



Indian Council
of World Affairs

The United Nations **The Wellspring for Gender Mainstreaming of International Relations and Foreign Policy**

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Former Assistant Secretary-General of the United Nations and Deputy
Executive Director of UN Women; Former Ambassador of India



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Indian Council of World Affairs

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THE UNITED NATIONS

**THE WELLSPRING FOR
GENDER MAINSTREAMING OF
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ABSTRACT

The United Nations is the fundamental keeper and shaper of humankind's evolving equity, gender equality and justice-based civilisational value system into the 21st century. UN@75's major achievement is that it is the wellspring of gender equality norms and standards. Since its inception, it has been the forum for gender equality, women's empowerment and women's human rights related debates in international relations. For the last ten years, UN Women is the only integrated feminist global governance entity that has been carrying the institutional torch. It has driven a virtuous cycle of gender equal global, regional, national, local norms, laws, policies and measures and their implementation with Member States, civil society, other feminist collaborators and stakeholders within and outside the UN system of organisations. Feminist theories have found voice and validation, dynamism and traction in and through the gendered interpretation of international relations in the multilateral system anchored in the U.N. The UN Women has emerged as catalyst for supporting countries and their regional, inter-regional, bilateral, and plurilateral groupings, to pursue a feminist foreign policy, advocating for gender mainstreaming of all relevant institutions, consultations, declarations, cooperation policies and strategies. This paper draws on the history of gender equality and women's empowerment in the United Nations and looks at various gender mainstreaming initiatives taken at the UN to codify the concept in various intergovernmental agreements and resolutions. The paper also highlights the role played by UN Women to become the fulcrum of New International Feminist Order.

KEY WORDS

United Nations, UN Women, Gender Equality, Women Empowerment, Beijing Declarations, WPS, Sustainable Development Agenda, '*Shad Gunas*' of Excellence



*“A feminist is anyone who
recognizes the equality
and full humanity of
women and men.”*

— Gloria Steinem



■ It does not require a feminist to highlight as the historian Yuval Noah Harari does in his Sapiens series, that the power hierarchy of supreme importance in all known human societies over the ages is the male dominated hierarchy of sex and gender with few episodic exceptions in some countries and communities¹. Gender inequality has not only been inherent in them but has also become the norm. The global feminist movement for equal rights for women in every field has called it out, sought to provoke outrage and, set goals and standards for achieving a gender equal world for all people.

Power relations within families, societies, economies and countries as much as in international relations are marked, to a greater or lesser extent, by the almost atavistic, “patrilineal fraternal syndrome”. Men have had a grip on power in all spaces and banded together to uphold and enforce a male order characterised by varying degrees of masculinity, male chauvinism and misogyny. This has been the source of structural gender injustice and discrimination against women and girls over millennia.

For long in its history, especially through the second wave onwards, the feminist movement has adopted the credo of “the personal being political and political being personal”² in the struggle to achieve gender equality. The premise is that gender relations are about power relations and they must therefore encompass not only personal experiences of women in the family as the nucleus and launching pad for change but must seamlessly extend to the community,

society, economy and politics in a systemic and systematic way.

While the local, provincial and national spaces have been primary theatres for the feminist struggle, feminists have sought to harness the international dimension. The global feminist movement is a manifestation of this internationalisation of feminism. It has been characterised by cross-border conversations, ideological affiliations, knowledge and experience sharing, advocacy on social and political norms and policies in different areas of common concern.

This interchange has grown within and across the feminist global North of developed Western countries (North America, Europe, and Australia-New Zealand) and global feminist south of developing countries of Asia, Africa, Latin America and Caribbean. India has been part of this global feminist movement from colonial times but it is from 1970s onwards that Indian feminism took flight and contributed to global feminism in a substantive and unique way.

The Global Feminist Movement (GFM) has sought to break down structural barriers to Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment (GEWE) and reshape institutions and policies of governments on feminist principles. It has tried to make GEWE the basis of all economic, social and governance norms and for individual and collective action in all spaces. Yet, feminist’s cross-border activism would not have gained the desired traction and institutionalisation at national and international levels without

a feminist global governance institution like the United Nations (U.N.).

To rectify the ills of multilevel patriarchy and create a new normal of gender equality on an on-going basis, it is important to dismantle its deepest civilisational foundations. The U.N. - as the fundamental keeper and shaper of humankind's evolving equity, gender equality and justice-based civilisational value system into the 21st century - is best equipped to do that. UN@75's major achievement is that it is the wellspring of gender equality norms and standards and a forum for gender equality, women's empowerment and women's human rights related debates in international relations since its inception to the present.

