

**Review of UN and other international policy, conferences and agreements
pertaining to gender, S&T for sustainable development.**

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**Opening Presentation, GAB International Conference on Gender, Science and
Technology for Sustainable Development: Looking Ahead to the Next 10 Years**

What can be done to support the economic, political, civil, educational and social empowerment of the world's women? How can their lives be made easier? How can the roles that they play in the family and community be supported, roles that in many places in the world include providing water and food and finding fuel, and in most places include maintenance of the household and care of the young and old? How can women be enabled to be active participants in their countries' development?

How do we incorporate a gender perspective into the policy- and decision- making process in such a way that women share in the benefits but do not bear disproportionate costs in the development process? How do we utilize the talents of women and men within the science and engineering enterprise to support sustainable development?

These questions have been asked for decades, and yet clear answers have yet to emerge. Much has happened in the 60 years since the establishment of the UN Commission on the Status of Women in 1946. Women have gained political rights and made great strides, more in some regions of the world than in others. Where they have not had access to educational opportunities, where countries have been slow to develop economically, not much has changed in the lives of these women.

There have been many other changes in the world over the past 60 years, many driven by advances in science and technology. Satellite technology, cellular/wireless communication, personal computing, Internet, GPS technology, and advances in agriculture and medical science have transformed the options and opportunity structures, creating greater disparities in some cases and reducing them in others, leaving the poorest economies struggling to advance and the poorest people of the poorest economies (disproportionately women and children) in desperate conditions.

Efforts have been mounted both within and beyond the UN structures to document, recognize and address these concerns on a world basis. Beginning with the World Summit on Women in Mexico City in 1975 there have been calls to assess and reduce the disparities in education, health, access to income generating opportunities and so on. Over time it has been recognized that disparities created in part by access to S&T can only be addressed by taking hold of S&T, to enable, educate and empower.

The conferences focused on the role of S&T in development (See Vienna Programme of Action on Science and Technology for Development) made mention of the need to focus specifically on women. The 1985 Nairobi World Conference on Women acknowledged

the role of S&T in women's development and pointed to specific areas in education, public literacy and employment where women's roles needed to be enhanced. There was also attention to the need for exploring the role of policy and decision-making in advancing women's rights. But the relationship among S&T, women's advancement and countries' development had yet to be widely acknowledged.

The 1995 Beijing Women's Conference firmly affirmed the idea of women's rights as human rights, but the questions remained of how to address women's needs. The mainline of the women's NGO community focused on a "rights based" perspective. An alternative view was emerging from the UNCSTD and its Working Group on Gender S&T for Development: a knowledge and skills based perspective. It advanced the notion of, first, assessing closest to the ground, the conditions for women along dimensions corresponding to seven transformative actions and then working to move on those dimensions toward parity.

The World Conference on Science held in 1999 in Budapest, after a rocky opening that included few if any women and little focus on gender dimensions, emerged as providing some of the most progressive and visionary language linking science, technology and gender.

"Paragraph 90, Report of World Conference on Science.

Taking into account the outcome of the six regional forums on women and science sponsored by UNESCO, the conference stresses that special efforts should be made by government, educational institutions, scientific communities, non –governmental organizations and civil society, with support from bilateral and international agencies, to ensure the full participation of women and girls in all aspects of science and technology, and to this effect to:

- *Promote within the education system the access of girls and women to scientific education at all levels;*
- *Improve conditions for recruitment, retention and advancement in all fields of research;*
- *Launch, in collaboration with UNESCO and UNIFEM, national, regional and global campaigns to raise awareness of the contribution of women to science and technology, in order to overcome existing gender stereotypes among scientists, policy-maker and the community at large;*
- *Undertake research, supported by collection and analysis of gender-disaggregated data, documenting constraints and progress in expanding the role of women in science and technology;*
- *Monitor the implementation and document best practices and lessons learned through impact assessment and evaluations;*

- *Ensure an appropriate representation of women in national, regional and international policy and decision-making bodies and forums;*
- *Establish an international network of women scientists*
- *Continue to document the contributions of women in science and technology goals. To sustain these initiatives governments should create appropriate mechanisms, where these do not yet exist, to propose and monitor introduction of the necessary policy changes in support of the attainment of these.”*

The emphasis of the WCS statement was heavily focused on women in science. Subsequent reports, such as that from the InterAcademy Council, *Women for Science*, draw links between bringing more women into science and the role of these women in interpreting science and pushing efforts where science can affect women's lives to the grassroots.

At Beijing +5 held in 2000 in New York City, a focus on S&T was retained among the NGO community but was marginalized within the formal discussions. Rather than building from the strong attention and language that emerged from the WCS, the science and technology dimensions once again moved into the shadows of the meeting. Within the overall UN structure a major focus was emerging to develop, articulate and advance so-called Millennium Development Goals. These included specific areas with measurable goals and timetable. Gender equality made the list, and there were gender dimensions to all of the other items as well. But the links across these discussions were poorly connected.

Similar attention has been given to gender dimensions within other world conference discussions, such as that around the information society (WSIS) and the World Engineers Convention.

The Gender Advisory Board, created as a monitoring, technical assistance and implementation body following the 1995 acceptance of the UNCSTD report by ECOSOC, has worked to support the formation of National Committees to assess and recommend appropriate local action and to create regional secretariats to provide “closest to source” support for country by country initiatives as well as training, learning and sharing of experiences.

Always there have been the tensions between targeting women's issues and mainstreaming these. The GAB response has been advocacy of doing both.....effecting changes in policies, programmes and practices in mainstream settings so that they support women's empowerment and disadvantage neither women nor men while putting focused efforts in place to help close the gap that has arisen through historical inequality and lack of access. It has been troubling to most of us who work on these issues that the strategies resident within the women's movement and targeted efforts have moved further away from attention to S&T as providing tools and **mechanisms** to produce equality. More

headway is being gained in incorporating “women as intellectual assets” discussions in mainstream development discussions. The target effort over the next 10 years must include building the capacity among women and men to assess needs and effect changes that yield benefit for women and men. This may mean an initial focus on equity for women before there can be equality. It may require that women be seen as having a greater claim on resources and opportunities so that they may contribute at the highest levels of which they are capable, unfettered by the chains of historical inequities and lack of access.