

**United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and Women
Empowerment:
(An Appraisal)**

Hadeed Shahid Awan¹, Rana Danish Nisar², Taimoor Ahmad Chaudry³

ABSTRACT

After the immense analysis, the condition of the majority of the women in the world is miserable and despondent. It has no doubt that with the threshold of the 21st century's, Women empowerment is the most red-hot issue in multiple academic disciplines. Apart from the problems of the women of the earth which are real, the efforts of organizations i.e. UN which deal with the Women snags are really appreciated and acknowledgeable. With the aim to build-up the word "WOMEN", the United Nations organized multiple summits, workshops, conventions and forums in the previous several years. The present study in the hands is the petite effort to understand UN struggles regarding women empowerment, major area of developments and conferences which are organized by the UN for "Better WOMEN". This is intensely a desk research using secondary data serene through published annals, libraries search contraptions and other internet springs. Mostly, the data collected were secondary data obtained from sources that are related directly to the theme of study.

Key Words: UN, UNDP, UNWOMEN, WOMEN EMPOWERMENT

Introduction

Women's empowerment is an evolving and complex concept, which is constantly being, defined, re-defined, sharpened, elaborated and clarified. The ultimate goals of women's empowerment have a deep link with gender equality and equity. It is connected with the structural transformation of society through educational opportunities, land and labor reforms, access to resources, autonomy, control over fertility, the right to decision-making, women's own control over their bodies, reproduction, and sexuality. Women's empowerment is defined number of ways. "CARE International", the international non-governmental organization (NGO) provides a definition of empowerment that encompasses three dimensions: individuals, relationships and structures. According to CARE International: "Individuals must gain power to change and effect change; structures that dictate social, economic and political power-holding must be altered; and human relationships must be created or modified to support change". The World Economic Forum provides another definition of women's empowerment, which includes the idea of fundamental human rights in its formulation of women's empowerment: "The past three decades have witnessed a steadily increasing awareness of the

¹ Hadeed Shahid Awan, Department of Politics and International Relations (DPIR), UOS.

² Rana Danish Nisar, School of politics and International Studies (SPIS), CCNU. (Corresponding)

³ Taimoor Ahmad Chaudry, UOS.

need to empower women through measures to increase social, economic and political equity, and broader access to fundamental human rights, improvement in nutrition, basic health and education” (Lopez-Claros & Zahidi, 2005). The United Nations was founded in 1945 after the catastrophe of two world wars. It aimed at rehabilitation and aid to war victims. General Assembly adopted “the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women” (CEDAW) in 1979, which is often described as an International Bill of Women Rights (UN, 2009). The CEDAW contains 30 articles that provide a practical blueprint to promote basic human rights, achieve progress and overcome barriers of discrimination against women and girls (“Treaty Summary”, 2013). The convention clearly states discrimination against women and sets up an agenda for national action to end such discrimination. It is the maiden human rights treaty that affirms the reproductive rights of women.

1. The UN World Conferences on Women

Considering the role of the UN in women’s empowerment, the UN has organized four world conferences on women that are held in Mexico city , Copenhagen , Nairobi and Beijing. In 1975, about 133 governments participated. A parallel forum “the International Women’s Year Tribune” was attended by 6,000 NGO representatives. This conference described a “World Plan of Action” for the Implementation of the Objectives of the “International Women’s Year”. It presented a complete set of guidelines for the women’s advancement. In 1980 Copenhagen, about 145 Member States gathered for the mid-decade “World Conference of the United Nations Decade for Women”. The main purpose was to foresee progress for the implementation of the goals which were set in the first world conference, focusing on employment, health and education. A programme of Action called for stronger national measures to ensure women’s ownership and control of property, as well as improvements in protecting women’s rights to inheritance, child custody and nationality. In 1985, the World Conference to review and appraise the achievements of the UN Decade for Women took place in Nairobi. The conference’s mandate was to establish concrete measures to overcome obstacles to achieving the decade’s goals. Participants included 1,900 delegates from 157 Member States. Governments adopted the Nairobi Forward-Looking Strategies for the women advancement, which outlined measures for achieving gender equality at the national level and for promoting women’s participation in peace and development efforts (UNWOMEN, 2013h). The 1995 Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing was built on a political agreement that reached at the three previous global conferences on women, and consolidated five decades of legal advances aimed at securing the equality of women with men in law and in practice. This conference was marked as a significant turning point for the global agenda for gender equality More than 6,000 government delegates attended the negotiations, along with more than 4,000 accredited NGO representatives. A parallel NGO Forum held in Huairou near Beijing drew some 30,000 participants. About 189 countries unanimously adopted “The Beijing Declaration” and “the Platform for Action”, which is considered as the key global policy document on gender equality and an agenda for women’s empowerment. Strategic actions and objectives were set for women’s advancement and for achieving the gender equality in 12 critical concerning areas (UNWOMEN, 2013h).

