

51%

A global snapshot of
women's experiences
in 2016



#The51Percent

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FOREWORD



It's rare to be able to say that half the people in the world – more than half, in fact – are affected by one issue.

The lives of women and girls are often circumscribed, pre-ordained by the strictures of their culture or by outdated economic conventions. Yet it's obvious that we can't create a prosperous, fair or happy society if half the population has a different, more limited, experience of life.

This booklet contains short reflections on women's lives from a wide variety of different contributors from all over the world, each with a different story to tell.

Their stories tell us that the issues facing women and girls are rarely simple, and never take place in a vacuum. Other factors always come into play, whether those are national politics, or family expectations, or the added burden of multiple discriminations.

A Ukrainian woman's experience is different from a Rwandan's – but behind the differences there is a common story of thwarted expectations and unfair treatment. And beyond that story there is the common desire of women to determine the shape of their own lives.

It's a matter of justice, but also, in a world facing huge challenges, a matter of practical necessity. In the search for solutions, the world simply can't afford to deny the experience, insight and energy of women.

Gender equality is something we claim to take for granted

in the UK – although of course our own record is far from perfect, as studies of pay and workplace discrimination, and domestic violence, for example, continue to tell us.

As the UN's Sustainable Development Goals come to the top of national agendas, so the empowerment of women and girls should rise to prominence in the minds of those setting national priorities. The British Council will be at the forefront of that agenda, in all the countries where we work.

I hope that this book of commentary and reflection by women (and one man) from around the world helps to start conversations and spark ideas about what can be done to enable the 51 per cent achieve 100 per cent of their – and our – potential.

Sir Ciarán Devane
Chief Executive, British Council

MEXICO

Invisible Victims

By Imke van der Velde, Alethia Fernández de la Reguera and Dalia Carrizoza Treviño



Imke is an international development professional with global experience in the non-profit sector. She is particularly interested in themes of empowerment of disadvantaged groups (gender equality, child protection, disability mainstreaming), human rights, peace and conflict transformation,

education and capacity building. She currently works for the British Council in Mexico as Project Manager Basic Education.



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migrants who returned from the U.S. Dr. Fernández de la Reguera is member of the UNESCO – Tec Chair in Ethics and Peace Studies and Council Member at the Institute for Migrant Women in Mexico City.



Dalia is British Council Mexico's Equality, Diversity and Inclusion champion. She also works in the Education team on different projects and is in charge of the communication strategy for them. She has a Bachelor of Communication Sciences from Justo Sierra University (2010).

Raising alarm

On the face of it, Mexico is doing fairly well in terms of gender disparities, showing a steady decrease in recent years and now ranking 71 out of 145 countries (Global Gender Gap Report 2015). Yet looks can be deceiving. These macro numbers are only part of a gender story, not properly reflecting social issues of safety, discrimination and violence. Such numbers are harder to come by, partly due to challenges and opacity in data collection and gross underreporting of cases to the relevant authorities. Nonetheless, based on known incidents and their own research, civil society and women's rights organisations see reason to raise alarm. The severity of such disconcerting cases and the weak public response make violence one of the biggest challenges for women in Mexico in 2016.

Invisible victims and collateral damage

Emblematic cases are plenty. Widely reported in national media was the murder in 2015 of photojournalist Rubén Espinoza. He had fled to Mexico City, imagining himself safe from threats he received back home for reporting on corruption in the state of Veracruz. His murder caused public uproar and underlined the precarious situation for journalists in Mexico. People took to the streets to protest throughout the nation, using banners and pictures of the victim and demanding justice for Rubén and for journalists in general. The simultaneous torture, rape and murder of the four women who 'happened to be' at his shared apartment at the time of the assault were dismissed by many media outlets as collateral damage.

On the contrary, the more recent murder of crime journalist Anabel Flores Salazar who was kidnapped from her home in Veracruz on February 8, 2016 and whose half-naked body was found a day later on the side of a highway in a neighbouring state, received much less attention. Where is the public outcry now, for this similar attack on a female journalist?

