



Submission to the Australian NGO Beijing +15 Review

2020women welcomes the opportunity to provide comments on the Review of the Beijing Platform for Action (BPFA). 2020women was founded in August 2009 as a feminist organisation established to promote the equality of women. We do this through practical means that include sharing women's stories and dreams, and by conducting surveys, giving women the opportunity to voice their opinions on issues that affect them.

We have attracted a considerable number of women to our web site, receiving a significant number of visitors in the first three months of operation. Over 500 women have registered as participants for our surveys, one third of whom are under the age of 30. The majority of these women have not previously been involved with women's organisations.

More information about 2020women can be found at our web site at:

<http://2020women.org>

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Background

In 2010 the Commission of the Status of Women will review progress on fifteen years of implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action (BPFA) that was created in 1995 at the United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women in 1995. This review encompasses the 12 strategic objectives contained within the BPFA: women and poverty, women in education and training, 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.

2020women welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Australian Commonwealth Government Office for Women's invitation to provide input to this review.

A central concern for 2020women is that while many of the policy and program requirements for gender equality in Australia are in place, in reality the major gains were made some time ago and little has improved over the past twenty years.

The women's stories collected through 2020women reveal a common theme that is unique to women: resilience. The principle of resilience is fundamental to strong societies and needs greater recognition and investment across the twelve strategic objectives.

Resilience pulls societies through times of difficulty. We believe that opportunity for change exists through supporting the resilience of women and by placing more women in decision-making roles. Women need encouragement to become better advocates for each other and to build on their resilience to nurture improved outcomes for women in the future.

Women and poverty

Although having a job is the best defence against poverty, a holistic approach is needed to overcome entrenched poverty; social inclusion, adequate incomes, quality jobs and access to appropriate social services (including legal aid) are all required. Unpaid caring and the high cost of childcare have an adverse impact on Australian women's incomes and this has been exacerbated by the lack of a universal scheme of paid parental leave for Australian women.¹

Currently, the 55.2% of Australian women in the paid workforce who have full time employment earn only 82.8% of men's full-time ordinary earnings. This gap increases when looked at in more detail; total full time earnings for women are at 54.5% of men's total earnings (ABS 2009).

The difference between men and women's wages in Australia is back to where it was in 1989 and the participation rate of women in employment in Australia is not keeping pace with advances made in other countries.

- A report released this year by AMP.NATSEM² showed that there is approximately 28% difference between men and women's annual wages between the ages of 25 to 34 years but this gap increases to 40% later in life. The same report also showed that men with children earn the most (they receive on average an income of \$64,900 between ages 35-44) while women with children earn the least (earning on average an income of \$33,500 between ages 35-44 years).

¹ It should be noted that the Australian government has agreed to introduce paid parental leave in 2011. However, the proposed scheme does not replace income earned, and will provide women with a relatively low level of income support.

² *She works hard for the money: Australian women and the gender divide* AMP.NATTSEM Income and Wealth Report, Issue 22, April 2009

- The difference increases as women move up the employment ladder. According to the Equal Opportunity for Women in the Workforce Agency's report³, the pay gap for women and men in key management roles is around 28.3%.
- As a result of pay inequity, the HREOC submission to the Review Panel on Australia's Future Tax System (February 2009) stated that retirement savings for women are less than half that of men. This was also the finding made by the Sex Discrimination Commissioner on her Listening Tour where many women related anxiety about living in poverty in their later years due to the gender gap in superannuation and retirement savings.⁴

The reasons women have fewer savings and lower superannuation were listed in the Listening Tour Community Report:

- *Women's unpaid work is not properly valued by society – the superannuation system does not recognise unpaid work;*
- *Women often leave the paid work force to care for children, parents or grandchildren;*
- *Women often struggle to become financially independent, particularly after a separation or a divorce;*
- *Women are often employed in the casual and part-time work force, earning a salary that is below the threshold for the superannuation co-contributory scheme; and*
- *Historical exclusion of women from superannuation schemes.*

Lack of superannuation during maternity is also another cause of women's lower superannuation savings.