For the last ten years, UN Women – is the only integrated feminist global governance entity that has been carrying the institutional torch. It has been influential not only in the incorporation of global norms on GEWE in national policies but also in diplomacy and foreign policy of Member States. It has driven a virtuous cycle of gender equal global, regional, national, local norms, laws, policies and measures and their implementation with Member States, civil society, other feminist collaborators and stakeholders within and outside the UN system of organisations.

Although “feminism” as a movement arose in the West, India and the South Asian Region have a rich tradition and panoply of women's movement and home-grown feminist thought, role models in political leadership, social and environmental activism, and feminist economist scholarship. It has contributed majorly to the significant body of GEWE norms and standards, soft law and

international rules of the game especially at the U.N.

Feminist theories have found voice and validation, dynamism and traction in and through the gendered interpretation of international relations in the multilateral system anchored in the U.N. In effect, there is a veritable new international feminist order emerging at the U.N. especially in the last 10 years, resisting continuing misogynist backlash from different quarters. By now all four projects of U.N. for humanity- peace and security, human rights, sustainable development and, humanitarian and disaster response are integrally mainstreaming gender equality and women's empowerment.

The intersection of feminism with the different theories of international relations has been debated for years but never more than now. Based on the body of U.N. engendered norms, standards and practice, and policies of Member States, it is clear that feminism provides a broad ranging grid for more inclusive and effective international relations. Gender mainstreaming is, therefore, justifiable in different theories of international relations - be they liberal/idealist, realist or constructivist.

GEWE is about principles but also hard-nosed national interest and, as it should be, a combination of the two. Gender equality has indeed been crowned as a global public good, equity and human rights principle to be pursued by States for its own value. Equally, it is recognised as a source of both soft and hard power and critical to realisation of the four national and international projects of humanity and the entire range of other public goods.

HISTORY OF GENDER EQUALITY AND WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT (GEWE) IN THE UNITED NATIONS

Historically, women have been part of the United Nations. Right at its inception, Minerva Bernardino from the Dominican Republic, Bertha Lutz of Brazil and Isabel de Vidal of Uruguay played a crucial role in advocating for the inclusion of women's rights and non-discrimination based on sex in the United Nations Charter, which in 1945 became the first international agreement to recognise the equal rights of men and women.

In 1946, a dedicated Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) was established as an organ of the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC)³. Meeting annually in New York, CSW has become a unique and the largest global platform for policy makers -Women's Affairs Ministers and officials, feminist activists and other stakeholders like private sector, media and academia - to dialogue and set global norms and standards for Member States to follow and cooperate with each other. It focused initially on women's legal status and pioneered the adoption of a number of legally binding Conventions:

- Convention on the Political Rights of Women, 1951
- Convention on the Nationality of Married Women, 1957
- Convention on Equal Remuneration for Men and Women Workers for Work of Equal Values, 1951

- Convention on Consent to Marriage, Minimum Age for Marriage and Registration of Marriages, 1962

The CSW spawned the landmark Convention for the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) in 1979. It is considered an international Bill of Rights for Women. It's near universal ratification —189 out of 193 countries— giving it a pride of place as a global feminist Constitution. Its key provisions seek to define discrimination against women, assure equality before the law or *de jure* equality while also assuring substantive and *de facto* equality of access, opportunity and results in all political, civil, economic, social and cultural fields and levels, both in public and private spheres⁴.

CEDAW significantly justifies and calls for temporary special measures (like quotas in Parliamentary representation of women) aimed at accelerating *de facto* equality between women and men. It stresses the importance of modifying social and cultural patterns of conduct and, eliminating prejudice and customary practices. It mandates a lifecycle approach and intersectional lens to gender equality in respect of observing the three principles of respect, protect and fulfil the human rights of women and girls. The United Nation's Committee on Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW Committee) was established in 1982 as a Treaty Body responsible for monitoring of CEDAW provisions and its implementation. Member States periodically report to the CEDAW Committee and many regard the reports presented by Member States as a barometer of progress on the realisation of substantive equality on the ground. The

CEDAW Committee also generates its own jurisprudence which has been cited and accepted in national and multinational courts of law⁵.