2. UN Initiatives for Women Empowerment

Promotion and protection of gender equality and women's empowerment is the primary responsibility of the UN. It helps in establishing the 'rule of law' on the equality basis. The achievement of the UN goals for sustainable peace and security, sustainable economic, social development and human rights protection depends upon advancing the women's empowerment and gender equality. Discrimination on the bases of gender is present in all cultures, and many a time reflected in the institutions' policies, laws and practices. Like, in many states women do not have same inheritance and property rights as men have. Even in the existence of constitutional guarantees that are provided for equality and laws for protection of women rights, discriminations by security, law enforcement services, social services, courts and lawyers are major obstructions to the security of women. Majority of refugees and displaced persons are constituted of women and girls, because of their fragile condition. They are easily victimized by militants in war prone areas. Dignity of women is severely violated by sexual and grave violence. Women vulnerability is on high in employment, inheritance rights, property rights, marriages, family matters and in reproductive health. For progress on gender equality, the post-conflict environment and peace processes can provide an exclusive opportunity. The UN Security Council resolution number 1325 requires a peace agreement that includes certain steps to ensure the respect and protection of women's human rights, especially when it is related to the electoral system, the constitution, the judiciary and the police. The UN activities regarding women's empowerment, include involvement in the constitutional and legal reforms, support to women's voices and concerns, make plans and strategies, empower women for their participation as actors in law making institutions, enforce the rule of law, and steps to ensure their security and protection (United Nations Rule of Law, n.d.). There are twenty five UN entities including UNDP which are working on gender equality around the world. "United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women" (UNWOMEN) has been established for consolidating the vital efforts of four previously distinct parts of the UN system which were: "United Nations Development Fund for Women" (UNIFEM); "the Office of the Special Adviser on Gender Issues" (OSAGI); "the Division of the Advancement of Women" (DAW) in "the Department of Economic and Social Affairs" (DESA); and "the United Nations International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women" (INSTRAW); "Inter-agency mechanisms such as the Inter-Agency Network on Women and Gender Equality" (IANWGE) and "UN Action on Sexual Violence in Armed Conflict". There are eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) which were agreed by all the member countries of the UN (UN, 2000). The basic aim of these MDGs is to animate extraordinary efforts to address the needs of the poorest. In September 2000, world leaders held together a conference at UN headquarters to adopt the United Nations Millennium Declaration, in which they committed for a global partnership for the reduction of severe poverty and set out a time-bound targets to achieve it till 2015 (UN, 2010a). The United Nations Millennium Campaign started in 2002, under this campaign people are supported and inspired to take actions that may support the MDGs. This campaign is a way forward in achieving all MDGs. "Promote gender equality and empower women" is the third MDG (UNDP, 2013h). There are eight millennium development goals of the UN, on which the UNDP is working. The goal regarding women empowerment is as follows: Goal number three

illustrates that elimination of gender disparity in primary and secondary education is to be eroded preferably till 2005. The factors of improved health, economic and social status, self-determination as well as positive health outcomes for the mother and the child are directly linked to the girls' education. The 55 percent out-of-school population is of girls. Pregnancy-related conditions and maternal deaths cannot be removed without empowering women. Women's empowerment includes; health information access and resources' control like wealth, which is the key to achieve health equity and the gender equality. According to available data, the ratio of female earned income is well below then male in all the countries. Worldwide, every third women is under threat of violence at some point in her life (WHO, 2013).

3. United Nations Development Programme & Women's Empowerment

The UN has a global development network called as "The United Nations Development Program" the UNDP. It connects the UN member states to resources, experience and knowledge to help people to build an improved life. It operates in 177 countries where it has established offices. It works with countries to develop local capacity and formulate their own way outs to meet global and national development challenges. The UNDP is an executive board within the United Nations General Assembly. The UNDP Administrator is third highest ranked official after the secretary general and deputy secretary general of the UN. The headquarters of the UNDP is in New York. Funds are provided to it by the member nations voluntarily. The UNDP also helps countries to achieve the MDGs. The UNDP emphasizes more on assistance to the less developed, and also provides training and expert advice to developing countries. The UNDP focuses on democratic governance, poverty reduction, HIV/AIDS, social development, energy and environment, and crisis prevention and recovery to achieve the MDGs to encourage global development. The UNDP, in all of its programs, use to encourage the human rights protection and the women's empowerment (UNDP, 2013a). Empowerment of women is one of the thematic areas of the UNDP. Gender equality and empowerment of women are of key importance to the UNDP. Empowering women is not only important for human rights, but it is the pathway to achieve sustainable development and the other MDGs (UNDP, 2013k).

