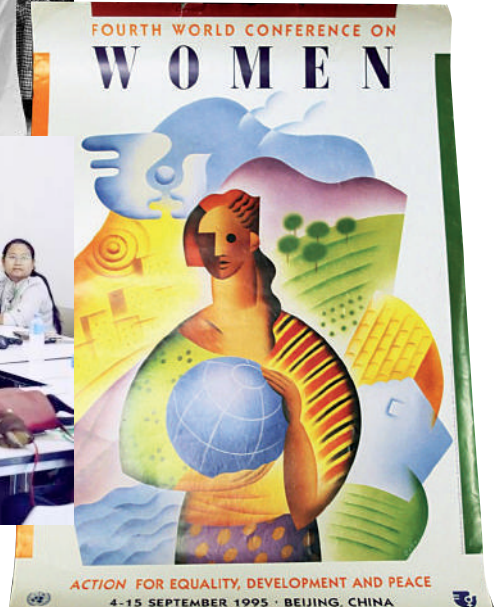


„We have come a long way... but there’s still a long road ahead“.

Voices from Cambodia 20 years after the Beijing Conference (1995)



MONDAY, 16 FEBRUARY 2015

20 years after the Women's Conference in Beijing Looking back – looking forward

Venue: Meta House, Sothearos Boulevard, Phnom Penh
English-Khmer interpretation will be provided.

- | | |
|-----------------------|---|
| 8.00h | Get together |
| 8.30h | Opening remarks by Chairperson
Ms. Benu Maya Gurung
<i>AATWIN Nepal</i> |
| 8.40h | Panel I: Looking back to the hopes and visions of Beijing 1995
MEP Barbara Lochbihler
<i>Organizer of the Women's Peace Train from Geneva to Peking</i>
Mrs. Hoy Sochivanny
<i>Positive Change for Cambodia</i>
Ms. Ung Yokkhoan
<i>AMARA</i> |
| 10.10 – 10.30h | Coffee break |
| 10.30 – 12.00h | Panel II: 20 years later “Is Beijing still relevant?”
Ms. Kasumi Nakagawa
<i>Professor at Pannasastra University of Cambodia</i>
Ms. Sok Sothea
<i>Youth Fellowship for Democracy</i>
Ms. Ly Pisey
<i>Social Action for Change</i> |
| 12:00h | Closing remarks by Chairperson |

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Introduction

„If there is one message that echoes forth from this conference, let it be that human rights are women's rights and women's rights are human rights, once and for all“.

Hillary Clinton, 05.09.1995, Beijing

In September 1995, the Fourth World Conference on Women took place in Beijing. An unprecedented number of 17,000 participants and 30,000 activists (UNWomen) descended on Beijing to enhance gender equality and further the empowerment of women worldwide. A parallel Forum attended by around 30,000 activists put pressure on the government representatives, and kept the media interested in the conference. Two weeks later, the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action had been drafted, a historic landmark in advancing women's and girls' rights. The Declaration was a milestone in affirming that the rights of women are an „inalienable, integral and indivisible part of universal human rights“ (paragraph 9). Until this day, the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action continues to be one of the go-to documents when discussing human rights of women.

The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action enumerated twelve critical areas of concern in which governments must take action in order to empower women and promote gender equality. It envisions a world in which girls and women are able to exercise their freedoms and realize their rights free of constraints based on their gender. On an economic level, areas of concern include the burden of poverty on women, gender inequalities in managing and accessing natural resources, and inequalities in economic structures. Social issues such as the unequal access to, and outcomes in education and healthcare are also addressed. The issue of violence against women, especially the effects of armed conflict on women were also raised as areas of concern. Politically, the inequality between men and women in positions of power and decision making, and the lack of mechanisms to promote the advancement of women was highlighted. Women's unequal access to, and participation in the media, as well as the stereotyping of women within communication systems was also discussed. Overall the lack of respect for, and inadequate protection and promotion of the human rights of women criticized, and, for the first time in history, discrimination against, and violations of the rights of the girl child were addressed.

The Beijing Conference brought a variety of women's issues onto the agenda, and civil society and governments worldwide returned home with the will to translate the Declaration's promises and concrete plans for action into practice. In the 20 years since Beijing we have seen a profound number of improvements in women's lives. Most countries have incorporated a guarantee of gender equality into their constitutions. According to UNWomen (2015), gender parity in primary education has been achieved in almost all regions of the world. More women than ever before hold political offices and others jobs that were unthinkable for women to hold in the past. Following Beijing, violence against women appeared on national agendas, with two-thirds of countries committing themselves to fighting domestic violence through the creation of laws and campaigns. It is indisputable that we have come a long way since the Fourth World Conference in Beijing, 1995.

However, despite significant improvements in advancing women's rights and promoting gender equality, many issues remain to be tackled. Although girls' enrollment in primary level education has increased, many girls worldwide are encouraged to drop out of school during secondary school years to support themselves and their families. Gender stereotypes continue to determine women's opportunities and choices in certain fields. For example, only thirty percent of the world's scientists are women (UNESCO, 2014). Moreover, occupational segregation based on gender, with ‚female‘ jobs such as nursing or teaching receiving significantly lower pay than their ‚male‘ counterparts, means that women are still disproportionately impoverished, and often dependent on male earners. Despite anti-violence campaigns and litigation, UN Women (2015) estimates that worldwide one in three women experiences sexual or physical violence at least once in her lifetime. Thus, although there has been a significant amount of progress in the last two decades, much remains to be done to realize the promises of Beijing.