CONCEPT OF GENDER MAINSTREAMING

The U.N. can be credited with codifying into intergovernmental agreements/resolutions, and nudging governments and even private entities to translate into practice, the seminal feminist concept of gender mainstreaming. UN ECOSOC Resolution 1997/2 defined it as “the process of assessing the implications for women and men of any planned action, including legislation, policies or programmes, in all areas and at all levels.”⁶

The gender mainstreaming strategy is further defined as “making women's as well as men's concerns and experiences an integral dimension of the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes in all political, economic and societal spheres so that women and men benefit equally and inequality is not perpetuated. The ultimate goal is to achieve gender equality.”⁷

It also set out Principles for mainstreaming a gender perspective in the United Nations system consisting of UN's 68 entities/ departments, agencies and the Bretton Woods Institutions. These principles also apply to national governments - their domestic and foreign policies, aid and trade strategies and all aspects of bilateral and multilateral diplomacy. The principles are as follows:⁸

- Issues across all areas of activity should be defined to diagnose gender differences

and an assumption of gender-neutrality should not be made.

- Responsibility for translating gender mainstreaming into practice is system-wide and rests at the highest levels. Accountability for outcomes needs to be monitored constantly.
- Gender mainstreaming also requires that every effort be made to broaden women's participation at all levels of decision-making.
- Gender mainstreaming must be institutionalized through concrete steps, mechanisms, policies, budgets, monitoring and processes in all parts of the United Nations system/ national government, foreign policy establishment.
- Gender mainstreaming does not replace the need for targeted, women-specific policies and programmes or positive legislation, nor does it substitute for gender units or focal points.
- Clear political will and the allocation of adequate and, if need be, additional human and financial resources for gender mainstreaming from all available funding sources are important for the successful translation of the concept into practice .

BEIJING DECLARATION AND PLATFORM FOR ACTION

Four World Conferences on Women from 1975 to 1995 (Mexico, Copenhagen, Nairobi) - the last adopting the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (BPA) - have been another major source for gender mainstreaming of

international relations. Each Conference adopted outcome documents creating a progressive body of norms and standards. The BPA - has policy recommendations for achieving GEWE focused on 12 Critical Areas of Concern - women and poverty, education and training for 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 child⁹.

25 years old this year, the BPA still constitutes a feminist gold standard and blueprint for governments and stakeholders to follow in their national and international policies for gender equality. Most countries have in the quarter century, based their gender equality policies on the BPA and participated in the quinquennial national, regional and global reviews - the latest just completed in 2020¹⁰.

The BPA specifically addressed the foreign policy dimension of GEWE and called on International Financial Institutions, including the World Bank (WB), the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the International Fund for Agricultural Development and regional development banks, to examine and allocate their grants and loans to programmes for implementing the Platform for Action in developing

countries, especially in Africa and the Least Developed Countries.

Recognizing that women have played an important role in conflict resolution, peace-keeping and defence and foreign affairs mechanisms, the BPA notes that “they are still underrepresented in decision-making positions” and “if women are to play an equal part in securing and maintaining peace, they must be empowered politically and economically and represented adequately at all levels of decision-making.”¹¹

THE WOMEN PEACE AND SECURITY AGENDA

Drawing upon this, the next big step was taken towards a systematic and substantive gendered lens being mandated in the UN and in the efforts of the international community towards conflict prevention, peace keeping, peace building, and preventing and countering violent extremism and terrorism. The Women Peace and Security (WPS) Agenda enshrined in the landmark Security Council Resolution 1325 (2000) and nine follow-up Resolutions till now, have become an integral part of UN’s Peace and Security architecture, policies and operations.

The WPS Agenda is constructed on promoting GEWE and leveraging it in



the four pillars of prevention, protection, participation, relief and recovery¹². WPS has been a ground-breaking achievement for women's inclusion, voice, participation and leadership in international affairs and recognition that they are differentially and often disproportionately impacted by conflict and have a vital contribution to make towards sustainable peace and security.

The Security Council - the supreme organ of the UN tasked with maintaining global peace and security - is more engaged now both as a policy maker, and monitors the implementation of the WPS by the UN and the Member States. So far, 88 countries have adopted National Action Plans on WPS. In keeping with the feminist vision, WPS is an important rallying point for gender equality related multilateral and bilateral diplomacy in the hardcore areas of 'waging' peace, assuring security, countering violent extremism and conflict related humanitarian action.

GENDER IN POLITICAL ECONOMY AND DEVELOPMENT

Similarly, feminist theories of gendered international political economy and development have been validated in the UN. The analogy to the international political economy theories that drove the North-South development dialogue including under UNCTAD auspices in the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s is inescapable. The centre-periphery and dependency theories of Raul Prebisch are applicable beyond post-colonial, North-South economic inequality and asymmetry

matrices within and between developed and developing countries.

