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**Priorities in follow-up to the ten-year review and appraisal of
implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action**

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* The views expressed in this paper are those of the author and do not necessarily represent those of the United Nations.

Priorities in the Follow-up to the ten-year review and appraisal of implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action

This paper has been prepared by Meagen Baldwin, Executive Director, WIDE (Network Women in Development) for presentation at the UN Expert Consultation on 'Priorities in follow-up to the ten-year review and appraisal of implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action', New York, 31 October to 3 November, 2005. This paper draws on WIDE's work and experience as a European network of development NGOs, gender specialists and human rights activists.

Background

The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women is the most important international agreement concerning women's human rights. In essence, all states who have ratified the convention or who have acceded to it have committed themselves to its implementation and, accordingly, to the transformation of their national legislation.

The Beijing Platform for Action, the document agreed by world governments at the Fourth World Conference on Women, is a comprehensive and courageous outline of strategic steps to be taken in order to concretise and enhance the goals of CEDAW. Although it is not, of its nature, a legally binding document, consisting of policy commitments rather than legal obligations, it is, nonetheless, a significant statement of principle, and has great symbolic value. Many of the signatory states saw in it guidelines for the worldwide advancement of women into the 21st century and stressed its historical importance. This is due not only to the extraordinary media coverage of the conference and the intensive character of the negotiations, but also to the fact that a large number of countries made concrete commitments in the field of women's policies to be implemented "after Beijing".

This year's session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) from 28 February to 11 March 2005 was dedicated to the agenda items 'Beijing+10 Review' and 'Current challenges and forward looking strategies for the advancement and empowerment of women and girls'. The signatory states of the Beijing Declaration and the Platform for Action, the documents agreed at the 4th World Conference on Women held in 1995 in Beijing, used the CSW to take a closer look at the implementation of these historic strategic documents for the empowerment of women all over the world. At the same event participants – albeit very cursorily - focused on remaining challenges and future strategies.

The political Declaration, agreed by consensus without any reservations, reaffirms the Beijing agreements and underlines that keeping the promises made at Beijing are necessary for meeting all internationally agreed development goals, including the Millennium Development Goals. In addition to the Political Declaration, 10 resolutions were submitted for approval by the 45 member states of the CSW.

The European Context

In May 2004 ten new countries joined the European Union and four more countries are now sufficiently advanced in the negotiations to be classed as candidate countries. Further back in the

queue are the countries now known as the EU 'new neighbours' – those countries in the Western Balkans and the Former Soviet Union. In this changing Europe, among the shared values the EU wants its new and future members and its neighbours to foment are democracy, respect for human rights and the rule of law. But do these values include gender equality? Legally member and accession states must have (or put in place) appropriate legislation that addresses issues around gender and equality and so for accession and new member countries, membership has inspired improved legislation in this area. However, there is still a considerable gap between policy and practice, and there is a policy coherence issue whereby the mandated economic reforms undermine progress for women in other areas.

Membership of the European Union and the accession process requires countries to undertake tough economic and social reforms, the burden of which is born by mostly women (witness the impact of privatisation of public services in the new member countries; the reduction in support to social services; the changing profile of labour markets etc); once members, access to funding for civil society organisations and new member governments change, and while they are still eligible for (reduced) funding as EU members, they are not differentiated in anyway from other EU members despite their greater needs (and this in countries where civil society is a relatively new concept and not sufficiently developed to survive a reduction in support and governments are unlikely to fill the gaps); and the changing borders create artificial dividing lines between 'new' and 'old' and between 'EU' and its 'non-EU' neighbours - these divisions promote exclusion and not inclusion. Of particular concern are the growing inequalities associated with the neo-liberal globalisation policies, and more specifically the specific abuses of human rights to which women are vulnerable in the context of the growth of the non-formal economy in Europe, the increase in illegal migration, trafficking of women and children and the growing fragmentation of old and new Europe.

Outside of Europe the European Union pushes forward with a strong neo-liberal agenda which promotes free trade, economic globalisation and market liberalisation – the result of which has led to deep inequalities, the feminisation of employment, intensified exploitation of women's unpaid work in the caring economy and has undermined the livelihood strategies of poor rural and urban women. There is no policy coherence between EU 'development' policies and its 'trade' policies though the EU, like many countries now, links development and trade. And even where good policies are in place, there is a gap between the policy and practice.

