

THE FUTURE IS FEMALE – WOMEN'S COLLECTIVE LEADERSHIP

The year 2020 marked 25 years since the United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women (FWCW) held in Beijing China in 1995. The Beijing Platform for Action (BPfA) which came out of the Conference is, along with the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), the major blueprint for gender equality and the empowerment of women.

SEAWWatch, along with other feminist regional networks, seeks to ensure that women's movements in the region, can substantially participate in the review and appraisal of the Beijing Platform for Action. Feminists from the younger generations are especially supported for women's transformative engagement and generative leadership.

This collectively derived environmental scan is a contribution towards renewing women's collective leadership.



PERCEIVED OPPORTUNITIES

Information Communications Technology

The Internet and social media could be used as a tool to communicate, learn and gain information about the feminist movement, mobilize, connect different feminist groups, and promote feminism and the movement in general.

Review Processes

There are opportunities in the review process, not only in documenting progress or gains, evidence of lived realities, and changes or challenges in the women's human rights agenda at different levels, but also in gaining access to decision-making spaces, and gaining platforms to create and mainstream a feminist agenda in sub-regions and the Asia Pacific region as a whole.

Intergenerational Feminism

New voices and partners, especially younger feminists, are being brought into the feminist movement. Not only are these young feminists bringing in different forms of protest, they are also seeking to expand women's rights in the areas of mobility, autonomy, and bodily integrity.

Inter-movement and Inter-government Solidarity and Cooperation

Alongside the introduction of younger feminists into the movement, there is also an expanding public consciousness on gender equality and ending violence against women and girls. These issues are becoming central in building critical public discourse. This may be an opportunity to strengthen grassroots activism through community work, inter-movement work, as well as public policy discourse on emerging gender issues.

Critical Feminist Analysis

Spaces and initiatives are being created for interactive dialogue, strategic conversations, and more nuanced feminist understandings between and among regional networks. These also provide an opportunity to repoliticize women's human rights, as feminist analyses of power relations, privilege, and more, are often sidelined in favor of more technical or bureaucratic approaches.

Feminist Agenda Setting

Feminist groups in sub-regions like South Asia have come together to build a feminist agenda. There are also beginning initiatives and interests in other sub-regions like Southeast Asia and the Pacific.



*"There is need to
revive and revitalize
the spirit of Beijing."*

Patricia Licuanan, SEAWWatch



PERCEIVED THREATS

Rise of Conservative or Right-wing Governments

Growing government oppression and censorship on freedom of expression and dissent, the weakening of the rule of law, attacks on human rights defenders, rising fundamentalism and right-wing ideology, regressive economic policies, as well as new forms of hypernationalism, are silencing women's voices and constricting spaces and opportunities for dissent, debate, and the promotion of women's human rights.

An Aging Feminist Movement

Many feminist leaders are getting older, and there are few young feminists to pass the baton to. This is concerning as there may be gaps in continuity and growth of feminist movements in the region, and a danger of "reinventing the wheel."

Lack of Funding for Civil Society Organizations

Diminishing resources due to lack of prioritization of women's issues are further divided among competing agenda points. There is a lack of resources for creating intersectional, intergenerational, and cross-regional discussions. Donor control of funding also limits what the women's rights movement can do with funds.

Misogyny as a Backlash to Feminist Gains

The culture of sexism and misogyny continues to be a problem across many sections of society, including parts of the younger generation, right-wing ideologues, and populists, among others. This culture is often expressed as some kind of backlash against women's rights, LGBTQI+ rights, and human rights in general.

Impact of Geopolitics

The politics of powerful state actors, in particular China and Saudi Arabia, are problematic for the region. Amidst the widening of the uneven global playing field, women are positioned in increasingly vulnerable situations.

POSSIBLE THREAT, POSSIBLE OPPORTUNITY

Gender Mainstreaming

Gender mainstreaming is becoming increasingly diverse and inclusive, as it now includes new types of families, new gender issues for the elderly, the LGBTQI+, and the economically marginalized. However, for gender mainstreaming to be more effective, it needs to be strengthened with an intersectional rights-based approach. It is also becoming more challenging to integrate in daily life, and in other social movements.