The centre-periphery model suggests that the global economy is characterized by a structured relationship between economic centres or core which - by using military, political, technology, financial and trade power - extracts an economic surplus from the subordinate peripheral countries. By extension of this logic, women have been at the periphery of both national and international economy and division of labour and income. This is reflected in the grossly inadequate and unequal participation and leadership of women in national and international economy, trade, aid, finance and business.

The "peripheralisation" of women in the economy was acknowledged in Addis Ababa Action Agenda on Financing for Development adopted at the *Third International Conference on Financing for Development*, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, 13-16 July 2015. It reaffirmed that achieving gender equality, empowering all women and girls, and the full realisation of their human rights are essential to achieving sustained economic growth and sustainable development.¹³ It reiterated the need for gender mainstreaming, including targeted actions and investments in the formulation and implementation of all financial, economic, environmental and social policies.¹⁴ The Action Agenda recommitted Member States to adopting and strengthening sound policies and enforceable legislation, and transformative actions for the "promotion of gender equality and women's and girls' empowerment at all levels, to ensure women's equal rights, access and opportunities for participation and leadership in the economy

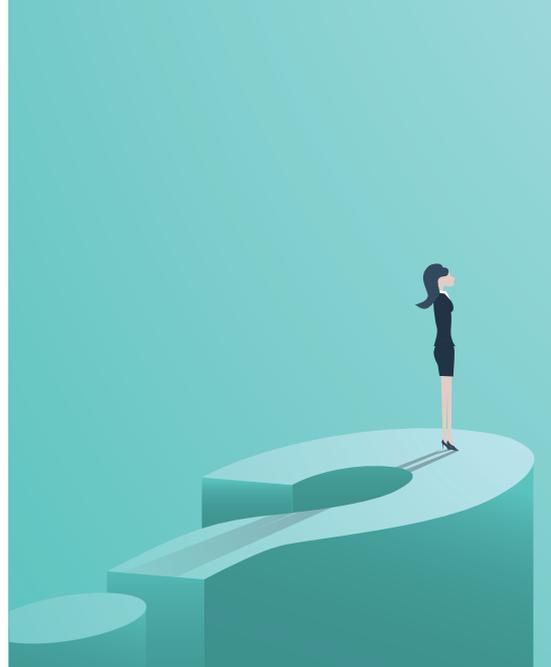
and to eliminate gender-based violence and discrimination in all its forms”¹⁵.

2030 AGENDA FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT: THE TRANSFORMATIVE GENDER EQUALITY GOAL

GEWE has been centre staged in the U.N. and in the development template of the Bretton Woods Institutions through the historic, universal, gender responsive 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development that sets out 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) encompassing the trinity of economic, social and environmental targets for humanity including a transformative SDG 5 on achieving gender equality and empowering of all women and girls, and complementary gender responsive targets in 11 SDGs¹⁶.

A gender mainstreamed 2030 Agenda¹⁷ and SDG 5 and its nine targets are path-breaking¹⁸. The Gender Equality Goal is a promise to all women and girls that they will be enabled to realize their full potential no matter their multiple intersecting identities and status. Its nine targets address physical integrity, voice and choice issues. Gender equality goals and targets have become international Sustainable Development Goals not only for individuals and families or communities and countries but for the international community. The personal has truly become political, local has become global and, global cascades down to the local.

From elimination of violence against women and girls, to ending harmful practices like early and child marriage; to recognising



and valuing unpaid care and domestic work that disproportionately falls on women and providing public services, infrastructure and social protection policies; equal participation and leadership in economic and public life, to sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights; from equal access, ownership and control over economic, technological and financial resources; to comprehensive legal and policy reform to end gender-based discrimination - governments are now committed to pursuing these targets nationally and internationally.

UN WOMEN - FULCRUM OF NEW INTERNATIONAL FEMINIST ORDER

UN Women has become the fulcrum of the new international feminist order. Since its creation in 2010, it has elevated and intensified GEWE related global discourse, international relations and diplomacy, striving for six qualities or *shad gunas* of excellence.

The first *Guna* relates to the creation of a UN Women centred gender equality, global governance and institutional architecture

- a locus of *Shakti* or creative energy. It is integrated, strengthened, multi-sectoral and equipped to promote GEWE in a focused and comprehensive way than any other institution in history. It is an axis for empowerment of and dialogue among Ministries of women's affairs of Member States. UN Women is a catalyst for engendering all key institutions everywhere – be it public or private, Foreign Ministries or Finance Ministries. UN Women is also a repository of and radiates the other five *gunas*.

