



Alternatives for celebrating Beijing+20

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In 2015 it has been 20 years since the Beijing Platform for Action (BPfA) was adopted. There is a need for new élan for women's rights and gender equality, internationally and in The Netherlands. There is also a need for clearer insights in the level of implementation of BPfA, and attention for "emerging issues" (a.o. changing North-South relations; consequences of the economic and financial crises; HIV/AIDS; UN Security Council Resolution 1325).

2015 is also the start of a new framework for international development cooperation: the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). In the period 2012-2015 the architecture of the post-MDG agenda will be shaped. Worldwide attention for the Beijing+20 momentum can have a strongly mobilizing effect to get women's rights and gender equality (central) on that agenda.

Both a national and international component are important for the Beijing+20 process. For the implementation of international agreements such as BPfA, CEDAW, UNSCR1325, the accent is at national (and local) level. For élan and solidarity the international component is indispensable. The alternatives for a 5th World Conference on Women sketched here below target both levels, and can be combined.

Taking stock

Governments and civil society, including NGOs, take stock: what results have been achieved in the twelve critical areas of concern of the BPfA (+ those related to UNSCR1325, CEDAW, and other relevant agreements)? And what are the gaps? Through answering this last question, priorities for follow-up can be identified. As such, (shadow)reports are more than another paper & talk exercise: they enable development of well-founded, forward looking strategies. They can be part of a creative, mobilizing, energizing process.

National (shadow)reports can be set up according to an internationally agreed report-model, concrete and based on facts and figures, made available in at least one of the UN languages. To enable comparison and benchmarking, compilation and digital publication can be organized by regional UN-organizations and UN Women.

Simultaneous global action

Imagine a 24-hour simultaneous action around the world, similar to the UN Millennium 'Stand UP' Against Poverty campaign in 2006. Governments and civil society, when possible in cooperation, organize national and local events. The starting time is a strategic moment, for example the start date of the 4th World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995 and the Huairou NGO Forum; or the closing day; the day the BPfA was accepted or the day prior to the High Level Meeting of the UN.

Media can spread the news and images of the actions. Digital means (satellite and internet, videoconferences, etc) enable connections across borders of provinces, countries, and neighboring time zones. The global action enhances visibility, momentum and connectedness, and expresses support for women in vulnerable countries and positions. It can create a new support base and élan for gender equality.

High Level Thematic Debate in 2015 (70th General Assembly)

During the 70th session of the UN General Assembly in 2015 a High Level Thematic Debate can be organized, aimed at commitment for the implementation of agreements, and the attribution of sufficient means for BPfA, UNSCR1325, CEDAW, etc. The debate will be inclusive for member states and civil society, including women's organizations and other NGOs working on gender equality and women's empowerment.

Of each country both government and civil society present at least three good practices and ten concrete challenges that must be tackled by 2020, including targets and timeframes. Overarching barriers and bottlenecks can be identified, and strategic and practical solutions proposed. Through the debate a strong connection with the Sustainable Development Goals can be made at UN level.

Five regional (online) conferences

Members of the International Alliance of Women (IAW) have put forward the idea to organize (online) conferences by governments and NGOs in each of the five UN regions. These can take place simultaneously, for example during the ten days or five weeks before the High Level Meeting at the UN General Assembly to be organized in 2015. The five conferences can be linked online, creating a worldwide network.

It remains to be seen whether this format is indeed suitable for every UN region. A Beijing+20 process at regional level offers potential benefits with respect to a UN-top: promotion of transparency; participation of regional, national and local organizations; access of women from marginalized groups; and less costly than the preparations of traditional UN conferences.

Forum-model derived from UN Habitat

The Huairou Commission recommends the model of the UN Habitat Forums as an alternative to a 5th World Conference on Women.

Draft resolution

After several consultations (AWID Forum April 2012; GEAR Campaign consultations; IWHC partner consultations; New York women's organizations meetings) several women's rights groups and NGOs active at UN level have drafted a resolution on "*the Commemoration of the Twentieth Anniversary of the Fifth World Conference on Women (Beijing)*". Likewise to the alternatives sketched above, it also recommends stocktaking by governments and civil society; and proposes the High Level Meeting model, in combination with gatherings at regional level.