³ *Pay Power and Position: beyond the 2008 EOWA Australian census of women in leadership*, EOWA, June 2009

⁴ *2008 Gender equality: What matters to Australian women and men* The Listening Tour Community Report, Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission

Gender discrimination in employment has a high cost, as employment is the most important link between economic growth and poverty reduction. The available statistics suggest that women earn less than men at all points of the employment spectrum and that there are structural and cultural barriers to engaging more women in high value added employment areas.

However, gender disaggregated data is not easily available in Australia, making it difficult to adequately assess areas for improving women's incomes and thereby reduce poverty.

Notwithstanding, research does show that the difference in pay for Australian women starts as soon as women enter the employment market. Entry-level graduate women earn on average \$2000 per annum less than male graduates according to the Graduate Careers Australia media release dated 28 July 2009.

Further action is required to ensure that Australian government legislation, policies, and programs are adequately evaluated to assess their impact on women.

Education and training of women

Australia has made good progress on the education of women, with a significant proportion of women entering universities or institutions with similar qualifications during the life. Women account for 55% of higher education students and 47.5% of vocational education and training enrolments⁵.

Despite this, women are still under represented in higher degrees and post-graduate courses and women are still undertaking education and training in more traditional areas, such as health and education courses. As a result, Australian women still seem to have fewer occupational options than women in many other countries.

Teacher's career advancement is another area for concern. Research shows that teachers are most effective in their first few years on the job, and that higher starting salaries attract higher quality teachers. Maintaining teacher effectiveness requires policies that

⁵ Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) Statistical Publications, Higher Education Statistics, 2007 Full Year Student Summary tables - All Higher Education Providers, 2008

give teachers incentives to continue to engage with students after 11 to 25 years of service.

There are also areas for improvement in the provision and resourcing of vocational and educational training. Other areas requiring further attention in education include human rights education in schools and leadership training for women.

The high cost of tertiary education presents a significant barrier to women's education, particularly to older women who wish to enter university later in life.

Women and health

Preventative health still lags in Australia, and there is a pressing need for evidence-based systems for evaluating and incorporating new health information and technologies into existing health care systems in Australia providing a focus on preventative health.

Health policy needs to take account of climate change and the economic context as health care costs rise.

- Dental care is not accessible to many Australian women due to increased costs.
- Occupational health and safety for women in Australia is adversely impacted by the fact that women participate in a relatively narrow range of occupations (such as nursing, childcare, retail) many being physically and intellectually stressful.
- Health outcomes for women in rural and remote regions are not as good as those in urban areas. Indigenous women are by far the worst affected by the unequal experience of health improvements in recent decades.
- The ageing workforce in Australia also affects health outcomes; particularly as the nursing and caring workforces age, presenting further risks in the future.
- There is room for improvement in maternal care, which is a potent determinant of child health and well-being outcomes. Consideration should be given to providing ante and post natal maternal and child welfare visiting programs, and ante natal classes for prospective parents and visiting programs.

- Mental health also requires more focussed attention, with suicide now a major cause of death, particularly in rural areas.
- Aged care funding requires review, recognising the increased role women are playing as carers of their ageing parents, and to ensure appropriate levels of respite care are available.

Violence against women

The Australian Bureau of Statistics reports that around one in three Australian women experience physical violence, and almost one in five experience sexual violence, over their lifetime.⁶ A survey published by the Australian Institute of Criminology in 2001⁷ found that *up to one-quarter of the 5000 young people aged 12 to 20 from all states and territories surveyed between 1998 and 1999 had witnessed parental violence against their mother or step-mother. The major findings were that young people of lower socioeconomic status were about one and a half times more likely to be aware of violence towards their mothers or fathers than those from upper socioeconomic households. Indigenous youth were significantly more likely to have witnessed physical domestic violence amongst their parents or parents' partners.*

We fear that some of the worst violence being perpetrated against women, such as genital mutilation, is the result of religious and cultural practices. Interventions in the form of social policies that prevent violence from occurring against women in these situations are needed.

We are also extremely concerned about the violence that is perpetrated against women and children in Aboriginal communities. Programs to work with young people to break intergenerational violence, with victims and perpetrators and with communities are also needed. For these women, domestic violence is made even more difficult by isolation and other cultural barriers.