UN System: Delivering Gender Equality Agenda

The Second *Guna - Bala* - is the quality of force multiplication. UN Women in its UN System coordination function has ensured that gender equality and women's empowerment related policies, programs and accountability frameworks are embraced by almost all 68 entities/agencies and departments of UN system including IMF/WB/WTO at the global, regional and country levels.

These together constitute a GEWE infused universe, measuring impact on delivering their global public goods - whether health or education - to women and girls while fostering their empowerment and agency. Another important commitment is gender parity in the UN system at all levels from recruitment to leadership of women in the highest echelons where remarkable progress has been made. The latest Report of the Secretary-General on the Status of Women in the United Nation systems indicates that gender parity has been achieved at UN's highest - USG/ASG levels and among UN Resident Coordinators - the field leadership

though women are 34% women in the D1- to USG levels, shedding down from 58% at entry level¹⁹.

Adoption and Implementation of the International Gender Equality Compact

The third *Guna - Veeryam* - is the quality to establish transformative and “brave new” global norms and standards. Apart from CEDAW and the BPA, the GEWE “motherboard” of standards have been strengthened through landmark Resolutions - of the Commission on the Status of Women, the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA), ECOSOC, the Security Council and CEDAW Committee jurisprudence - expanding and deepening GEWE body of international soft law and practice. Sustainable Development Goal 5 and all other gender-responsive targets in other 11 SDGs” constitute a Gender Equality Compact.

The Compact embraces the BPA and the CEDAW as foundational frameworks for sustainable development. Key global agreements from Rio plus 20, the Addis Ababa Action Agenda, the Paris Agreement, the New Urban Agenda, the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) and Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction have additionally been engendered and are now part of the Gender Equality Compact. The Compact offers a real opportunity and urgency to drive lasting change for women's rights and empowerment.

Since 2015, a priority has been to keep driving the “normative of implementation”. However, as the recent global, regional and national

reviews of BPA under UN Women auspices indicated, there are major implementation gaps in almost every area, progress is slow and uneven. At this rate, gender equality will not be achieved in this century let alone by 2030. Priority must, therefore, be given to the gender-responsive implementation of the SDGs and the Gender Equality Compact in a holistic and integrated way through promoting an all-of-government, multi-sectoral and multilevel approach. Localisation of global norms through adoption and reform of laws, policies and measures including special measures and actions, the removal of discriminatory laws and policies, and ensuring their full, effective and accelerated implementation is necessary.

Despite remarkable progress in the last 25 years, we need to continue to push the frontiers in old and new, and culturally contested areas. It is crucial to drive political, social, scientific technological innovations including Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Information and Communications Technology (ICT) in advancing gender equality. These innovations can enhance the viability and effectiveness of the interventions, modalities and means of knowledge gathering, dissemination and implementation of the GEWE Compact. Innovation in communication, including new ways of using old media and social media, innovative partnerships, advocacy platforms and campaigns, are essential enablers.

Mobilising Game Changers and Movement Building

The fourth *Guna – Aishwarya* - is about mobilising the wealth of actors and

organisational assets through advocacy, movement building and multistakeholder partnership with the women's movement. It is about deploying the power of what may be called key stakeholders and game changers for gender equality including men and boys, youth, media, private sector, faith-based organisations, other development, environment/climate change and human rights CSOs with women's movement and civil society at the centre.

GEWE is a psychosocial project as much as a political and economic one. These convergences are essential for dismantling discriminatory social norms, harmful practices and patriarchal structures that stubbornly prevent rapid GEWE transformation. Changing gender unequal social norms and addressing the needs of all women and girls is imperative. This is especially so for those facing multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination and marginalisation based on race, ethnicity, religion, rural-urban divide, disability, poverty, caste and class. Examples of UN Women's



international advocacy campaigns include the successful HeforShe, Step it up for Gender equality, Planet 50-50, Unstereotype Alliance, Generation Equality Forum, Ring the Bell for Gender Equality in Stock Exchanges, Women's Empowerment Principles for Private Sector, LEAP for youth and the Interfaith Alliance for gender equality. These have been successful on many different fronts.