Whether looking at the state of play for gender internally within the EU or externally at the EU's policies with its Southern partners or its neighbours, it is increasingly becoming obvious that issues that are important to women and policies that impact on women, are relevant to women in the global North and the global South: the negative impacts of globalisation are as relevant within Europe as they are outside of Europe; internal European economic policies impact on Southern women; and external European trade policies can negatively affect poor women in the South and in European neighbouring countries; 'development' issues as we traditionally understand them, are European issues

In terms of priorities for the follow-up to Beijing+10 it is difficult to say that one issue is more important than another. The discussion of the following issues should not imply that issues not discussed here are not important. However, this paper focuses on:

- Making the inter-linkages between Beijing +10, the MDGs and the WTO: as the MDG process dominates the UN and governments agendas and as the achievement of the BPfA is critical to achieving the MDGs, we need to ensure that the BPfA is not overwhelmed by or lost to the MDGs. But we also need to ensure that other linkages are made – particularly (but not only) to the 6th WTO Ministerial meeting in Hong Kong. We need recognition that ‘trade’ and ‘macroeconomics’ are issues that impact on women, they are not gender neutral and that to really have a chance of moving ahead with a pro-poor development agenda requires policy coherence between the development and the trade agendas. The 6th WTO Ministerial needs to become what it was meant to be, that is a ‘development’ round.
- The political context in which we are operating – because of the difficulties of negotiating with the US government and its allies of the day, the women’s movement is, in a sense, ‘holding the line’. We need to think how we can instead, move forward for women.
- The politics of women’s issues: Sexual and reproductive health and rights has had several partial victories recently: in the Beijing+10 review meeting where progressive women’s organisations and donors were able to apply sufficient pressure on conservative governments to ensure the reaffirmation of the Beijing Platform for Action and also at the Millennium Summit where the goal of universal access to reproductive health was included in the expanded gender equality goal. While these are victories in and of themselves (although they would have been bigger victories if sexual rights had been included within the MDGs), their victories take greater weight given the ‘political’ importance that conservative governments (particularly the US) give to them. Winning these political battles is important for women and for the women’s movement – and so we need to explore how to be better at playing politics and how to play it for our own ends.
- Gender-mainstreaming: As Gender equality and equity are the goals of gender mainstreaming, and as they are also the prerequisites for sustainable development, poverty reduction and peace and democracy, it is important that we hold onto gender mainstreaming as a strategy. It is also important, because, despite the difficulties of implementation, the lack of understanding of what it actually means and the lack of real commitment by many governments, we have still gone a long way in this area and we need to push forward. Many governments have taken on board gender-mainstreaming, even if in a limited and often token way. We now know much more about why it hasn’t worked and know (or think we know) what we need to do to make it work So we should persist and reinvigorate gender mainstreaming as a strategy to achieve women’s equality.

Issues of Priority for Follow-Up

Beijing + 10, the MDGs and the 6th WTO Ministerial and ...

The Beijing Platform for Action takes into account deep inequalities within and across countries. However, it is being undermined by the dominance of the MDG process within the UN system. This is a cause for concern given that the MDGs ignore the structural nature of poverty as well as the structural nature of gender inequality. While the Millennium Summit ensured that women’s rights issues were not casualties of the political games that were played, and indeed goal #3 on gender equality was expanded to include some critical issues (particularly on violence and reproductive health), it still maintained a narrow and minimalist focus and did not address or integrate many of the concerns raised by women’s groups from around the world. Indeed, the

lack of ‘mainstreaming’ of gender within the MDGs poignantly highlights the difficulties of mainstreaming as a strategy.

For the vision of the Beijing Platform for Action and indeed the vision (not the outcome) of the Millennium Summit to be achieved, we need to find ways to ensure that women’s rights are respected, women’s voices are heard, that women are a part of decision-making and that women are included in all the discussions that impact on their lives, including the ‘economic’ and ‘trade’ discussions. And so we need to be making the linkages between not only Beijing +10 and the MDGs but also between these and the 6th WTO Ministerial meeting scheduled for Hong Kong in December, 2005.