⁶ ABS, *Personal Safety Survey*, cat no. 490.6.0, Australian Bureau of Statistics, Canberra, 2005

⁷ *Young Australians and Domestic Violence*, Australian Institute of Criminology, Canberra, 2001

In particular, in Australia, integrated approaches between Commonwealth and State governments are required to effectively prevent domestic violence. Better data on domestic violence is also needed to assist with the evaluation of intervention strategies.

We commend the Australian governments Plan of Action against domestic violence, the key features of which include recognising that everyone in the community is responsible for reducing domestic violence, and providing a focus on the perpetrators of violence to make them part of the solution.

Women and armed conflict

It has been demonstrated that the presence of women in influential peace building roles can make a significant impact. The Australian defence forces are regularly involved in peacekeeping activities and the need to increase the representation of Australian women in peace building still exists.

While women are represented in most roles in the Australian Defence Forces, there are still relatively low numbers of women employed; the highest percentage of women is 15.1% in the Royal Australian Air Force. Women also make up only 17.6% of the defence force reserves⁸.

Women and the economy

Women contribute to the economy mainly through paid work, but if their work is valued less than men's work, women will often find themselves in low-status jobs with few benefits. Women are over-represented in the under-employed group, and they make up 70.7%⁹ of the part-time work force. They also make up a large proportion of minimum wage earners and recipients of government benefits and are therefore at greater risk of poverty than men.

In 2006, a report from Access Economics for the House of Representatives' *Inquiry into Balancing Work and Family* found that improving women's participation could add 2.8 to

⁸ 2005 data

⁹ As at April 2009

4.4 per cent to national income, leading to benefits in more tax being paid and therefore a stronger economy. Women's participation in the workplace is still 19% lower than men's, and men still dominate in leadership roles.

It is estimated that Australian women will earn \$900,000 less than an equivalent man over her working life. Men holding a bachelor degree or higher, with children, can expect to earn around \$3.3 million over their working life. This is nearly double the amount for women in the same category who can expect to earn \$1.8 million.

Pay equity, paid parental leave, improved access to childcare and other policies that support a balance between employment and family responsibilities are pre-requisites to promoting women's economic independence in Australia. In a recent survey undertaken on workplace culture and pay equity by 2020women of nearly 100 Australian women, respondents reported that they are losing out in pay negotiations and that they are not valued in the workplace. Australian women are still expected to shoulder the majority of domestic duties, but workplaces are not family friendly. As a result, 89% of the survey respondents agreed that women with children are disadvantaged at work, while men are not. Another 72% of respondents to the survey agreed that time spent at work is seen as more important to senior managers than outcomes achieved, and 60% agreed that women are not seen as job oriented.

Many of the changes brought in to improve gender equality at work were seen as operating 'in name only' by survey respondents. The top three possible solutions that were identified were

- Equal numbers of men and women in senior roles
- Access to information about pay levels and
- Flexible arrangements for staff with caring needs.

The legislation underpinning equity in the workplace lacks any substantial commitment. There has been little successful action arising from it. The Australian government is currently reviewing this legislation, which will only become effective if it mandates

- The provision of sex-disaggregated data;
- Gender auditing and evaluations of government programs and services to ensure that equal participation of women and men occurs in decision- making;
- Gender benchmarks to be set for employers, with publicly available reporting requirements;
- Education and reporting aimed at preventing the perpetuation of rigid gender stereotyping at schools and for the media
- Support from policymakers and politicians on gender related issues, particularly paid maternity leave;
- Tax deductible status for child care expenses;
- Funding or earmarked resources for activities related to the empowerment of women and for the strengthening of women’s organisations that strengthen the voice and power of women to counteract gender bias in formal institutions; and
- Building strategic alliances between government planning and accountability institutions and women’s organisations.

Women in power and decision making

Despite some significant achievements, including the appointment of a female Governor-General and a female Deputy Prime Minister, Australian women are generally under-represented in power and decision making roles, and there still is some distance to travel before meeting even 30% female representation in these roles. This is due, in large part, to the difficulties that women face in their early working lives, which influences the extent to which women will strive for decision-making roles outside the workplace. For example, the Equal Opportunity for Women in the Workplace Agency (EOWA) reports that men outnumber women in managerial jobs by more than three to one.