4. Focus Areas for Women's Empowerment

It is important to eradicate poverty in real terms to empower women. Women are more fragile to the poverty. The UNDP make improvements in the life of people while opening up their opportunities and choices (UNDP, 2013d). Now a day, many countries are working to build democratic governance. The challenges are to develop processes and institutions that are more productive in meeting the needs of the poor and ordinary citizens specifically women. The UNDP assists countries in strengthening their legislative and electoral systems, improving access to public administration and justice, and developing a greater capacity to deliver basic services to women (UNDP, 2013b). The lack of access to affordable energy services and environmental deprivation is disproportionately faced by women. Countries seek help from the UNDP at the global, national and community levels to strengthen their capacity to address these challenges (UNDP, 2013c). HIV has affected 34 million people globally. New HIV infections have decreased by 20 percent, but the epidemic of HIV has negated this. Almost 1.7 million (majority are women) people are dying due to AIDS every year. The UNDP recognizes that

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action taken outside health sector can prove to be helpful in better outcomes in health (UNDP, 2013f). The UNDP supports global and national efforts for the gender equality and empowerment of women in poverty reduction, crisis prevention and recovery, environment and sustainable development and democratic governance. The UNDP ensures through its global network that women must possess a real voice in all institutions, like judiciary and civil service along with the private sector and the civil society. By this, women can able to make their participation on equal bases with men in decision-making and public dialogue, and influence the decisions to determine the safe future of their families and nations (UNDP, 2013k). Women are victim of the violence that remains widespread in almost all the countries. Implementations of strong laws are needed for prevention and protection for this purpose. The UN has defined five goals regarding ending of violence against women (UN, 2008). The UNDP is obliged to work for its eradication. Social empowerment is connected with economic empowerment, so that the UNDP emphasizes more on economic empowerment. Women have a limited access to decent jobs, credit and land in comparison with men. The outcomes of many researches show that if women are economically strong the economy of country will boost. Gender equality is connected with policy-making and macroeconomic policies (UNWOMEN, 2013a). Proper planning is very important for providing services to public and citizens who expect from the governments, but priorities and needs of women are often overlooked (UNWOMEN, 2013d). Hence the UNDP lays efforts to devise such policies which address women issues. Comprehensive international standards for human rights of women have been set in CEDAW. The governments that have signed the convention are obliged to take steps in devising policies and laws for achieving these norms (UNWOMEN, 2013b). The MDGs illustrates primary sketch for the development. Goal number three “promoting gender equality and empowering women” is important itself, but it is also essential for the achievement of all other MDGs

5. Working Structure for Women Empowerment

The UNDP acts on two fronts. Firstly, it helps the UN member states to implement the standards by providing financial and professional support. And secondly, it supports international political negotiations to formulate the globally agreed standards for the gender equality. The UNDP assists the UNWOMEN along with governmental and non-governmental partners helps them to make proper laws, policies, resources and services that are required by women in moving towards equality. It provides with an extensive experience and knowledge that ensures the best working environment, and to unlock speedy national progress for the attainment of international and national commitment to women. The UNDP aids in high-impact and fuel innovative programs for both civil society groups and government agencies. The UN Trust Fund works around the world to end all the forms of violence that are gender-based and damages rights of women. The fund for Gender Equality is devoted to programs that boost political participation and economic opportunities for women at all levels (UNWOMEN, 2013g). Many UN institutions such as the General Assembly, the Security Council and the Economic and Social Council get regular information on the issues of women rights from the UNDP and UNWOEMN. All data on women violence is maintained by it for UN Secretary-General which takes necessary steps to stop violence (UNWOMEN, 2013c). The UNDP shares its work with the other UN organizations by organizing number of training programs so that