Selective Rollback of Commitments by Governments

The selective rollback of commitments to the BPfA is coupled with the failing relevance and credibility of human rights and their mechanisms, and rule of law. While elected women officials are more common, they could become a threat if they do not support, or outright reject the women's agenda.

Online Spaces

While online spaces may strengthen solidarity on issues, they also serve as a space for the spread of fake news, harassment, and threats to life. The Internet is also limited to those who have access to it.

Additional Concerns

A range of additional concerns were also cited, including the role of corporations, regionalism and the strengthening or weakening of block positions, increasingly busy lives and the need for self-care, requiring smarter work habits, especially among those in the feminist movement, potential spaces for influence in SAARC + ASEAN, more interest and participation from males, the funding process, notions of internationalism, and the culture of individualism particularly among the youth.

This handout is produced by the Women and Gender Institute ([WAGI](#)) and the Southeast Asia Women's Watch ([SEAWWatch](#)) in partnership with the Council of Asian Liberals and Democrats ([CALD](#)) and the Friedrich Naumann Foundation for Freedom ([FNF](#)).

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PRACTICE MAKES PERFECT

A Framework for Feminist Practice

Key domains derived from an exchange on the Beijing Platform for Action (BPfA), among an intergenerational group of feminists from the Asia Pacific region.

Re-Politicization of Feminist Agenda and Process

Re-politicization of the feminist agenda refers to putting forward a **transformative agenda** as against reformist programs that do not challenge existing structures of power and dominance. It includes a re-politicization of a feminist process that practices an **expanded and dynamic power analysis**. It requires a **critical use of language** that is reflective, inclusive, and facilitates an emotional connection to social realities.

Feminist Leadership

Feminist Leadership refers to **challenging the assumptions** that masculinist leadership is essential, effective, and is the standard or norm. It instead puts forward the practice of feminist leadership that is founded on **values of reflexivity, care, and ethical concerns** as prime.

Communications as Sincere Connected Conversations

Communications refer to **content and mediums that are appropriate, familiar, and accessible** to its target audiences. It requires content and form that is grounded so as to achieve connection and not alienation. While **communications can be simple, it cannot be simplistic**. Communication must **ensure complexities are captured**, understood, and **facilitate exchange**. Feminist communications **strive for authenticity and diversity, guided by sincerity**.

Inclusivity and Grassroots-Oriented

Inclusivity and grassroots-oriented refers to a focus on those in margins. It asserts a strengthening of a **bias and emphasis for the poor, across the various sectors and issue** areas of concern. Yet it also recognizes that inclusivity is about being **mindful of actors that are deemed “organic” to the issue, but are voiceless, unheard, or made invisible**.

Inter-movement Solidarity

Inter-movement solidarity refers to the openness of the **women’s movements to working with other social movements** at the national, regional, and global levels. It also refers to **social movements outside of the women’s movements to know the feminist agenda, carry it, and engage with it**. Inter-movement solidarity therefore **requires providing and creating spaces for feminist practice across movements**.

Intergenerational Movements

Intergenerational movements refer to **knowing the different waves of feminist practice** across time — locally, regionally, and globally — and **building on them**. It asserts the importance of **learning from a generation’s strength, bias, strategies, and visions**. Intergenerational movements encourage an **intergenerational approach to ways of knowing and ways of doing**.

Intersectional Analysis

Intersectional analysis refers to an **appreciation of the historical context and sensitivity to cultural specificities** when addressing a challenge to the feminist agenda. It asserts the shaping of a feminist position based on identifying the **critical intersections** of political influence, economic status, racial norms, sexual standards, social privilege, among other **salient identities, structures, and contexts** for advancing the feminist agenda.

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Beijing Platform for Action (BPfA) remains the global blueprint for the advancement of women’s human rights.