2015 marks the 20th anniversary of the Fourth World Conference on Women. It is a year in which countries will have to re-evaluate their progress since the Declaration in 1995. In late March, the fifty-ninth session of the Commission on the Status of Women will take place in New York, with a main focus on reviewing the progress made in implementing the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. 2015 therefore offers the opportunity to regenerate commitment and mobilize the public worldwide to promote gender equality and advance women's empowerment.

On the occasion of the 20th anniversary of the Beijing conference, the Heinrich Böll Foundation Cambodia held a roundtable workshop in order to examine the legacy of the Beijing Conference, and its relevance today. The workshop consisted of two panels. Both panels were chaired by Ms. Benu Maya Gurung, Program Coordinator of the Alliance Against Trafficking in Women and Children in Nepal (AATWIN), who was able to offer insights from Nepal.

The first panel looked back to Beijing in 1995, drawing on personal experiences of the panelists who had attended the conference. Ms. Barbara Lochbihler, Member of the European Parliament and organizer of the Women's Train to Beijing in 1995 gave the first speech. Ms. Hoy Sochivanny from Positive Change for Cambodia (PCC) and Ms. Ung Yokkhoan from Amara, Cambodian Women's Network for Development also participated in the discussion. The speakers assessed the impact of the conference at the time, and its implementation to this day.

The second panel aimed at answering the question whether Beijing is still relevant today. It was formed by Ms. Kasumi Nakagawa, professor at Pannasastra University, Ms. Sothea Sok from the Khmer Youth Alliance for Democracy and Ms. Ly Pisey from the Women's Network for Unity. The panelists discussed the situation of young women in Cambodia, the achievements since Beijing, as well as what needs to be improved.

This publication contains excerpts from the discussion that took place on the 16th of February 2015 at Metahouse in Phnom Penh, Cambodia.



Benu Maya Gurung

Alliance Against Trafficking in Women in Nepal

„There is a lack of resource allocation“

Good morning and Namaste. I would like to thank Heinrich Böll Foundation for organizing this panel. For today's session we are very privileged to have historical women here, who participated in the Beijing Conference in 1995. I am very happy to meet you and to share the floor in this panel with you today. I am Benu Maya Gurung and I work for the Alliance Against Trafficking in Women in Nepal, in short AATWIN. We have 32 member organizations working against trafficking and with the survivors of trafficking. Let us listen to the witnesses of change, nationally and internationally, as the experiences may differ depending on which country our panelists come from.

In 1995 there was a world conference, and now, 20 years later, it is time to review the progress. We know there are still challenges, but of course changes have happened too. In Nepal we have done a lot of consultation and reviewing lately in preparation for the CSW59 (Commission on the Status of Women, 59th session) which is going to be held in New York from the 9th to the 20th of March. In many women's rights areas, the implementation in Nepal is weak, although we do have a National Action Plan. One of the biggest problems is that there are thousands of issues, and we must determine which ones to

prioritize without leaving some women behind. We must also learn to engage men, as not only women are necessary to promote positive change. A major challenge is therefore the question of how we can enhance male engagement. Many lessons must still be learnt.

In Nepal, women's participation in politics is also an important issue. We have about 33% participation of women in politics, which I think is the highest in South Asia. The question remains, however, if it's meaningful participation, because in many cases they just use the women's finger prints for official documents without granting them decision-making power.

On a more positive note, we do have a Domestic Violence Act in Nepal, so domestic violence is recognized as a crime and not seen as a social problem. The level of discrimination is decreasing, although some discrimination with the men remains. Levels of discrimination differ by caste, with discrimination levels being lower among the indigenous women.

Regarding maternal mortality rates, we call it the violence from the government. Nepal is a hilly area, and there is a lack of health posts that offer birthing services. Sometimes women have to walk several days or many hours to reach health facilities. This month, a man filed a case against the government because he claimed his wife died because there were no health personnel in the health post during her pregnancy.

Nepal is also suffering from huge numbers of youth migration. In our country there are only old people and children left in villages. We have a population of 2.5 million and 300,000 nationals who are working abroad. Everyday about 1500 more migrate through documented channels. There are no records of those migrating through illegal channels.

Although women's engagement in formal sectors of the economy is increasing, it is usually in informal sectors where women are vulnerable to labor and sexual exploitation. How can we bring them into the formal sector so they will be more secure? Especially the women in Nepal working in the entertainment sector are not recognized as workers by the government, and their security is in danger.

The situation of women all over the world is similar, and the situation of women in Cambodia is very similar to the situation of Nepalese women. Of course we have achieved something since Beijing in 1995, but we need to go further and achieve more. In Nepal we have many policies in our country, but there is a lack of resource allocation, so the mechanisms can't work. Policy itself cannot work without the budget or resource allocation. Many women are stranded.

The government says it is very sensitive to the needs of its people and counts the number of laws and policies it has established, but many of these remain meaningless without supporting mechanisms to ensure their implementation.



Barbara Lochbihler

Member of the European Parliament

„Women joining the armed forces have not made armies less brutal“

At the time of the Women's Conference in Beijing I was working in Geneva as the Secretary of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom in Geneva (WILPF), and thus involved in all the preparatory work in the global NGO world regarding the Beijing Conference. WILPF is a very old organization that turned 100 this year. It works on anti-war and women's rights. Currently, I am a member of the European Parliament where I work for the Green Party.

