The 25th Anniversary in September 2020 of the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing puts the global spotlight onto the historic commitments made by world leaders made in the Beijing Platform for Action to advance the rights of all women and girls. At the centre of the Beijing Platform of Action is a commitment to equal representation of women in leadership and decision-making roles in all spheres.

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development has generated renewed momentum for the advancement of the Beijing outcomes. A key driver for progress is Sustainable Development Goal target 5.5 on promoting and strengthening equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic and public life.

Women leaders are making an impact. Women’s presence in local, state and national levels of government has influenced higher female voter turnout, increased gender sensitive policies and a stronger focus on improving social, health and safety services. In business, evidence is emerging to show that a higher proportion of women managers is significantly associated with an increase in profit.

Nevertheless, far from the visionary commitments of Beijing, leadership remains out of reach for too many women across Asia and the Pacific. The representation of women in the region’s parliaments, the area where data is the most up-to-date and reliable, illustrates the disparities which can be found across all areas of society. In 2019, the average representation of women in Asia and the Pacific, at 20 per cent, lagged behind the global average of 25 per cent. Women furthermore filled only one in 10 of the 1,040 ministerial posts across the region in 2018.

ESCAP, under the auspices of the Interagency network on gender equality and the empowerment of women, has prepared a report into critical enablers for women’s leadership with a focus on its transformative impact on the societies they serve. The report “Pathways to Influence: Promoting the Role of Women’s Transformative Leadership to Achieve the SDGs in Asia and the Pacific” highlights four key pathways to women’s transformative leadership, including growing consciousness and capabilities; accessing resources and opportunities; shaping and leveraging formal policies, laws and rules; transforming social norms and exclusionary practices. The report draws on research and data, as well as the journeys of 17 women leaders from 14 countries across the region to identify key factors that have enabled women leaders to inspire change in their diverse areas, ranging from business, agriculture, peace,
technology, urban development and local governance to the rights of women, workers, minorities and persons with disabilities.

A reception will be held on the first day of the Asia-Pacific Ministerial Conference on the Beijing+25 Review, 27 November 2019 from 17:15 hours to launch the report. A group of leaders featured in the report will share their insights and journeys to impact change through a facilitated dialogue.

OBJECTIVES

The purpose of the reception is to

a) launch the report on “Pathways to Influence: Promoting the Role of Women’s Transformative Leadership to Achieve the SDGs in Asia and the Pacific”;

b) raise awareness of critical enablers and challenges for women in accessing and commanding positions of influence and

c) celebrate the contribution of women leaders to achieving inclusive and sustainable development.

FORMAT

The reception will include a dialogue with leaders featured in the report where they will share their stories and insights into pathways to leadership. The session will be interactive and moderated to facilitate the exchange of experiences among the panelists and the audience. It will highlight the journeys that are at once collective and individual, that the women leaders share with their peers and across generations. Guests will be invited to enjoy refreshments the panel.

PROPOSED AGENDA

Moderator: Ms. Suzanne Nam, Contributing Editor at Forbes and Senior Communications Advisor

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Activity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>17.15 – 17.20</td>
<td><strong>Opening</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Opening Speech, Ms. Armida Salsiah Alisjahbana, Executive Secretary, ESCAP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17.20-18.00</td>
<td><strong>Dialogue</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Zhang Haidi (China)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Helen Hakena (Papua New Guinea)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Manohari Doss (India)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Zolzaya Batkhuyag (Mongolia)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Launch of report</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18:00-19.00</td>
<td><strong>Refreshments</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Zhang Haidi (China)**

Zhang Haidi was afflicted with angioma at the age of 5 and became paralyzed from the chest down. In the 1980s, she became a national role model of tenacity and proactivity. Elementary school children in China used to read about her life story in their textbooks. She has inspired millions of persons with disabilities.

Being unable to attend school due to her disability, Zhang taught herself the curriculum from primary school to the bachelor’s degree level and then obtained a master’s degree in philosophy from Jilin University. She became fluent in several foreign languages, including English, Japanese and German. She published several novels and essays and became a translator and nationally recognized author. At the age of 15, Zhang also taught herself acupuncture and medicine and used her skills to help people in need in rural areas. Her experiences and achievements are widely known in China.

Zhang Haidi has leveraged her public profile and experience to promote the rights and opportunities for persons with disabilities across China, becoming Chair of the China Disabled Persons’ Federation in 2008 and a member of the Standing Committee of the National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference. Her efforts have contributed to many tangible changes in the position of persons with disabilities in China and are now extending internationally through her role as President of Rehabilitation International.

**Helen Hakena (Papua New Guinea)**

Helen Hakena’s life as a primary school teacher in Bougainville was thrown into turmoil with the outbreak of civil war in 1988. In 1992, with a group of women from her former school, Hakena co-founded the Leitana Nehan Women’s Development Agency, with the slogan “Women Weaving Bougainville Together”. The aim was to mobilize young people – women and men – to promote peace. The Leitana Nehan Women’s Development Agency began by providing humanitarian relief, clothes and medicines to affected families. As the Women’s Development Agency’s volunteer base expanded, peacebuilding tools and skills were developed and applied, and lessons were learned about how best to work with village communities, dynamics and structures. Leadership training and mentoring among communities became a core part of the organization’s work, which continues to this day.