All WTO issues are critical for women and men’s human rights, employment, livelihoods, and entitlements and they are critical for governments’ sovereignty as they increasingly reduce the right of nations to regulate in the public interest and force governments to move away from spending on social services and limit the ability of governments to manage economic and social policy to meet their development needs. This is particularly important as we see the growing inequalities associated with neo-liberal globalisation and exploitation. There should be a concern about the many ways in which neo-liberalism, including the promotion of a ‘free’ trade regime, economic globalisation and market liberalisation has led to deep inequalities. It has led to the feminisation of employment, intensified exploitation of women’s unpaid work in the caring economy and has undermined the livelihood strategies of poor rural and urban women, including migrant women, disabled and displaced women in all areas of the world.

The increasing impact of such policies on the lives and livelihoods of women is compounded in countries of the South by the structural inequalities between North and South and within the North and within the South. If policies are assumed to be gender neutral, they can reproduce or even worsen inequality – it is women that pick up the adjustment costs of unfair trade policy. We need to call on Governments to recognise that gender aware macro economic policy, including the application of a gender analysis of trade and its impact on women globally are essential if economic development partnerships are to be made real and effective. We also need to support women’s organisations to take on these issues so that they can be as effective at influencing the outcome of WTO discussions as they have been at influencing UN processes.

The role of civil society and women’s organisations

The Beijing +10 meeting was a reflection of the current geo-political context within the UN system, where the United States of America tried to forcefully impose its neo-conservative agenda on other countries, and to question and violate international consensus and human rights agreements.

Given the current geo-political context, while women’s organisations expected this, it was still extremely frustrating to NGOs and government delegations alike to spend the first week of the Beijing +10 Review reaching a consensus on the Political Declaration – a declaration that was not contentious and reaffirmed previous commitments. This process not only wasted time and energy, it also diverted attention away from other issues that should have been, and needed to be discussed or discussed in greater depth. As a result, at the end of the Beijing +10 meeting, there was more a sense of relief that women’s rights and issues didn’t go backwards, rather than a

celebration that things had moved forward. But we need to think more about how to move forward.

The main reason women's rights didn't move backwards at Beijing +10 meeting was because of the strength, determination, organisation and expertise of the many women's organisations present and vocal in meetings prior to and during the review. We need to draw on this, draw on our experience of negotiating the UN system to push forward – to push forward within the current framework (ie the UN) but also to look for alternative frameworks.

The Secretary General, many outcome documents (for this review, of the Millennium Summit) and reports (the Cardoso Report), and many though not all governments recognise the skills, expertise and legitimacy of women's organisations and the importance of bringing them to the table. We need to demand that this happens more, and more systematically and that the narrow, neo-liberal, conservative agenda of the minority is not given the prominence or power to take away the rights of the majority.

Civil society, including women's organisations should be (financially) supported to ensure their ability to continue to participate in discussions. This support should reflect a long term commitment to women's rights and should not be ad-hoc, minimalistic or short-term in nature. In addition women's organisations should be a welcome part of official delegations – not only at the meetings but during the preparatory stages; the cost of their participation should be supported by governments; and they should be an integral part of the decision making and negotiating process. Women's participation should not be token at any level.

And, equally importantly, we need to look at alternative forums for pushing our agenda. Alternatives do exist:

- The Global Call to Action (GCAP) is the world's largest anti-poverty alliance, whose organizations together represent more than 150 million people globally. Launched in January 2005 at the World Social Forum in Brazil, the alliance has grown rapidly and national campaigns are now active in 74 countries.
- The European and World Social Movements offer an alternative at the regional and global level to discuss debate and articulate an alternative. The growth of the Social Movements is an indicator of the level of unhappiness and frustration with more mainstream forms of dialogue and is an opportunity to take our discussions elsewhere. The women's movement needs to reach out to these and other movements.
- As I write thousands of women are meeting in Bangkok for the AWID Forum. This International Forum on Women's Rights and Development is both a conference and a call to action that brings together women's rights leaders and activists from around the world every three years to strategize, network, celebrate, and learn in a highly charged atmosphere that fosters deep discussions and sustained personal and professional growth.

The Politics of (SRH) Rights

Discussions at the review meeting and difficulties around the resolutions on economic advancement and trafficking illustrated clearly that it is important that progressive women's organisations bring together economic and sexual and reproductive health and rights in their analysis on gender equality and development. The reaffirmation of our right to freely exercise

our sexuality was a victory for progressive women's groups and governments against conservative governments and conservative women's groups. And the expansion of MDG3 to include the goal of universal access to reproductive health (though not to sexual rights) was an achievement and step forward and a sign of the strength of the women's movement. However, it was a greater victory because of the high political stakes attached to the right of women to have access to sexual and reproductive health.