Knowledge and Advocacy Hub

The fifth *Guna - Sarvagyaana* - is the quality of omniscience. UN Women has been working to be a one stop centre for GEWE related information, knowledge and wisdom to use T.S. Eliot's hierarchy of knowledge power. Generating comprehensive gender equality and women's empowerment related data, statistics, indicators, monitoring systems, frameworks, and capacities in SDG implementation is a prerequisite. Follow up and review of implementation at all levels, to assess progress, gaps, and guide policies and actions is the key.

There are 50 indicators on gender equality and women's empowerment in the Global Indicators Framework on SDGs which require a gender statistics revolution and support. Beginning with bridging the gender data gap - "making women count", it is vital to continue to make the case that explains why GEWE matters for national interest and foreign policy, what does it constitute in different areas/sectors and how can countries articulate and organise themselves to get to that destination. Becoming the knowledge hub and best practices treasury to draw from what works and what does not, is equally important. A global observatory



and GEWE related knowledge exchange and a Research and Data (R&D) platform is ideal with national partners like India, who can also be regional cooperation leaders.

Traditional feminists have balked at the instrumental argument for GEWE or for that matter working with the private sector. For mind-set change in political and corporate leaders or public opinion makers, there is need to highlight both the right thing to do - because it is gender justice and the smart thing to do - because it serves social, economic, democratic and effective governance and profit purpose.

The US\$12-18 trillion global GDP increase by 2025 through gender parity - a case made by McKinsey and US\$1 trillion increase in GDP for a more gender equal India by 2025²⁰ are persuasive arguments for political leaders, as are corporate profitability benefits of gender parity. The penny literally drops and, as Amartya Sen argues, the economic and poverty eradication benefits of GEWE are a no brainer.

Igniting the Power of Institutions, Resources and Programs

The sixth *Guna – Tejas* - is about igniting the power of institutions and resources. Creating, empowering, strengthening and resourcing dedicated to gender equality and women's empowerment institutions at all levels – global, regional, national and local - is vital. Equally important is ensuring that all key institutions - political, economic, judicial, social, cultural, infrastructural and public services, foreign policy related etc. – work in a gender-responsive manner. Generating significantly increased and enhanced financial investment and resource mobilization from all sources, including Official Development Assistance (ODA), transformative actions to close gender equality gaps at all levels - targeted and mainstreamed - is essential fuel for the gender equality engine. There is a need to ramp up resource mobilisation and increased impact of UN programs on the ground.

The UN works in cooperation with donor states and beneficiaries in core areas of GEWE. They complement bilateral cooperation programs in areas such as women's economic empowerment, women and peace and security, political participation and leadership, ending violence against women, gender responsive budgeting and, channelling and uptake of international development assistance. Another aspect is training in gender-responsive diplomacy — be it bilateral or multilateral — and capacity building for women diplomats including in specialised areas that are key to any countries foreign policy including trade, economic, finance, environmental

and climate change, cultural, social and technological cooperation, disarmament, peace-making and building, among others.

Including women in second and third track diplomacy in mixed or discrete groupings as UN Women has sought to promote - for example in Afghanistan, Syria or Colombia and in G20 Women's Engagement Group - is important too. It is not as a substitute to their being at the main negotiating table but there is value in their being co-opted in a preparatory and reinforcing role too.

UN CATALYST FOR REGIONAL, INTERREGIONAL, BILATERAL, PLURILATERAL GENDER DIPLOMACY

UN Women has encouraged and supported individual countries and their North-South, North-North and South-South, sub regional, regional and inter-regional groupings, to pursue a feminist foreign policy, advocate for gender mainstreaming of all relevant institutions, consultations, declarations, cooperation policies, plans, programs and strategies.

In a major breakthrough, UN Women persuaded the G77 to adopt a Declaration on GEWE in its special Conference hosted by Bolivia in 2014²¹ - for the first time in its 50-year history and was reflected in the Santa Cruz Summit Declaration²². With UN Women support, the Istanbul Program of Action for LDCs of 2011 identified gender equality as a key development priority as did Small Island Developing States Conference - Samoa Pathway. In 2014, UN Women worked with Turkey, the G20 host in 2015, to launch a Women's Engagement group - Women-20

and to hold its own annual summit, issue actionable declarations to be incorporated in the G20 Summit Declarations²³. UN Women also supported engendering of G7 - starting with a Women's Forum in 2015 in Germany, the G7 Roadmap for Gender-responsive Economic Environment in 2017, the formation of a G7 Gender Equality Advisory Council in 2018 and the Biarritz Declaration on a partnership for a global coalition on GEWE in 2019.