these activities may help in integrating gender across national programs, policies and budgets. It also strengthens national skills and capacities on women's machineries, human rights and violence (UNDP, 2011). The UNDP and UNWOEMN help, and coordinate the overall efforts by other 25 UN organizations to promote gender equality across the UN system through providing certain expertise and monitoring (UNWOMEN, 2013f). Partnerships are central to the UNDP's work. These partners make vital contributions to women's empowerment, because of this the UNDP always look for efficient partners who can collaborate with it (UNDP, 2013g). Gender equality goals are met by the support of voluntary financial contributions for the UNDP programs. These major contributions come from governments, corporations, foundations, individuals and organizations. Under the light of "the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women" and "the Beijing Platform for Action" along with many others structures, the UNDP develop actions to achieve development on women's rights. Private sector has done commendable work on women issues than the state governments. Keeping this in view, the UNDP offers foundations and businesses to private sector to empower themselves with the leading organizations of the world which are meant to achieve empowerment of women and gender equality. The UNDP is committed to work on common agendas with the corporate sector (UNDP, 2013i). Civil society around the world is an important platform to raise the voice against any discrimination because it contributes in making policy framework globally on women's empowerment and gender equality through the annual UN Commission on the Status of Women. Civil society acts as an important parameter where the policies and performance of international and national leaders and organizations regarding these issues can be judged and monitored (UNDP, 2013j). The UNDP has been supported by the people of international stature in the politics, culture and arts. They lend their time, talents, occupation and name for advocating the gender equality (UNDP, 2013e). Gender-Responsive Budgeting (GRB) is government planning, programming and budgeting. It lays the contribution for the fulfillment of women's rights and the advancement of gender equality. It identifies and reflects interventions required to address gender gaps in local government policies, plans and budgets (UNWOMEN, 2012a).

The United Nations Development Program Pakistan (UNDP Pakistan) is a leading international development agency. The UNDP Pakistan is part of "the UN's global development network", which campaigns for the change and use to connect countries to experience, knowledge and resources so that they can build better lives. Globally, the UNDP is collaborating with 177 countries including Pakistan to a wide range of partners to develop local capacity and enable customized solutions that best development changes. The UNDP Pakistan helps Pakistan to achieve its own development objectives as well as internationally agreed goals in the line of MDGs. Through the agency's work it empowers lives and builds resilient communities that are capable of withstanding crises, inclusive growth and human development. The UNDP in Pakistan is operating since its establishment in 1960. Pakistan is one of the eight countries which are selected for pilot project called the One UN Program that aims to provide development assistance in a more coordinated way. The UNDP Pakistan helps attract and use aid effectively while promoting the protection of human rights, capacity development and the women's empowerment as a publically funded organization. The UNDP Pakistan focuses its work in five thematic areas: Poverty Reduction and MDGs, Democratic governance, Environment and Climate change, Crisis prevention and recovery and Women's

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Empowerment (UNDP Pakistan, 2013a). The UNDP Pakistan works in number of ways firstly; it ensures that women have a real voice in all governance institutions, from the judiciary to the civil service, as well as in the private sector and the civil society. It may help women to participate equally with men in public dialogue and decision-making, and influence the decisions that will determine the future of their families and the country. Secondly; it integrates gender equality and women's empowerment and gender equality into crisis prevention and recovery, democratic governance, and environment and climate change for the sustainable development (UNDP Pakistan, 2013d). The agency supports the delivery and provision of technical and advisory services that help in implementing women's empowerment and gender equality agenda. It also supports programs of the Government and Non Governmental Organizations (NGOs) which lead to recognition of empowerment of women and gender equality commitments with the international and national human and gender rights commitments. The UNDP supports such initiatives that are helpful in promotion of human rights of women, focus on their political participation, and freedom from violence and economic and social security. Women empowerment strategy focuses on this following target: *"Elimination of gender disparity in primary and secondary education preferably by 2005, and at all levels by 2015"*. Current collaboration is going on an understanding that the Ministry of Human Rights is the leading official institution to lead, and advise and improve the accomplishment of women's empowerment commitments across the board. It will revive human rights in the country, initiatives for harmonization of legislation falls and protection of human rights in collaboration with non-governmental organizations under its mandate. The UNDP Pakistan works with UNWOMEN that provides technical assistance in the following main areas by:

- *Legislating, reforming and implementing policies*
- *Implementing Beijing Platform for Action*
- *Enhancing protection, prevention and participation of women*
- *Promoting linkages and dialogue with Women Development Departments (WDDs), Women Parliamentarian Caucus and the National Commission for Status on Women (NCSW)*

Conclusion

The UN has held many conferences on women issue that is why the UNDP is one of the major collaborators in achievement of women's empowerment goal worldwide. The UNDP is working in all of the UN member states for the betterment of women. Many project and programs are in action for this purpose especially in the developing states. The UNDP is works independently with its own setup as well as provides technical and aid facilities to the respective governments of the member states. Without any doubt, the UN efforts regarding women empowerment is really appreciated and acknowledgeable. Along with the UN, the other IGOs, INGOs and other organizations and their sub-bodies should do focus on the women empowerment for the better world and women.

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