And, fortunately or unfortunately, it is increasingly the 'political' battles that dominate our time, efforts, resources and that are covered by the press. What does this mean for the women's movement? It means we must increasingly become political as we protect our stakes in the rights arena. But it also means, I believe, that we must think hard about what our agenda is, and think of ways to push forward our concerns and our issues, and not be diverted by what in the end is a strategy of the conservative players to dilute our attentions. This is a tough area to negotiate as not playing 'their' games could mean real losses, but we need to balance our efforts so that we protect our rights without getting side-tracked and in the end we have an agenda that is about transformation for gender justice.

And there are a number of 'political' battles that need to be fought and won – again, we need to win them because of the issues themselves, but also because of their political profile:

- Peace and security
- Migration
- Trafficking

These issues are sensitive and difficult and 'political' because they threaten or impact upon national security, the monitoring of borders, member state sovereignty and they reflect internal economic and social conditions. They are also political because of the fear, insecurity and paranoia that have come out of 9/11, the war in Iraq and terrorist events in Bali, Madrid and London.

It is also not possible to discuss these issues in isolation – how can we talk, for instance, about migration without bringing on issues of trafficking and trade and security. Within the European context alone, it is difficult to reach consensus in these areas – and so we need to work to make explicit the complex links among globalisation, trade, migration and sexual and reproductive rights to understand how the women's struggle for autonomy and integrity in both the productive and the reproductive sphere are integrally connected. Europe has shown itself as a more progressive 'grouping' (witness its strong stand at the Beijing+10 meeting against the more conservative factions) and we need to think through out how to capitalise on this, and how to encourage the more progressive countries within Europe to lead the way on these discussions.

Gender Mainstreaming: are we really committed?

The Beijing + 10 resolution on gender mainstreaming reaffirms the 'twin-track' approach to promote women's empowerment and achieve gender equality ie 'programs aimed at meeting the basic needs and the specific needs of women for capacity building, organizational development and empowerment, together with gender mainstreaming in all program formulation and implementation activities.' The resolution reaffirms that *gender mainstreaming is a globally accepted ... a critical strategy.... for promoting women's empowerment and gender equality*

But how ‘global’? how ‘accepted’? and how ‘critical’ is this strategy?

Gender mainstreaming as a strategy, if properly understood, fully implemented and adequately resourced (both in terms of money and personnel), should be able to make men and women’s concerns integral to the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programs in all political, economic and social spheres so that women and men benefit equally ... with gender equality and equity as its goals.

Experience over the last ten plus years have shown, however, that gender mainstreaming as a strategy has not achieved what was hoped for. Gender mainstreaming is misunderstood, is not properly funded, supported or implemented, and is being rejected because of the lack of political will, the lack of achievements and the difficulties in implementing it as a strategy.

There has been much discussion and research about why gender mainstreaming has not achieved what was hoped from it and much work done on what is necessary to make gender mainstreaming more effective ... so we feel that we know what we need to do to effectively mainstream gender, but what can we now do to encourage donor countries, implementing organisations and recipient countries so that they put in place the conditions that are necessary for gender mainstreaming to work given this is a strategy that governments (North and South) are pulling back from or implementing only partially and in an incomplete way? And is this a priority?

The major challenges facing gender mainstreaming are that of political will and accountability, policy coherence and lack of resources. Gender mainstreaming is not an optional add-on, but is policy in action. EU institutions and civil society have a vital role to play in ensuring the implementation of these practices as widely as possible in order to work towards the overriding goals of gender equity and equality. For this, joint efforts are needed between the European commission, the European Parliament, NGOs, civil society and political movements to improve political will and deliver policy in action.

This paper includes gender mainstreaming as a priority because we all seem so lack-lustre about it, and we need to decide if this is an agenda we wish to continue pushing or do we, like the EU nearly has, give up on it? Yes, we reaffirmed it at Beijing +10, but no one seems to really want to take it up - and when the EU asks for a civil society response on gender mainstreaming, how do we respond? We need to make it a priority again.

This paper drew on the following sources:

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