As well as campaigning for the adoption of UN Security Council resolution 1325 on women, peace and security, Helen Hakena represented the women of the world in presenting a petition to the UN Secretary-General, signed by 350,000 women leaders, calling on the UN Security Council to include women in peacekeeping missions. While addressing unresolved issues and divisions from the conflict is still a core part of the Women’s Development Agency’s training, facilitating, advocacy and community development work, the leadership and advocacy skills honed in response to human conflict are now being turned towards a new conflict – with the impacts of population displacement as a result of rising sea levels due to climate change.
Manohari Doss (India)

Manohari Doss’ leadership journey began in her early experience of hardship as one of five children of small-holding farmers, reinforced by the experience of prejudice towards her husband, Edward Doss, a Dalit. While Doss was deeply influenced by her social work training, both of them were driven by their commitment to change: for Dalit and hill tribe people to have real choices and chances in life.

It is now 35 years since Manohari Doss and her husband, Edward Doss (now deceased), established the Institute for Self Management, the Women Development Resource Centre and the Tamil Nadu Labourers Union, based in Madurai and working across parts of Tamil Nadu State in India. In that time, thousands of Dalits and hill tribe people improved their circumstances, sense of confidence and skill levels. Among other significant achievements: the Resource Centre and Labourers Union, along with multiple microcredit schemes, workers cooperatives and unions and a Women Labourers Bank were established; housing, income and savings levels improved; hundreds of young people received an education; access to welfare rights increased; annual women’s conventions were organized and submissions on gender policies were made to government bodies, such as the National Women’s Commission.

Zolzaya Batkhuyag (Mongolia)

Zolzaya Batkhuyag trained as a lawyer and was involved in human rights and other clubs at university. The turning point in her leadership journey came on 1 July 2008 when a riot exploded outside the office of the ruling political party, right next to the hotel where Batkhuyag was working as a marketing manager. After this event, Batkhuyag co-initiated a Hands Up for Rights human rights campaign and became active in civil society activities. After two years, she and three friends came to see that women needed their own space to share their views and experiences and created a Facebook meeting event. Through the emerging discussions, common challenges became apparent, mainly related to the patriarchal environment in Mongolia.

Zolzaya Batkhuyag started Women for Change in 2010 with the three young lawyer friends. Seven years after those small beginnings, Women for Change has become a diverse and influential group of 90 people, supported by four full-time staff and a team of researchers. The adoption of a Domestic Violence Law has been one focus of the Women for Change efforts. Women for Change has also been following up with training for law enforcement officers. After two decades of campaigning by civil society groups, public attitudes on domestic violence are changing. Everyday proverbs that condone violence against women are now no longer acceptable, for example. Working with men is also a focus of Women for Change, including through Men for Change workshops that encourage young men to reflect on masculinity in Mongolian society and see gender equality not as a women’s issue but as something that benefits everybody.
BACKGROUND: BEIJING+25 REVIEW

The adoption of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (BPfA) at the Fourth World Conference on Women in 1995 symbolized a landmark global commitment and ushered in a comprehensive and bold global framework to advance women and girl’s rights. A quarter of a century on, despite innovation and progress on many fronts, the pace of change remains slow across the 12 critical areas of concern of the BPfA.¹

The centrality of gender equality and women’s empowerment to the eradication of poverty and achievement of inclusive and sustainable development has been affirmed through its systematic integration into the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), including through a standalone SDG 5. The Beijing+25 Review converges with the 5-year milestone for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and marks a window of opportunity to take stock of progress made and actions required to address barriers to gender equality and implementing the SDGs by 2030.

Leveraging the 12 critical areas of the BPfA and the SDGs, the Beijing+25 Regional Review will center around six cluster areas that highlight the importance of holistic and joined-up development solutions:

- Inclusive development, shared prosperity and decent work;
- Poverty eradication, social protection and social services;
- Freedom from violence, stigma and stereotypes;
- Participation, accountability, gender-responsive institutions;
- Peaceful and inclusive societies;
- Environmental conservation, climate action and resilience-building.

For the Beijing+25 Regional Review the focus will be on four key clusters: inclusive development, shared prosperity and decent work; freedom from violence, stigma and stereotypes; participation, accountability, gender-responsive institutions; and environmental conservation, climate action and resilience-building.

CONTACT

Ms. Sayuri Cocco Okada
Social Affairs Officer
Email: okada@un.org
Tel. +66 2288 1945 Fax. +66 2288 1030

¹ The 12 critical areas/strategic objectives of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action include women and: poverty, education and training, health, violence, armed conflict, economy, power and decision-making, institutional mechanisms, human rights, media, environment and the girl child.