I will take you back 20 years and reflect on what our hopes and aspirations before, during and after Beijing were. This is complicated because rather than having a single issue agenda in Beijing, we had three pillars: equality, development and peace. As I was Secretary General of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom WILPF in Geneva, I followed the peace agenda.

The peace agenda was based on an analysis that we had to disarm the world, and then take the money and resources to invest in life, rather than on war and destruction. It was carried by the hope that the world would come back to something more logical that serves the people. During the Cold War the mainstream belief was that we have to have big

armies, as the enemy is coming. As we were preparing for Beijing, European superpowers like France were testing nuclear weapons in the Pacific. We were strongly opposed to this, as we were aware of the terrible consequences of nuclear weapons. The lessons learnt from the women in Japan after the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki as well as from women in the Soviet Union who were experiencing miscarriages, were very present in our minds. The French government was denying that their testing had any consequences.

We from the WILPF group were very political in a classical terminology as we were radically left. When we brought up the issue at the Beijing World Conference we were told by other women's groups that it's too political. And then we said: everything is a women's issue. We want to democratize the UN Security Council, we want to have a share in the power and we want to have a separation of powers. We ended up appointing a resolution asking for a world without nuclear power and nuclear arms.

At the time of the Beijing Conference, the world was experiencing a great transformation: the Soviet Union dissolved in the Nineties, transforming the global world order, and ending the Cold War. In Eastern Europe, there were a lot of influential and strong socialist women's organizations. However, by the time of the Beijing Conference, the socialist structures were completely dissolved. This meant that many women from former socialist countries no longer participated in an organized fashion in the Beijing Conference.

One reason for organizing the WILPF peace train from Helsinki to Beijing was to visit the women and peace organizations in Eastern European countries such as the Ukraine, Russia, Bulgaria, Romania, former Yugoslavia and Kazakhstan. We did this to discuss with the women what their aspirations for Beijing were, so that we could bring their demands to Beijing for them.

The women's peace train was a very challenging and demanding logistical task, and no one could imagine 200 women traveling alone in their own train. However, we managed at all the meeting points to discuss with women from former socialist countries. There was a lot of uncertainty for these women at that time, because during socialist times they had had the assurance of a workplace and basic health care, both of which dissolved with the destruction of the system. It was a completely different world for them.

We had two meetings in the Ukraine. When we look at the Ukraine today, we see an ongoing war, but back then the hopes of women were that they would be able to continue in advancing female empowerment. What I saw at the time was that women were highly educated in all subjects, not just subjects such as family and healthcare, but also natural sciences. However, because of the complete restructuring of their societies, women were completely pushed back. Now they are trying to reshape their standing in society once again. One of the underlying problems of the peace train was that the Soviet Union had ceased to exist.



The other problem was that we were trying to discuss women's issues with relatively authoritarian governments as a feminist, western NGO. When we prepared to go to Beijing, the Chinese authorities distrusted our motives and almost denied us entry into China. On the one hand, they wanted to host the World Conference, on the other hand the Chinese wanted control over what was said. How can you control over 45,000 women in the biggest gathering of the world? You can't, but they still believed they could! So we had a whole NGO Forum, and they placed us outside of Beijing because they thought it would hinder us from going, but we went anyway and did not feel discouraged. At the NGO Forum we were in charge of a peace tent where we allowed women from oppressed areas to speak out, even if they said the opposite of what their governments were saying. The whole situation was tense, and the organizers did not even give us microphones for the peace tent, saying they were all broken. There was a constant surveillance of what the women did. If we had discussed about women's rights and family and such issues, they would have left us alone, but peace was a political issue at the time.

The themes under the peace pillar also moved away from the focus being solely on disarmament, conflict resolution, and the opposition to nuclear warfare. A year before Beijing, there was the World Conference on Human Rights in Vienna. This was the first time that the issue of violence against women got public recognition. In 1994, the UN established a Special Rapporteur for Violence Against Women. One of her first reports was on a peace issue: rapes in war and post-war times committed by the Japanese against the so-called 'Comfort Women'. This development constituted a major step forward, from rape and domestic violence being social issues to these issues gaining international attention. We demanded justice for the victims, help to overcome the trauma, no impunity for per-

petrators, and that we have to do our utmost to prevent war and violent conflicts through active human rights work. Some years later, this led to the adoption of the UN Security Council Resolution 1325. Resolution 1325 deals with women involved in the peace agenda. Again disarmament, political solutions to armed conflicts and the involvement of women in peace negotiations were put on the agenda. Statistically, we now have more women in armies and peace keeping forces. Coming from a strict equality policy, this is progress. For me, personally, this is not progress at all. My demand is to dissolve the armies of the world, rather than making them women friendlier. Women joining the armed forces have not made armies less brutal.

Finally, before coming to this workshop, I looked up our demands at that time. We had our own declaration with twenty points because we were radical. For example, we wrote: „the explicit recognition and reaffirmation of the right of all women to control all aspects of their health in particular their own fertility, is basic to their empowerment“. At that time this little sentence was very radical, because there were organizations with very fundamentalist agendas like the Catholic Church, or the Organization of the Islamic Cooperation who, for centuries, determined what is good for us, and decided we should not be in charge of our own bodies. If we see now what the Islamic State and Muslim extremists are saying, it is, at the core, the same message. We also said local, national, regional and global peace is attainable and inextricably linked to the advancement of women who are a fundamental force for leadership, conflict resolution and the promotion of lasting peace at all levels. If we are realistic, 20 years later, we didn't manage at all. Regarding the flourishing of civil society groups, women's groups and networks entering the political sphere, we have reached a lot.