The OECD has developed Development Assistance Committee guidelines on gender equality based on development assistance, toolkits, markers, policy review and reports among others. UN Women has encouraged peer consultation, mutual influencing and bilateral cooperation arrangements to target dedicated gender programs for funding, supported gender mainstreaming of transversal cooperation programs and GEWE policy compliance as an incentive vis a vis beneficiary countries.

In Asian sub-regional fora such as SAARC, UN Women and its predecessor organisation have been partnering with the SAARC secretariat to mainstream a gender perspective across thematic areas, in all of its policies and programs, organisational procedures and coordination of interventions related to gender equality and the empowerment of women. UN Women has also supported the constitution of the SAARC Gender Policy and Advisory Group (GPAG) in 2016 that identified women's economic empowerment in South Asia as a priority and helped draft the 3-year gender action plan of SAARC.

UN Women contributed to the finalisation of the new UN-ASEAN Plan of Action 2021-2025

in which gender is a prominent cross-cutting priority across all three community pillars of ASEAN and successfully put WPS into the political security pillar for the first time. It has also been at the forefront of support to ASEAN to engender the new, legally binding ASEAN Agreement on Disaster Management and Emergency Response (AADMER) 2021-2025. It has engaged with women's sectoral bodies (ACW and ACWC) to help build institutional capacity for them to integrate gender into ASEAN priorities to align with ASEAN Vision 2025. Key strategic studies include - ASEAN Gender outlook: Accelerating achievement of SDGs.

UN Women regularly tracks how increased HOS/G championship of GEWE is reflected in UNGA speeches going beyond the Western group. Over the years, more and more Heads of State and Government refer to gender equality as a priority in their domestic and foreign policy. Feminist ideational templates have entered bilateral and plurilateral diplomacy especially of Nordics/EU with developing countries, including as part of aid, human rights, economic, diplomatic and security dialogue and cooperation.

HISTORIC SIGNIFICANCE OF FIRST GENDER EQUALITY SUMMIT

In Asia, Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe and Chinese President Xi Jinping assumed the role of high profile global champions in partnership with UN Women. In South Asia, Prime Minister Narendra Modi for HeforShe and Bangladesh's Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina for Planet 50-50 have been notable in their global

championship of GEWE. The climax of this mobilisation of the top, mostly male, political leadership of all countries around the world was the first ever *Global Leaders' Meeting on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment: A Commitment to Action*²⁴ with 70 Heads of Governments and States, with 165 countries making commitments to implement the Global Gender Equality Compact in September 2015.

It resulted in unprecedented political support at the highest level for the GEWE agenda. Never before had Heads of State and Government come together to affirm their strong and extraordinary commitment to gender equality, to the full implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action, and to the achievement of gender equality commitments in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. As a strong reminder of the fact that no country has achieved gender equality and underlining the universality of UN Women's agenda, countries were represented from all continents and all income levels. The event marked the culmination of UN Women's 18-month long Beijing+20 campaign and its efforts to ask countries to "Step It Up" to achieve Planet 50-50 by 2030. It took place in conjunction with the UN Sustainable Development Summit, under UNGA auspices in New York, strategically positioning gender equality there.

It was the realisation of UN Women's objective to place accountability for implementation of gender equality commitments at the highest level in government and to have leaders themselves take responsibility for implementation. In addition, leaders from regional organisations, civil society,



private and philanthropy sectors also made commitments at the event demonstrating the multistakeholder nature of the gender equality project.

FEMINIST FOREIGN POLICY

Sweden became the first country in the world to declare a feminist foreign policy - applying the gender perspective throughout the foreign policy agenda with the three Rs of Rights, Representation, and Resources²⁵. It has since been joined by Canada, France and Mexico. Hard and soft diplomacy aspects of feminist foreign policy announced by these countries implies that they would apply a gendered lens in their peace and security, sustainable development cooperation, humanitarian assistance and human rights related consultation and peer pressure particularly with developing country partners.

6 GUNAS AND WAY FORWARD FOR INDIA AND SOUTH ASIA

UN Women and the UN have been actively working with South Asian countries and India to advance their national and international GEWE agenda. Going forward, it is recommended that they follow the 6 *Gunas* approach to advancing the GEWE agenda in South Asian and Indian foreign policy and in their conduct of international relations including in and with the U.N.

