent call for the promotion of women's land and property rights.

Did you know?

- About one third of the world's women are homeless or live in inadequate dwellings, such as slums.
- Women only own about 2 per cent of all land, but produce on average half of the food that is grown.
- Most domestic violence against women goes unreported because victims do not have access to shelter apart from the marital home.

For further information:

www.fao.org | www.unhabitat.org | www.unifem.org | www.worldbank.org | www.unmillenniumproject.org

Women, Water and Sanitation: making a vital connection

The recent tsunami disaster in the Indian Ocean drew the world's attention once again to the importance of gender issues in water resource management and sanitation. In the areas hit, women and children continue to be the worst affected by lack of access to proper sanitation and safe water resources. Both the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) have called for increased gender awareness in approaches to disaster relief, recognizing the special needs and contributions of women in water management.

International milestones, such as the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation and Millennium Declaration, recognize the critical role that women play in water management and how they can contribute to protecting the environment and to reducing poverty. In developing countries, women are primarily responsible for providing water to their families and communities and need reliable supplies of water to manage food preparation, care of domestic animals, crop irrigation, personal hygiene, household cleaning and waste disposal. Due to inadequate access to safe water resources, women often are forced to travel great distances each day to fetch water, using time and energy that could be spent more productively. Moreover, studies show that women and children are especially susceptible to disease caused by a lack of safe water and adequate sanitation.

Improved access to freshwater and sanitation is key not only to reducing poverty but also to achieving the Millennium targets for health, including reducing maternal and child mortality and combating HIV/AIDS, malaria and other major diseases.

Did you know?

- It has been calculated that in South Africa alone, women collectively walk the equivalent distance of 16 times to the moon and back every day gathering water for their families.
- In India, it is estimated that the national cost of women fetching water is 150 million woman work days per year, equivalent to a national loss of income of 10 billion rupees (approximately US\$208 million).
- Every 15 seconds, a child dies as a result of diseases related to unsafe drinking water and inadequate sanitation.

For further information:

www.fao.org | www.undp.org | www.unhabitat.org/programmes/water | www.unifem.org/files/confirmed/2/351_at_a_glance_water_rights.pdf | www.who.int/water_sanitation_health | www.unesco.org/water

To learn more about women working to protect their neighbourhoods and environment and building grassroots leadership, read about New Yorker Lyn Pile and the women who came together in Beijing in 1995. Visit UN Works website www.un.org/works and go to Women Work

To learn more about women changing perceptions about HIV/AIDS, read Pakistani journalist Tasneem Ahmar's story on how she is using the media to break stereotypes. Visit UN Works website www.un.org/works and go to Women Work.

Women and HIV/AIDS: the feminization of a pandemic

Since HIV/AIDS entered the public consciousness some 20 years ago, in some countries it has continued to be perceived as a problem confined to men who have sex with men and intravenous drug users. Today, however, the AIDS epidemic is affecting women and girls in increasing numbers. In most regions, an increasing proportion of people living with HIV are women and girls and that proportion is continuing to grow, particularly in Eastern Europe, Asia and Latin America. In sub-Saharan Africa, women and girls make up over 57 per cent of adults living with HIV.

The HIV/AIDS threat to women mainly feeds on cultural and economic discrimination. Women are physically more prone to infection from HIV and other sexually transmitted infections, and they are less autonomous in decision-making concerning sexual relations and reproduction. They can be forced into unprotected intercourse by their husbands or partners. Indeed, in some countries, marriage has become a high risk factor for becoming infected with HIV.

Moreover, economically disadvantaged women are often compelled to use sex as a commodity in exchange for food, shelter, school fees and other basic necessities. Women in high-prevalence areas face the additional burden of caring for family members and neighbours who are sick with AIDS, rendering their workloads untenable.

The UN and its global partners are promoting a gender-sensitive approach to the fight against HIV/AIDS as an integral part of efforts to achieve the Millennium Development Goals for gender equality, health and the eradication of extreme poverty and hunger. The *Global Coalition on Women and AIDS*, an initiative of the Joint UN Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS), is leading a campaign that focuses on seven action areas. These pertain to the particular vulnerabilities and needs of women and include HIV-prevention and education, ensuring property rights for women and girls, and providing them with equal access to care and treatment.

Did you know?