I found a statement from the female leader Aung San Su Kyi who was part of the opposition in Myanmar at the time of the Beijing Conference, and therefore under house arrest. Since she was not able to travel to the Conference herself, we managed to smuggle a video statement of hers to Beijing. Today, she is a candidate for the next presidential elections in Myanmar. I will now read what she said: „For millennia, women have dedicated themselves, almost exclusively, to the task of nurturing, protecting and caring for the young, and the old and striving for conditions of peace that favor life as a whole. To this can be added the fact that to the best of my knowledge, no war was ever started by women, but it is women and children who have always suffered the most in situations of conflict. Now that we are gaining control of the primary, historical role imposed on us to sustain life in the context of the home and family, it is to apply in the world arena the wisdom and experience which has been gained in activities of peace over so many thousand years. If the peace dividend for human development offered at the end of the Cold War can be added to the universal benefits of the growing emancipation of women, spending less on the war toys of grown men and much more on the urgent needs of humanity as a whole, then the next millennium will be truly an age the likes of which human history has never seen“. Unfortunately, we know that despite the pledges of governments to invest in this peace dividend, the idea did not succeed. Instead we continue to spend a substantial amount of the financial and scientific resources of our societies on war instead of life.



Hoy Sochivanny

President of Positive Change for Cambodia

„Women are not protected from risks associated with climate change“

First of all, I would like to thank Heinrich Böll Foundation for organizing this roundtable on looking back to 1995 and ways forward to Beijing+20.

I'm Sochivanny Hoy, President of Positive Change for Cambodia (PCC), a feminist and women's rights organization seeking women's and girls' full equality with men and boys. Women should live with value, freedom and peace through the implementation of CEDAW and the Beijing Platform For Action. We should change the attitude of men and boys so that women and girls can exercise their social, economic, cultural and political rights.

From 1993 onwards, I was working with the Cambodian Women for Development Agency (CWDA). In 1995 I participated in Beijing with 85 other Cambodian women from civil society, and 35 individuals from the Cambodian government, all of whom, however, were men and barely spoke any English. During Beijing, CWDA conducted two workshops: women at the borders and women at the frontlines. In Cambodia we conducted a workshop on women and health, women in decision making, women in education, and wo-

men in community development. At the Beijing Conference, Cambodians learnt from the participants of 185 countries that young women from other countries are brave, they are strong and speaking out. This was very different to Cambodia, where women were shy, and spoke barely any English.

After Beijing I was involved with establishing, and chaired an NGO network which fought to end violence against women and lobbied the government to formulate a new law on domestic violence. In 2005 this law was finally adopted. Currently, I work with PCC and am the chair of NGO CEDAW, a network of 62 NGOs promoting the rights enshrined in CEDAW and the 12 critical areas of the BPPA. We also write shadow reports for the periodic review process and train the government on the rights enshrined in CEDAW. The government is often unaware of these rights, despite having ratified the treaty.

20 years after Beijing and the many activities conducted by civil society in advancing women's and girls' rights, I can say that I see vast changes since 1995. Women and girls today are progressive as they know about their rights as women. This comes after having kept silent for 20 to 30 years, and having lived in violence with no freedom and no power and a strong economic dependency on their husbands. In the last ten years change has been rapid. Girls have gone from being silenced to talking out in public, and they earn their own livelihood in garment factories. Some even own farms or factories.

However, 20 years after Beijing we still struggle with six out of the 12 critical areas. Firstly, there remains direct and indirect discrimination in laws related to violence against women and girls such as domestic violence, trafficking, marriage laws in cases of sexual harassment and sexual violence, and migration. Dominant cultural stereotypes also continue to cause discrimination against women and girls.

Secondly, with girls and education, I see that they stop their education early to work in garment factories. Furthermore, if they cannot find decent work in Cambodia, they migrate to other countries where they are often vulnerable to exploitation. Forced marriages are also a big issue as some 15 and 16 year old girls are forced to marry foreign men from Taiwan, Korea and China in order to gain income for their family.

The third area regards the legal justice services in place for women and girls. When injustices are committed within families, women are unable to seek help from the legal system, as the common view is that violations occurring within the family should be dealt with internally. Furthermore, the corruption of commune police officers and other responsible authorities means that many women continue to experience violence.

The fourth area is that of reproductive health for women and girls. Many women and young girls are not well informed about safe sex practices.

Fifthly, very few women participate in local and national decision-making processes as society still discriminates against women in this area. In 1993 6% of the members of the National Assembly were female, by 2013 the number increased to 16%.

Lastly, women are not protected from disaster and risks associated with climate change. High level government officials in Cambodia are unaware of the differential impact that issues related to climate change can have on women and girls. In fact, women's and girls' livelihoods can be dramatically impacted by the changing climate.

As some promises of Beijing have not been fulfilled until this day, I would like to send out a message to all women of the world. Donors and funding NGOs should support and fund NGOs working on women's rights in Cambodia, especially in the six areas listed above. Moreover, women activists should expand their network with other NGOs promoting gender equality. Older women must help build the capacities of girls, and prepare them to be strong women in future, aware of their rights. Societies of all regions should share their knowledge and support each other in advancing the rights of women.

