



MMS Bulletin #155

Gender equality: Where do we stand 25 years after the historic UN World Conference on Women in Beijing?

Medicus Mundi Switzerland advocates for gender-transformative approaches to realise gender equality.

Progress towards gender equality is lagging and hard-fought gains are under threat

By Carine Weiss

The 25th anniversary of the Beijing conference makes 2020 a milestone year for gender equality. We also kick off the 10-year countdown to achieve the UN sustainable development goals, which includes a commitment to end gender inequality by 2030. Today, not a single country can claim to have achieved gender equality and Covid-19 has put the hard-fought gains even more under threat.



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The recently published report on *Gender equality: Women's rights in review 25 years after Beijing* showed that despite the progress we have made hard-won advances are being reversed (UN Women, 2020). Reasons for example are conflicts and the alarming rise of exclusionary politics. Due to patriarchal systems, “men exercise preponderant power in nearly every sphere of life, ranging from personal decisions regarding the size of families to the policy and programme decisions taken at all levels of government” (ICPD, 1994) women remain undervalued, they continue to work more, earn less, have fewer choices, and experience multiple forms of violence at home and in public spaces. Gender inequality and gender norms impede progress on the global goal to achieve health for all. Multiple obstacles remain unchanged in law and in culture.

“I ask no favor for my sex. All I ask of our brethren is that they take their feet off our necks.”— **Ruth Bader Ginsburg**

It is easy to bash and questions men's leadership. However there is a truth behind female leadership which we can no longer ignore (Chamorro-Premuzic T. and Gallop C. 2020). We need to acknowledge the fact that through the battle women have become stronger in raising their voice in highlighting the injustice, which occurs on a daily basis.

Nonetheless we need to look at the important gains since the adoption of the Beijing Platform for Action (Beijing+25 National Reports 2019; UN Women 2020). There are now more girls in school than ever before, fewer women are dying in childbirth and the proportion of women in parliaments has doubled across the world. Over the past decade, 131 countries have passed laws to support women's equality.

Still there is a lot of work to be done. In politics 1 in 4 seats are held by women, more than double of young women aged 15 – 24 years are not in school compared to young men the same age. Access to justice is hampered by the lack of trust and confidence as less than 40% of women who experienced violence will seek help of any sort (UN Women 2020).



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With COVID-19 putting at risk the hard-won advances achieved on women's rights in past decades we need to step up to sustain the gains. The COVID-19 pandemic is not just a health issue. It is a profound shock to our societies and economies, and women are at the heart of care and response efforts underway.

Medicus Mundi Switzerland advocates for Gender Equality

The Network Medicus Mundi Switzerland has focused his work together with the internal Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) Group on the question *Are gender transformative approaches the answer to realising gender equality?* The body of evidence making the case for gender-transformative approaches shows it is important to do so with the explicit intention of promoting gender equality.

A gender transformative approach aspires to change the reality of inequality seen today. It tackles the root causes of gender inequality and reshapes unequal power relations. It actively examines, questions, and changes rigid gender norms and imbalances of power. While

promoting the value of women and girls it goes beyond improving the condition of women and girls – it seeks to improve their social position.



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MMS has organised a workshop with IAMANEH Switzerland in 2019 and a three-part Webinar Series in 2020 to enhance the understanding and the implications of applying gender-transformative approaches to SRHR programs and project.

It is key to address both men and women

One of the key findings was: where health interventions with men are explicitly gender transformative, they can contribute to modifying inequitable gender attitudes and change gender norms. It is key to address both men and women and to examine the role of power relations, how it shapes negatively health and to identify attitudes and practices among men that harm both women's and men's health, and viewing men as active agents of change in advancing gender equality (Casey et al. 2018; Dworkin et al., 2015; Ruane-McAteer et al. 2019). When working on the individual level enhancing coping strategies for men and women have been very promising and show wonderful results in changes in the relationships of couples who experienced trauma and violence outside and within the relationship (Tankink, M. and Sleg, H. 2017).

Engaging men does not translate into gender-transformation.

Transformation requires intentional focus on power relations. Hence we need to work with both sexes with the aim to change the nature of their relationship in a positive way. If gender equality can be achieved and the successes sustained it requires expanding to structural level interventions: from the individual level to institutional and societal level (Amin, 2020).

Gender-transformation starts at an early age

Furthermore global research has shown that gender-transformation should start at an early age and that stereotypical perceptions about gender norms are common already in early adolescence (Kågesten et al., 2016). Please read the article "Realizing gender equality: are gender transformative approaches the answer?"

We at Medicus Mundi Switzerland will continue to advocate for gender equality and sexual and reproductive health and rights and support the Network in their endeavours in fighting inequality and enhancing health and the wellbeing of boys and girls, men and women alike.

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