- In one study in Zambia, fewer than 25 per cent of the women surveyed felt that a wife could refuse sex with her husband (even if she knew he had had multiple partners) and only 11 per cent believed a wife had a right to ask her husband to use a condom.
- Worldwide, only 12 per cent of people who want to be tested for HIV are able to do so.
- In Somalia, only 26 per cent of young women surveyed had heard of HIV and only 2 per cent knew how to avoid infection.

For further information:

womenandaids.unaids.org | www.undp.org/hiv | www.unifem.org | www.unesco.org/aids | www.unesco.org/women/aids | www.ibe.unesco.org/hivaids | hivaidsclearinghouse.unesco.org

Women and the Peace Process: building bridges, not walls

The plight of women and girls in armed conflict around the world has received increasing public attention in recent years with documented reports of systematic violence, including rape, torture, sexual humiliation and mutilation, as well as vulnerability to displacement and trafficking.

Yet women are also playing a significant role in resolving conflict and building peace. As described by UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan in an address to the Security Council, “women have proven instrumental in building bridges rather than walls.”

For example, the recently-signed peace agreement ending civil war in the Sudan marked a milestone in the efforts of Sudanese women to put an end to the fighting. Over the years, the women of the Sudan worked together through organizations such as *Sudanese Women's Empowerment for Peace*, *Sudanese Women in Nairobi* and *Sudanese Voices for Peace*. Overcoming tribal and ethnic divisions, they pooled their efforts to successfully negotiate peace between the Sudan People's Liberation Movement and the government in Khartoum.

Despite their active roles in peace movements, women continue to be involved mostly at the grassroots level. Culturally-rooted gender discrimination often excludes them from being consulted in formal peace negotiations, and their concerns and interests are often overlooked in political processes or institutional arrangements. To confront this, the United Nations and its partner agencies support women's participation in all stages of the peace-building and nation-building process, and are actively engaged in strategic partnerships with regional and intergovernmental organizations to ensure that gender concerns are integrated into peace efforts.

Did you know?

- In 2001, at the height of the Liberian crisis, the *Mano River Women's Peace Network* brought women from Liberia, Guinea and Sierra Leone to successfully open up communication among warring factions and restore diplomatic relations. The group was awarded the *UN Prize for Human Rights* in 2003.
- During World War I, nearly 1,200 women from warring and neutral countries came together to protest the war and founded the *Women's International League for Peace and Freedom* (WILPF), which continues to lobby for change today.
- In 2000, the UN Security Council unanimously adopted resolution 1325 recognizing the importance of involving women in negotiating peace agreements, planning refugee camps and peace-keeping operations, and reconstructing war-torn societies.

For further information:

www.un.org/womenwatch/osagi/faces | www.unifem.org | www.womenwarpeace.org | www.unesco.org/shs/gender

To learn more about women's involvement in peace-building efforts, read about the inspiring work being done by women's rights activist Ruth Ojiambo Ocheing and her organization in Uganda. Visit UNWorks website www.un.org/works and go to Women Work.

To learn more about how microloans are improving women's lives, read about Padma Sivaprakasam and Working Women's Forum activities in Tamil Nadu, India. Visit UN Works website www.un.org/works and go to Women Work.

Economic Empowerment for Women: accessing microfinance

How do you ensure empowerment when the reality is poverty? Women globally have been playing a central role in the battle against poverty, and in many parts of the world, microcredit is the tool they are using. Speaking about microfinance at the launch of the *International Year of Microcredit 2005*, UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan said: “[Microfinance] is recognition that poor people are the solution, not the problem. It is a way to build on their ideas, energy and vision.”

Microfinance, including credit, savings and other services, is not charity but a means of providing poor women with the resources and tools they need to improve their lives. It is increasingly recognized that giving female small-scale entrepreneurs access to credit is often the best way to increase household income and improve health and food security. Traditional social models that limit women's opportunities and economic control are gradually being replaced by approaches that recognize their ability to lift themselves and their families out of poverty.

The UN and its agencies, funds and programmes are building international support for making microfinance services available to women worldwide. The UN Capital Development Fund (UNCDF) provides funding, technical and policy guidance to governments and other UN agencies, such as the UN Development Programme. The innovative Grameen Bank in Bangladesh was supported by UNICEF from its earliest days, while the World Bank supports *Grameen Village Phone*, a mobile phone service run mostly by women. The International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) has been providing microcredit loans for more than two decades and UNRWA, the UN agency for Palestine refugees, is running a highly successful microcredit programme for women.

Did you know?