After 20 years of working hard to improve the lives of women in Cambodia, there has been a significant amount of achievement. Women have broken their shyness and silence, and are letting their voices be heard. Compared to 1995, more girls can be found in both primary and secondary education, and women have even entered into technical studies and foreign languages. Cambodia has also ratified most conventions, and there are laws in place to protect women. Some cultural stereotypes causing discrimination against women have eroded, and compared to the stereotype of Cambodian women before 1995 and before the Pol Pot Regime, one must say we have come a long way.



Ung Yokkhoan

Director and Founder of AMARA, Cambodian Women's Network for Development

„Women continue to be underrepresented in leadership positions“

My name is Ung Yokkhoan. I am the director of AMARA. After Beijing 1995, I chose one critical area to work on which was the empowerment of women in politics, because I saw that Cambodian women were still not participating in politics. I would like to lay out for you what has changed in the last 20 years since Beijing, but before that I will give you an idea of what the situation of women in Cambodia in 1995 looked like.

In 1995, there was a lack of laws and principles on supporting and promoting the participation of women in public affairs and politics. All citizens, but especially women lacked knowledge and confidence in the laws and their implementation. There was no gender equality and equity in government institutions, and women were very shy and fearful of entering public positions as there was a severe lack of role-model women at all levels. The political climate at the time was shaped by uncertainty and unrest. Traditional stereotypes of women put the burden of caring for the family on women, causing females to be hesitant to participate in public and political affairs, and stay at home taking care of the

house and children instead. When women did venture outside of the home to work, they experienced discrimination. No women's network or motivating political figures existed to encourage women to engage in public affairs and politics.

Following the Beijing conference, gender equality and equity were implemented by the Cambodian government through the following steps. To begin, the Secretariat of Women's Affairs was replaced by a proper and prestigious "Ministry of Women's Affairs", administered by a woman minister and governed with the principles of 'Neary Rattanak' (woman as precious stone) as guidelines. Furthermore, the government passed laws and many principles for supporting and promoting women's rights in all national areas, including politics. Nowadays, there must always be at least one woman in a high position in all the governmental institutions at the national and sub-national levels. Women hold seats in the senate, the parliament and all other high ranking positions. The government also established "the Cambodian National Council for Women" and the "National Committee to Promote Social Morality, Women's Values and the Cambodian Family" in order to encourage women to confidently get involved in leading positions. In general, women are also more informed about political issues, and more able to make their own political decisions, for example during election times. This is partly thanks to women candidates during electoral campaigns.

The government also acknowledged the need for local and international NGOs to get involved in implementing development programs for promoting women's rights by using all processes such as training, coaching, organizing grassroots meetings, awareness-raising, advocacy and establishing NGO CEDAW for writing shadow reports on women's issues. The number of women participating in politics has increased at all levels from one mandate to the next. According to AMARA's Capacity Building Project, women in communities have an improved awareness of human rights, women's rights, and children's rights, concepts of democracy, CEDAW, the Cambodian Millennium Development Goals and many other laws relevant to women's lives. Through this knowledge, women have gained confidence and optimism, making them brave enough to participate in political affairs as female activists of political parties, and potentially volunteer to stand as candidates in local elections. Some women candidates got elected to be female Commune Councilors, and are now engaged in the implementation of commune laws.

Although we have made a lot of progress in advancing women's rights in Cambodia since 1995, some threats to women's empowerment remain. There are still many women who are not aware of the laws relevant to their daily lives. Women continue to be greatly underrepresented in leadership positions, and discrimination in the workplace affects women disproportionately to men. For example, some females hold the position of Commune Councilor or government official, but the powers have still not been properly delegated to give them the same decision making competencies as their male colleagues

have. Women also continue to underestimate and undervalue their own competencies, although they would be suitable for a position. Although a women's network and female role models do exist today, they are still not strong enough to encourage more women to be assertive. Despite this, some local women do know how to use their rights and express their opinions at government meetings.

Another challenge for Cambodia's society is that all types of violence against women are still severe. Although there is awareness raising and information broadcasting, sex trafficking of women caused by poverty is still flourishing. Moreover, many girls are facing difficulties to continue their education until high school and university because of safety problems. On a more positive note, grassroots women are provided with services and supplies for infant and maternal care.

I have several recommendations on promoting gender equality between men and women, and women's empowerment in politics. The government should review and strengthen the law enforcement to promote the safety of young women so that they are encouraged to get equal access to higher education. All leaders with decision making capabilities should give government roles and authority to women. All political parties should conscientiously enforce the principals of their gender policy for increasing the number of women participating in politics, in order to respond to all goals of the Millennium Development Goals of Cambodia. And, lastly, the government should enforce the Law on the Suppression of Domestic Violence in the Families and Protection of the Victims.



Kasumi Nakagawa

Professor, Pannasastra University of Cambodia

„Women still suffer from gender inequality in employment“

I was born in Japan and during the time of Beijing I was still finishing up my degree. In 1997, I migrated to Cambodia, and have lived here as a female activist for the last years teaching gender studies at Pannasastra University. For the last 15 years I have observed the huge development and empowerment of women by working with my students.

