

Expert Group Meeting in preparation for the High-level Intergovernmental Meeting on the Review of the Implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action, Bangkok, 22-24 March 2004

AIDE MEMOIRE

I. Introduction

The United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP) will organize an Expert Group Meeting (EGM) in Bangkok from 22 to 24 March 2004. The EGM is in preparation for the High-level Intergovernmental Meeting, in September 2004, to review the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (BPFA) adopted at the Fourth World Conference on Women (Beijing, 1995), and the outcome of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly (2000) for the UNESCAP region.

The output of the High-level Intergovernmental Meeting from 6 to 9 September 2004 will be fed into the global Review and Appraisal of the implementation of BPFA, to be carried out by the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) at its forty-ninth session in March 2005.

The objective of the EGM is to formulate the conceptual and organizational framework for the High-level Intergovernmental Meeting of September 2004.

II. Background

In September 1995, government delegates and non-governmental (NGO) observers gathered in Beijing, China for the United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women. Delegates met for two weeks to work on a Platform for Action aimed at achieving greater equality and opportunity for women. The Beijing Conference followed three previous World Conferences in Mexico City (International Women's Year, 1975), Copenhagen (1980) and Nairobi (1985).

By the close of the Conference, representatives from 189 countries voted unanimously to adopt the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (BPFA) reflecting a new international commitment to the goals of equality, development, and peace for all women everywhere.

The BPFA identifies 12 Critical Areas of Concern considered to represent the main obstacles to women's advancement. The critical areas are: Women and poverty; Education and training of women; Women and Health; Violence against Women; Women and Armed Conflict; Women and the Economy; Women in Power and Decision-making; Institutional mechanisms for the Advancement of Women; Human Rights of Women; Women and the Media; Women and the Environment and The girl child.

The Platform defines strategic objectives and spells out the actions to be taken by governments, the international community, non-governmental organizations and the private sector.

Five years after the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing, women from around the world gathered again. The United Nations General Assembly Special Session, "Women 2000: Gender Equality, Development and Peace for the 21st Century," was held from 5 to 10 June, 2000 at United Nations headquarters in New York. The goal of Beijing+5 was to review and assess progress

achieved and to consider future actions for further implementation of the *Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women* (adopted in 1985) and the BPFA.

The Beijing +5 Outcome Document strengthened commitments to eradicate harmful traditional practices, including so called 'honour killings', forced marriages and female genital mutilation. Among other things, it also called upon governments to eliminate gender discriminatory legislation by 2005 and create greater access to affordable treatment and care for women and girls living with HIV and AIDS. Additionally, the language of the outcome document is stronger than the original BPFA, showing an awareness of the effects of globalisation on women, and the identification of rape in war is a significant development.

In 2005, a review and appraisal of the implementation of the BPFA and the outcome of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly (2000), will be carried out by the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) at its forty-ninth session (March 2005). The review and appraisal by the CSW will identify achievements, gaps and challenges and provide an indication of areas where actions and initiatives, within the framework of the BPFA and the outcome of the special session (Beijing+5), are most urgent to further implementation.

To prepare for the review and appraisal, the United Nations Secretariat will draw on a variety of sources of information and statistics. These include national action plans to implement the BPFA; reports since 1995 by States parties under the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW); and information generated since 1995 during the review by the CSW of the BPFA, including through expert group meetings organized by the Division for the Advancement of Women. Information for the review will also be based on a questionnaire to Governments and to UN agencies, Funds and Programmes that will be prepared by CSW.

Other sources of information which will be utilized include Common Country Assessments and the United Nations Development Assistance Frameworks, (CCA/UNDAFs), Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers, (PRSPs), national Human Development Reports and Millennium Development Goal (MDG) reports. National reports on other areas, such as social development and sustainable development, will also be utilized.

Official statistics available from the United Nations Statistics Division, the Population Division, the regional commissions and other entities in the United Nations system (ILO, UNESCO, WHO, etc.) will also be used. Coordination will be established with United Nations entities responsible for follow-up to other global conferences in order to exchange pertinent country information, in particular with UNFPA on follow-up to the 1994 Cairo International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) and with the Department of Economic and Social Affairs on follow-up to the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development in 1992, and its review in 2002, as well as the follow-up to the World Summit for Social Development in 1995 and its review in 2005.

Review and appraisal will also be carried out at the regional level. The regional processes will utilize regional action plans, national reports to regional bodies and the outcomes of expert group meetings and other activities at regional level.

In this regard, UNESCAP will organize the High-level Intergovernmental Meeting, from 6 to 9 September 2004, to review the implementation of the BPFA and the outcome of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly (2000) for the UNESCAP region. The output of the High-level Intergovernmental Meeting in September 2004 will be fed into the global Review and Appraisal of the implementation of BPFA, to be carried out by the CSW at its forty-ninth session in March 2005.

III. Objectives

The objective of the EGM is to formulate the conceptual and organizational framework for the High-level Intergovernmental Meeting of September 2004. Specifically, the EGM will:

1. Identify the persistent issues, concerns and emerging challenges in the region, vis-à-vis the Outcome Document of the Global Review of the BPFA; these include the social and economic impact of globalization, trafficking in women and girls; violence against women; women in decision-making; human rights; information and communication technology; HIV/AIDS and peace and conflict resolution;
2. Provide a conceptual framework for the High-level Meeting, with which Governments can discuss and analyze specific country experiences in the implementation of the BPFA and the outcome of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly. The framework should enable and facilitate a discussion of the *major* achievements and obstacles encountered in implementation since 1995, of governmental and other efforts to promote an active and visible policy of gender mainstreaming in all policies and programmes; the framework should facilitate deliberations that differentiates between outputs and actions from achievements and impacts on the situation of women and promotion of gender equality;
3. Provide a framework for the High-level Meeting with which to organize and prioritize agenda and thematic items; the review agenda should reflect a reporting exercise on implementation with emphasis on best practices and effective strategies being employed by the various actors accountable for implementation; negotiation of agreed text modality will not be a part of the Meeting Agenda.

IV. Organization and format of the EGM

The 3-day EGM will be organized and hosted by UNESCAP in Bangkok.

Ten experts will be invited from the region to deliberate on various emerging aspects of gender and development issues most relevant to the UNESCAP region. Government delegates, NGO representatives and UN agency representatives are welcome as observers. At the conclusion of the EGM, participants are expected to adopt a report that outlines the major conclusions and recommendations of the meeting. A final report will be produced after the meeting.

V. Documentation

UNESCAP secretariat will prepare a document compiling information on the persistent as well as emerging challenges to achieving gender equality in the UNESCAP region.

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