- Establish institutional focal points/units/within PMO/foreign ministry/trade and economic ministries and support them in other countries as part of sub-regional, Asian, South-South and North-South cooperation. Ensure women's equal representation and leadership in foreign policy institutions, in diplomatic missions and in key negotiations abroad as the best manifestation of *Stree Shakti*.
- Follow an all of Ministry - all of Government-all of Society approach to gender mainstreaming of foreign policy in close coordination with the national women's machineries/Ministries and women's civil society organisations and actively support their global networking and exchanges.
- Foster data, knowledge and best practice hubs and networks at regional and global level. Let there be osmosis between the strategic security and foreign policy community, academia and think tanks and the feminist one.
- Proactively support up-gradation of the Gender Equality Normative Compact and gender mainstreaming of progressive regional and global norms in international fora including in new areas like Technology 4.0 and the future of jobs.
- Lead and support Advocacy and movement building on GEWE and join global campaigns. *Beti Bachao Beti Padhao* is an exemplar for others. HeforShe drew highest commitment in India and even a postal stamp was issued.
- Invest in and promote international/bilateral cooperation in practical, scalable and replicable programs that act like lighthouses and demonstration models and invest in women's capacity building and training. India's ITEC – South-South cooperation program can become an instrument of women's empowerment in partner countries.

CONCLUSION

As the BPA plus 25 reviews and appraisal²⁶ has shown - the progress in realising the feminist order on the ground in our countries is unacceptably slow and uneven. We need giant leaps not faltering steps. This requires the “international feminist order” and Global Gender Compact marshalled by the UN to work in symbiosis with gender-responsive political leadership and feminist movement building in countries. Planet 50-50 is humanity’s most important transformative mission and goal of international cooperation too. It needs to be addressed with the sense of priority and urgency it deserves as 2030 is just round the corner.

Only through the global public good of GEWE can the international community find solutions to the vexed problems of absolute poverty, jobs crisis, environmental degradation, violence, conflict and terrorism, and unrepresentative and undemocratic governance. A new era of international cooperation among Governments and peoples towards achievement of Sustainable Development Goals by 2030 requires full and equal partnership of all men and women.

Gloria Steinem famously said “Don't think about making women fit the world - think about making the world fit women”²⁷. It's that transformation of the world, overturning millennia old patriarchy and enabling empowered women to prevail, that 21st century international relations and diplomacy must reflect and support.

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Lakshmi Puri

Former Assistant Secretary-General of the United Nations and Deputy Executive Director of UN Women; Former Ambassador of India

Lakshmi Puri is former Assistant Secretary-General at the United Nations and the former Deputy Executive Director of UN Women. She was Director of the flagship International Trade division and the acting Deputy Secretary-General of United Nations Conference on Trade and Development. She led the preparations for the Fourth Least Developed Countries Conference as Director at OHRLLS.

Before her 15-year stint at the United Nations, she served as an Indian diplomat for 28 years. Lakshmi joined the Indian Foreign Service in 1974 and served in Japan, Sri Lanka, Switzerland (Geneva), and as an Ambassador to Hungary and accredited to Bosnia and Herzegovina. She was active in conceptualising and negotiating India's many bilateral, plurilateral and multilateral economic diplomacy initiatives.

Joining the leadership team of UN Women at its inception, she contributed strategically and vitally in building UN Women into a dynamic entity, a powerful advocate, knowledge and partnership hub, norm setter and program driver for gender equality and women's empowerment. Lakshmi was instrumental in convening by UN Women of the first-ever Global Summit on gender equality in 2015 with 70 key heads of state and government attending and making commitments. She also led imaginative Movement building campaigns such as HeForShe and Planet 50/50 with global impact.

Lakshmi Puri has multifaceted experience in bilateral and multilateral diplomacy, negotiations of international agreements and norm-setting. She has been active on public advocacy spanning, critical areas of sustainable development including poverty eradication, food security and agriculture, water, energy, urban development, education, trade in goods, services, and commodities investment and intellectual property rights regimes, migration and refugees, climate change and humanitarian action. Puri has contributed to publications and thinks tanks in these areas and to opinion editorials. Throughout her career, she has interacted with global leaders, decision-makers and opinion influencers at the highest levels. She has developed transformative partnerships with governments, civil society, academia, youth, the private sector, and the media.

Lakshmi has received international awards and accolades for her work and contribution to international development, human rights, humanitarian, peace and security policy-making and norm-setting. These include the prestigious Eleanor Roosevelt Human Rights Award, Novus Award for Championing the Sustainable Development Goals, the Millennium Campus Award 2015 and Global Generation Award as Inspiration for Youth.



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