Today, I am here to share with you some of the findings on the implementation of the Beijing Platform in the last 20 years. Last year, I worked with the government to draft a report on the 20 years of implementation of the Beijing Platform. This will be submitted to the Commission on the Status of Women in March. We identified seven big achievements since the Beijing Platform that I will recount to you below.

Cambodia endorsed the Beijing Platform for Action (BPFA) at the Fourth World Conference on Women (FWCW) in 1995. The period following the FWCW has been an eventful one, with many actions and measures being initiated and achievements attained. The Royal Government of Cambodia (RGC) has put gender equality as a top priority on the

government's development agenda, with significant political commitment, and has taken concrete measures in order to achieve the goals set out in the BPFA. Cambodia has periodically reviewed the progress of the implementation of the BPFA by submitting reports in 2000 and 2004, and participated in the regional and global review process.

Firstly, female poverty reduction was identified as a primary concern in Cambodia after the Beijing Declaration. Following the historic UN Millennium Summit in 2000, which set broad Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) to be achieved by the year 2015, Cambodia developed its own set of MDGs, the Cambodian Millennium Development Goals (CMDGs), focusing on poverty alleviation and human development. Cambodia has been making progress in women's economic empowerment to achieve these poverty alleviation goals. 20 years ago in Phnom Penh there were no high rise buildings and few paved roads. In terms of infrastructure, a lot has been improved, and infrastructure is very important as it improves the access of women and girls to education and health facilities.

The poverty reduction also links with women entering the labor force, and in terms of this Cambodia has been doing a great job. Women's opportunities to get employed have expanded, and more women are in paid employment. The labor force participation rate for women in Cambodia is the highest in the region, with increases in women's labor force participation rates rising from 75.6 to 79.7 per cent between 2008 and 2012 for the age group 15-64 years.

Secondly, there has also been substantial improvement since 2004 in narrowing the gender gap in the literacy rate among the 15 -24 age group, and the proportion of female to male literacy was more than 99 per cent in 2011 compared to 91. 3 percent in 2004. This progress means the government is on track to achieve its CMDG target. Gender parity has been achieved in primary school level net enrollment. The 2013/2014 Gender Parity Index improved to 0.97 in primary net enrollment, and from 1.05 for secondary enrollment. However, I also see a gap in very remote areas, for example in Ratanakiri. In many ethnic minority groups the parents still don't understand the importance of education, so in these communities young girls are only going to school for one or two years. It is still a big issue that some parents are not aware of the importance of education, and children are not aware of their rights. When I started teaching in 2002, the vast majority of my students were boys. Today, about 40% of the students in my class are female.

Thirdly, Cambodia is one of 10 countries that were on track in 2013 to achieve MDG 4 and MDG 5 to reduce child mortality and maternal mortality. The Maternal Mortality Ratio (MMR) has more than halved to 206/100,000 in 2010 from 472/100,000 in 2005, a remarkable reduction in a short time period. This success is owed greatly to the RGC's efforts to improve the delivery of key reproductive, maternal, newborn and child health interventions for women and children. This is due to increased government spending on health facilities. When I visited health centers in rural Cambodia, I saw that all health facilities had at least the very basic equipment for mothers to give birth to children, and the mid-

wives I interviewed were very aware of women's rights, and the importance of medical check-ups and vaccinations.

The fifth point of the Declaration is increased female participation in decision-making. After national reconciliation in 1991, and the first democratic election in 1993, the participation of women in decision-making positions has steadily increased in many fields. The number of women in the National Assembly has continuously increased over the past four legislatures, from 5 per cent in 1993 to 20.3 percent in 2013. I would like to talk to you about one lady that I met in Ratanakiri. She is 43 years old, and the chairperson of the Women and Children Consultative Committee at the district level in Ratanakiri. She told me that in 1980 she was elected as Commune Chief and was very excited about her election, but not very confident. So she asked the second person in the row, a man, to be Council Commune Chief and she supported him behind the scenes. I asked her what she tells female leaders nowadays on how to act, and she said: „For the young women I would definitely say try! You may fail, but try. I didn't try at that time.“ I think a lot of mindset has been changed, and if elderly people start telling young people to try, you may fail but try, there will be more positive development in female participation in politics.

Sixthly, Cambodia has made significant progress in formulating policies for gender equality, and the empowerment of women since the Beijing Platform For Action. Mainstreaming gender equality at all levels was a high priority of the Royal Government of Cambodia after the Beijing conference. The Ministry of Women's Affairs created many laws and mechanisms, but the resources are still lacking and more advocacy is needed for these policies to be fully implemented.

The RGC has committed itself to the prevention of violence against women through its endorsement of international declarations and conventions, and a number of laws and policies have been adapted to date, including a Labor Law in 1997 and a Law on the Prevention of Domestic Violence and the Protection of Victims in 2005. MoWA initiated a baseline survey in 2005 and a follow-up survey in 2009, which showed that both men and women were generally expressing a much lower tolerance for violence in 2009 than in 2005. In 2009, victims were also reporting decreased levels of domestic violence. The percentage of Cambodians who understand that violence against women is a wrongful behavior and a crime increased from 30 percent in 2008 to 80 percent in 2009, thus exceeding the 2015 CMDG target of 70 per cent (CMDG 2011). Ten years ago I was doing a session on domestic violence in the provinces, and when I was saying „husbands don't have the right to hit the wife“ everyone laughed at me. Thanks to media campaigns and awareness rising by NGOs and the government today, even at the grassroots level, we can hear men saying „you should not beat the wife“.