Many of the causes are cultural. In other countries, these cultural attitudes start at an early age and can be identified in the way women are marginalised in their participation in

education. However, in Australia this battle has been largely won, with cultural problems becoming clear only when women enter the workforce where the battle for real equality for Australian women is yet to start.

Better representation of women in local government organisations is needed in Australia. Opportunities to increase the representation of women in senior management roles in local government need to be encouraged. Only 20% of women are in these roles, and only 5% of chief executives or general managers are women. Women account for less than 30% of elected officials in local government. Structural barriers to the advancement of women need to be removed, and women should be prepared to lead and succeed in local government.

A study undertaken for the EOWA reported that men are often evaluated at work on their potential, whereas women are evaluated on their performance. In a survey conducted by 2020women, it was also clear that women trade career progression for workplace flexibility. Women also reported that they underestimate their value to organisations, and accept lower pay levels than men.

Australian women are discouraged from seeking decision-making roles by entrenched work cultures based on 'presentee-ism'. Long hours are seen as essential to advancement, and flexibility is regarded as career limiting. Little understanding of the benefits of diversity as a competitive business strategy is demonstrated by Australian organisations.

Particular attention should also be paid to the issue of improving indigenous women's participation in decision-making and policy formulation. ATSIC was originally intended to have equal representation of men and women, but this did not eventuate, and research by the Centre for Aboriginal Economical Policy has found that "*women do not seem to be successful in being elected ... nor in attaining higher elected ATSIC office.*" In fact, after the election one male chair went as far as saying that Aboriginal women had given Aboriginal men a mandate, by returning the traditional role [of leadership] to them¹⁰

¹⁰ Megan Davis, *A Woman's Place*, Essay in the Griffith REVIEW Edition 24: Participation Society

This culture also permeates Australian public sector organisations, albeit to a lesser extent.

Public sector leadership needs to set a stronger example by changing this culture, and demonstrating to the private sector the benefits to be gained in organisations with women in power and decision making roles. Ensuring that all advisory boards and decision-making bodies in the public sector have a minimum of 30% female representation will help to achieve this. Publicly available annual reporting should also be required by all Government departments, agencies and boards on gender equity, and all government programs and policies should be subjected to periodic audits/evaluations on gender equity.

Legislation underpinning flexible and family friendly workplaces is also required, including a universal paid maternity leave scheme that does not disadvantage working women who have children. This legislation should include the adoption of targets for the participation of women in decision-making positions, as well as providing sanctions and incentives for all employers who achieve the targets.

Institutional mechanisms for the advancement of women

Australia has a range of mechanisms to advance women's roles and representation, including but not limited to the EOWA, the Sex Discrimination Commissioner in the Australian Human Rights Commission, the Commonwealth Office for Women and equivalent organisations at State government level and legislation. We also now have had a few women appointed to the High Court of Australia.

However, some of these mechanisms were weakened by the previous government. For example, the Office of Women was moved out of the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, the central policy making body for the Commonwealth government. Gender budgeting is no longer employed, and access to gender disaggregated statistics and data has become more difficult and expensive. The Equal Opportunities for Women in the

Workplace Act¹¹ and the Sex Discrimination Act have also been proven to be relatively ineffective in achieving cultural change in the workplace.

We believe that there is a need for representing Indigenous women's issues more strongly in the current institutional arrangements in Australia, and that we need to find resources that recognise and develop new Indigenous politics. There is need not only for some form of Indigenous women's council, but also for representation bodies for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander youth and elders.

The current government has articulated a strong commitment to promoting women's issues, and we look forward to this commitment being reflected in new arrangements and legislation.

Human rights of women

Currently the Australian government is undertaking consultations on how to better protect human rights. The key human rights problems identified by women during consultations held by the Australian Human Rights Commission in 2007/2008 included homelessness, violence, equal participation in public life, including in the paid workforce, and pay inequity. Examples included the following:

- Women are not protected from discrimination and sexual harassment in all areas of public life.
- Women are unable to make a complaint about discrimination at work because of caring responsibilities.
- Working women do not have a right to paid maternity leave.
- Politicians and public servants do not have to consider the rights of women when developing and implementing new laws and policies on issues such as housing, health, education and employment.