- In Africa, women account for more than 60 per cent of the rural labour force and contribute up to 80 per cent of food production, yet receive less than 10 per cent of credit provided to farmers.
- It is estimated that, worldwide, there are 13 million microcredit borrowers, with US\$ 7 billion in outstanding loans, generating repayment rates of 97 per cent. Microcredit has been growing at a rate of 30 per cent annually.
- Microfinance programs report that women clients play greater decision-making roles in their families and communities. A programme in Nepal found that 68 per cent of its members were now making decisions on family planning, their daughters' education, property and children's marriages.

For further information:

www.yearofmicrocredit.org | www.ifad.org/ruralfinance | www.un.org/unrwa/programmes/mmp/index.html | www.uncdf.org | www.unicef.org/credit | www.worldbank.org

Women and Maternal Mortality: the untold tragedy

Most developing countries will fail to meet the Millennium Goal of reducing maternal mortality by three quarters within the next 10 years, according to a recent report of the *UN Millennium Project*. The report criticizes the lack of commitment to fight a situation that threatens the lives of millions of women, terming the worldwide ratio of maternal deaths per live births (430 per 100,000) shockingly high. Maternal mortality rates continue to soar in sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia, where only 50 per cent of women have access to obstetric services. Even fewer women deliver in a hospital. For women who live in poverty, their low social status, culturally-defined roles and vulnerability to violence can aggravate the problem of pregnancy-related ill-health and death. Young women who become pregnant very young, who give birth many times, or who are malnourished or anemic are more likely to die.

Maternal mortality and morbidity not only affect mothers, but have a devastating impact on husbands, families and entire communities. Newborns are less likely to survive without their mothers. Older children, especially girls, often are forced to drop out of school to take care of the family. In other words, maternal mortality impedes the achievement of other Millennium Development Goals, such as the reduction of child mortality, the empowerment of women and universal access to primary education.

Governments and UN agencies are carrying out reproductive health programmes aimed at reducing maternal mortality in about 90 countries. The current focus is on equitable access for all women to high-quality care that includes skilled care at birth as well as access to emergency obstetric services. Of equal importance is protection of women's reproductive rights and access to family planning.

Did you know?

- The risk of an African woman dying from complications related to pregnancy or childbirth is 1 in 16, compared to 1 in 4,000 in industrialized countries.
- A million or more children are left motherless each year as a result of maternal mortality. These children are 3 to 10 times more likely to die within two years than children who live with their mothers.
- Every minute, a woman dies from complications in pregnancy or childbirth, a toll of 1,400 women each day or 529,000 each year. Most of those deaths (99 per cent) occur in developing countries.

For further information:

www.undp.org | www.unfpa.org/mothers/index.htm | www.un.org/unrwa/programmes | www.who.int/reproductive-health/MNBH | www.un.org/womenwatch



Women and Trafficking: searching for a better life

Human trafficking has now become the third largest criminal enterprise worldwide after illegal drug and arms sales, according to a recent report issued jointly by several UN and other agencies. It generates an estimated US\$9.5 billion each year for traffickers and their accomplices.

The root causes of trafficking lie in the demand for cheap labour in affluent countries and the desire for those in poverty to find alternatives for themselves and their families. Lured by the prospect of a better life, women and girls are led into domestic service, low-paid sweatshop industries, street begging and commercial sex work. Restrictive immigration laws and a lack of legal and economic resources make them easy prey for traffickers.

Until now, human trafficking has been viewed as an issue of national security or illegal immigration. The victims of trafficking are often criminalized as law-breakers or illegal aliens, and deported with no regard for the crimes and abuse they have suffered. The report calls upon the international community to change its perspective on the issue, stating: "human trafficking is first and foremost a violation of human rights."

Did you know?

- Ninety per cent of foreign migrant sex workers in the Balkan countries are victims of trafficking.
- According to the UN Office for Drug Control and Crime Prevention, at least 700,000 persons, mostly women and children, are trafficked each year across international borders, with some human rights organizations estimating much higher numbers.
- Girls as young as 13, mainly from Asia and Eastern Europe, are trafficked as "mail-order brides."

For further information:

www.unfpa.org/gender/trafficking.htm | www.unhchr.ch/women/trafficking.pdf | www.unodc.org/unodc/en/trafficking_human_beings.html | www.iom.int | www.unesco.org/shs/humantrafficking | www.unescobkk.org/culture/trafficking

* The report "Trafficking in Human Beings in Southeastern Europe" was issued by the UN Children's Fund (*UNICEF*), the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (*UNOHCHR*) and the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (*ODIHR*) of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (*OSCE*).