After listing the seven achievements to date, I will now recount the two challenges identified by the government in their report. Firstly, while gender parity has been achieved in primary education enrolment, beyond lower secondary, access to education for girls

is limited and completion rates remain low. Girls' completion rate of lower secondary school remains at 40 per cent and upper secondary at only 22.1 per cent. Social norms that prioritize boys' over girls' education are just one of the barriers to education for girls. The perception of parents towards their daughters is generally that they should help with household chores, and take care of younger siblings, undermining the importance of higher education. I also interviewed a lot of young women working in the garment factories who are 15 or 16. They are currently establishing 6 new factories which will provide employment to 10,000 young women and there is a huge population dynamic as many young girls stop going to school and instead go work in the garment factories.

The second issue is limited opportunities for women's access to better paid employment. With the implementation of gender-responsive labor policies and promoting gender equality in the labor market, some gender gaps in the labor market have been reduced. However, women still suffer from persistent gender inequality in employment. About 70 per cent of employed women, compared to 59 per cent of men, remain in vulnerable employment, defined as unpaid work contributing to the family and own account workers. Low levels of education and literacy constitute one of the main barriers to women's participation in better paid work.



Sok Sothea

Khmer Youth Alliance for Democracy

„We want the youth to have a voice“

My name is Sothea, and I come from the Youth Fellowship for Democracy, an association created just one month ago in order to encourage youth to work in social development politics, public affairs and on environmental issues. We see a lot of youth with potential, but the government does not give them any opportunities to develop this potential. We want the youth to have a voice, and the government to acknowledge the problems concerning our youth today. We want the youth to reach out to the government officials and ask them whether they have the political will to increase the amount of women in politics? Do they have policies in the party to encourage young women in politics? Do they have policies in the party to encourage youth in politics? We want both the ruling and opposition party to focus on youth and young women. We hope that Cambodian women will change their attitude. Don't be shy! Speak out! Why don't you speak out? When we look at the history of our country, it takes only a handful of men to make a war, to make the people suffer. So we don't need to be quiet, we should voice our concern and speak out about what we want for our country in the future, otherwise the government will not know what our concerns are.

Regarding education, the government reports that the number of young girls in education has increased. However, don't forget that they just study three or maybe four years and then drop out, in rural and urban areas. Although the number has increased, they do not stay in education as long as boys do because their families require many girls to earn money for the family. We can see ten and eleven year old girls in the street working. In urban areas, more girls have the opportunity to continue on to high school, but girls in rural areas often do not have this opportunity.

Regarding the health of women, a lot of the support, especially the infrastructure provided by governments such as the Japanese, goes into building services such as hospitals. But how good is the service of the hospital? Do they actually care about their patients or do they just want to make money? I encourage the donors to follow up their activities and evaluate how services in hospitals or schools are actually being implemented.

Regarding the politics, we can see that young women are starting to get involved in politics, but in terms of their academic degrees, and their capacities, do they have enough capacities to properly be involved in politics? Often young girls have the will to do politics, but are they encouraged and equipped to properly participate in politics? We can see that in many cases they lack these capacities. In public affairs, we can see that young women and youth whose parents do not work in high positions or have the economic capacity to buy their position, have very few chances to work in public affairs.

We can also see that a lot of young women are forced to drop out of school to increase their income. For example, many go and work in the garment factories. This kind of work over longer periods of time is hazardous to these young women's health. There is poison in their bodies. As we are young women, we want to encourage young women's involvement in politics and public affairs, but we need the support from the political parties and the government. We want the political parties to have the political will to encourage young women in politics.

I am young, and I didn't participate in the Beijing Platform from 1995, but I can see that the government just achieved a small number of issues. Why can I say this? For example last year we produced a shadow report for CEDAW that the Cambodian government did not live up to its duties under CEDAW. We want the government, especially the Ministry of Women's Affairs, to focus their activities on promoting women's participation in politics. We need to face the real problems and see what has been done and what must be achieved to reach the goals of the 1995 Declaration. I don't want the young women to keep quiet, I want them to speak the truth.



Ly Pisey

Women's Network for Unity

„Are we doing the right things?“

Regarding the 1995 Beijing Conference: I was eleven years old at the time, running in a rice field with no idea what the Beijing Declaration was about. First of all, I would like to thank all the big sisters and brothers for your hard work clearing the path until this day, there is so much to learn from you. I will not talk about the good achievements in Cambodia because these have already been raised. While I admire your efforts to fight for whatever you believe in in women's rights, I am very sad that the demands are not there based on the viewpoint of this generation.

I think that while we are fighting for women's rights, we are not changing in terms of the systematic or structural levels, but rather only on the individual level. For example, the access to education or to health services. Many of us are aware of the privatization of social services, and I'm not sure that we have addressed this issue! Before, we used to ask how women could gain a better access to quality health care and education, but now we go to the hospital and spend a lot of money. Many Cambodians, up to 70%, are paying out of pocket for health care. Don't we think this is a women's issue? Why is the government not concentrating on investing public funds on such basic social services,

but instead trying to reinforce privatization that takes away all our basic rights? How can we even dream to achieve women's rights in this sector while such a policy is there? And how many of us have been criticizing this policy? I have been involved in women's rights networks for many years, but are we doing the right things? We are touching so many surfaces but never dig onto the root. And if you can't even challenge this, never dream of women having better access to better quality of basic social services. So for me, I don't just look at women's issues alone, but the services that women deserve are not there. And have you ever heard the Minister of Women's Affairs talking about this policy? No. Why not? Probably because she was not informed or has not got the same power as the Minister of Finance.