¹¹ Under review by the current government

There are other issues that are particularly dire for Indigenous women, and better representation and exploration of the human rights of Indigenous Australians is needed. All aspects need to be addressed by appropriate legislation that safeguards the human rights of all Australian women.

Women and the media

Codes of Practice and guidelines manage the portrayal of women in the media in Australia. However, 2020women is concerned that enforcement appears to be complaint driven, relying on citizens to police the media, and that media representatives are poorly educated about their industry codes of practice. As a result, gender stereotyping in the media is common.

ACMA (Australian Communications and Media Authority) is the government agency responsible for the regulation of broadcasting, internet, radio communications and telecommunications in Australia. It appears there is little activity or focus of this body on women's issues in relation to media, yet gender stereotyping in the media is still a major issue for Australian women. These stereotypes reinforce cultural attitudes and assumptions that are not in women's best interests.

Media standards that address sexualised and denigrating representations of women are needed, and a clearer focus on monitoring gender stereotyping by the government's media regulatory agencies.

Women and the environment

Addressing the threat of climate change is one of the main challenges facing women in Australia. Women's vulnerability to climate change is increased by their limited access to resources and decision-making. Women at home may also have more limited mobility than men, increasing the risks they face in bushfires and floods. Further research into the impact of environmental issues on women and children is needed to identify other issues.

Communication strategies related to emergency services that respond to environmental disasters in Australians must take account of women's needs. Gender analysis of policies and programs related to the environment is critical. Actions to take account of women's

perspectives in relation to the environment should be developed and implemented at the national and regional levels.

Strategies to involve women in decision-making and planning on environmental issues should also be complemented by strategies for engaging women in rebuilding communities affected by environmental disasters. For example, it is clear that Australia will face further challenges in the future as a result of the increasing number of people seeking refuge from climate related disasters.

Education for women to reduce their vulnerability, and to develop the critical role that women play in the provision of leadership in rural communities and steps should be taken increase the participation of women in decision making on climate change at different levels.

The girl child

Child safety and child abuse are more prevalent in societies where there is a strong divide between gender roles. This is particularly evident within migrant and Indigenous communities in Australia, although it also applies to non-Indigenous Australian communities. Girl children in all parts of Australian society are expected to undertake more housework than boy children, and children's low self-esteem is a leading indicator towards mental health issues and dysfunctional behaviours. Funding is required to address these problems.

The two most common areas of discrimination occurring for girls in Australia are in sport and issues pertaining to a girl's physical appearance.

- There is active marketing of magazines promoting particular aspects of body image and appearance to young girls from the 6-12 age group. There appears to be no legislation or monitoring of these magazines, which can only have an adverse impact on the self-esteem of young girls.
- Young people feel that society, and teachers, believe that girls are less competitive or athletically inclined. They also believe that girls are judged by appearance to a far

greater extent than boys. In addition, in many Australian migrant communities, girls are often subjected to far stricter rules about clothing than boys.

Many of the solutions to issues discussed in responses to the other strategic objectives apply to young girls as well as to women. In particular, young girls need opportunities to share their concerns in safe and supportive environments when families are in distress, whether from environmental disasters, economic constraints or conflict situations.

2020women is also concerned that post-disaster protection for children, particularly girl children is required. In the aftermath of natural disasters, children are particularly vulnerable. Separation from parents can occur, and there is an increased risk of abuse/exploitation and of trafficking of children in the community. Policies that provide a clear assessment of specific risks and threats for children after a disaster are needed, and aid workers need to be aware of these policies.

Girl children also need to be heard at the policy development level. For example, programs to address the health of the girl child should be positively funded to identify how best to meet the needs of girl children.

Funding should also be available to ensure that teachers and curricula are gender sensitive, and education should be given at school about women's rights. There also should be mechanisms in place to ensure that media promotes respect for women and girls.