When we look at gender based violence, the ministry says there has been some progress, but when sex workers are arrested and detained daily in the Social Affairs Center, is this gender-based violence or are you just looking at domestic violence? I don't say domestic violence is not an issue, but shouldn't we be concerned about the treatment of sex workers, too? While you are talking about trafficking, many people do not consider the rights of consenting adult sex workers who are working hard to make an income to support their family with no protection. Do we have a reliable court system? We don't have that! And how many people have been working to improve this system? How can you empower women if they can't even file a complaint?

We have been working with Cambodian sex workers, helping them to file complaints. We go to the police station and they say: „Oh it's okay; you're just a sex worker. You haven't been raped or beaten“. Is that fair? I have so many questions. Sometimes I want to give up. I'm not just challenging my own government, but at the same time challenging development workers who are experts in many fields, but only touching many things at the surface, and then complaining that we are not succeeding. So I'm not just criticizing the government's role, I feel like the donors have contributed a lot to the problems. You throw so much money without knowing what you want. We need money, but we need good money too.

Another issue is economic empowerment or economic control. Cambodia is claiming that the garment industry shows the country's economic improvement by having around 700,000 workers, 90% of whom are women, working in garment factories. Why are their working conditions so poor? What is the problem, they are already in the formal sector! This sector has a huge impact on Cambodian economic growth, but why are there such poor working conditions and starving wages? If we cannot even address this sector, how can we even dream to address other sectors? And have you ever challenged the buyers, and foreign factory owners, the big brands companies? They are mostly not Cambodian, but Chinese, South Korean or Malaysian. And if we look at the salaries we will see an increase of 5 dollars in 5 years, so 1 year 1 dollar, and match that with the living cost. Is this a way to improve the economic lives of female workers? I don't think so. Almost every day you can read about workers complaining about starving wages.

For me these developments are part of the trends of globalization. You have nothing in the rural areas that is why you move, you migrate in search of opportunities. But at the same time the government doesn't care about protecting migrant workers. My hope is to see women from the grassroots getting involved because I can see their frustration. However, we can't expect a gentle response, and it will be hard to control because it has been enough.



Concluding Remarks

In 1995 government leaders and activists came together in Beijing for the Fourth World Conference on Women. After weeks of debating, and unprecedented lobbying efforts by activists from all over the world, the Beijing Declaration was issued. It is indisputable that the Beijing conference constitutes a milestone in the advancement of women's rights, and remains relevant until this day. Today, 20 years after the conference, we have clearly come a long way since 1995 in empowering women, but a lot remains to be done.

The first panel consisted of women who were activists at the Beijing Conference in 1995. Having worked on women's rights prior to, as well as after 1995, these panelists were not only able to recount their memories of the conference, but also share their perceptions of what progress occurred after the Beijing conference. Despite mentioning the shortcomings in the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, the older women on the panels praised the Declaration as laying the groundwork for positive developments in female empowerment in Cambodia. In the last 20 years, Cambodian women have gained awareness of their rights, and many have learnt to speak out and voice their demands. Girls' enrollment in elementary school almost equals that of boys, and the access to maternal health care services has improved dramatically for women. Furthermore, more women than ever before hold positions in the Cambodian government, and many women have moved into the work force. There has also been a lot of progress regarding legislation to protect women from violence.

On the second panel we were introduced to a different perspective: that of women who were too young in 1995 to participate in Beijing, and grew up in the years following the Declaration. Interestingly, these panelists, not having experienced the time before Beijing, were very critical of Cambodia's achievements regarding women's empowerment. They argued that women are still vastly underrepresented in the government and other decision-making positions. Furthermore, although girls' enrollment in primary education has increased, enrollment in secondary education remains limited. Many young women drop out of school to work in Cambodia's numerous garment factories, where they labor under hazardous conditions and for starving wages, and violence against women continues to occur until this day.

One of Beijing's groundbreaking accomplishments was the first time inclusion of, and focus on the girl child on an international agenda. Perhaps the workshop itself is proof that Beijing's legacy continues until this day. The young panelists were politically active,

female leadership figures who did not hesitate to let their demands be heard. They were keenly aware of their rights, the shortcomings of their government, and the actions necessary to fully accomplish all of Beijing's hopes and promises. The youth, both male and female, play a vital role in shaping what the lives of women in future generations will look like, and it seems that this generation of young, Cambodian women will not stray from the path towards gender equality that their older sisters fought so hard to establish.

Even though women in Cambodia have generally benefitted from the economic development the wage gap is highly gendered at 30% according to the World Bank Poverty Assessment. The return to education for women is low and continues to prohibit women to transgress not only traditional boundaries but also to advance professionally.

Women in Cambodia are in a limbo situation. Pushed by poverty and lack of employment, and pulled by the prospect of a regular income, Cambodia's young women migrate to urban centers. In the hope of living up to their aspirations once they arrive and the wish to 'fit in' the individual transformations they undergo are not perceived positively in their home communities. The living and working conditions are too often alarmingly bleak. However, women have been able to articulate their needs and demands and there is apparent change happening in the factories. It is a slow process but women are gaining ground in Cambodia.