In the meantime, thousands of other women – Mexican, indigenous, migrant women outside of the

public eye – have disappeared. Only some of their bodies are eventually found in garbage dumps, the desert, outskirts of a city or dumped on the side of a road. For the majority of cases, their fate remains a mystery. Femicides, torture and forced disappearances of women in Mexico are the pinnacle of a system embedded by cultural and structural violence that prevents women from satisfying their basic needs and normalizes gender violence.

Crunching numbers

Violence against women in Mexico takes multiple and intersecting forms and occurs at epidemic proportions – a national household survey showed that 31.8% of women experience some sort of violence in public life, and 44.9% suffer intimate partner violence (ENDIREH/INEGI, 2011). The Ministry of the Interior (SEGOB) reported a staggering number of 35,285 cases of sexual violence in Mexico between January 2014 and September 2015. This does not reflect the full magnitude, as it is estimated that only 10% of cases are being reported and it is believed that every 4 minutes a Mexican woman gets raped (El Economista, 24/11/2015).

Newspapers are reporting a silent epidemic of missing and murdered women. In Mexico State (one of the 32 states) alone during

2011–2012, 1,258 women and girls were reported disappeared and at least 448 murdered (The Guardian, 29/07/2015). Femicide, accounting for one of the more severe violations of women's rights in Mexico, is on the increase in terms of prevalence. In 2012 Mexico was ranked 16th in the incidents of homicides against women globally (National Citizens Observatory of Femicide OCNF). According to UN Women, cases of femicide in the country have seen a steady increase since the year 2007 with almost seven femicides a day in 2013 – accounting for 2,502 per year. In 2012/2013 however, only 10 people were sentenced in such cases (OCNF).

Challenges within the bigger context

A general lack of respect for women and human rights and structural gender inequalities are at the base of these rampant numbers. Lack of access to justice, coupled with present laws not providing sufficient protection due to serious law enforcement problems, within a current legal system infamous for its irregularities, put women in a specific position of risk.

And although there are initiatives from the public and private sector providing women with more and better opportunities for development, whether it's in

justice, business or on general economic and social levels; many women suffer discrimination not only because they are women, but due to their class and ethnic background, limiting their opportunities to thrive as much as they could. Structural discrimination against women ingrained in culture, institutions and everyday interactions makes growth and progress for women a particular challenge. As a result, women continue to face obstacles to their professional and personal development: the educational level of women is lower than that of men, employment and entrepreneurship opportunities are fewer, in turn reinforcing their disadvantaged economic and social positions. There are still many communities throughout Mexico where women are considered subordinate to men in all aspects.

Policy and Politics

Statistics show that violence against women requires a comprehensive approach in terms of prevention of gender based violence, protection of victims and prosecution of perpetrators. A major development in that area has been The General Law on the Access of Women to a Life Free of Violence, created in 2007 and modified since, in order to improve the legislative framework to prevent, protect and prosecute. Yet,

as mentioned before, the Mexican government faces challenges in law enforcement and coordination among the three government levels (Federal, state and local). In terms of prevention policies, the creation of safe public spaces and programs to sensitize men and women, as well as youth, over gender violence and its consequences are still insufficient. Regarding protection of victims, access to justice is still not guaranteed. Therefore the training of authorities (especially first respondents and judges) should be a priority.

In response Mexico State created – through the National Commission to Prevent and Eradicate Violence Against Women (CONAVIM) – the Justice Centres for Women, which provide inter-institutional services to support women victims of violence and their children. Currently there are 26 centres in 19 states working in the following areas: access to justice, prevention, assistance, empowerment, monitoring and assessment of cases. However these centres still face coordination problems, and are not sufficient to assist the number of victims in each entity.

Many challenges lie ahead, precisely because eradicating violence against women requires cross-sectoral integration of policies, improved practice and

a multidisciplinary approach to behaviour change. Mexico's willingness and attempts, albeit flawed, will be the foundation of better-quality lives for women in the years to come.

GREECE

The Resilient Woman

By Lina Liakou



Lina Liakou is an elected councillor at the municipality of Thessaloniki appointed for issues of civic engagement. She is also the Managing Director of the 'Metropolitan Development Agency of Thessaloniki' an inter-municipal legal entity that coordinates national and international research projects

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For decades young girls in Greece grew up hearing their mothers and grandmothers reminiscing about stories of struggle and bravery from the population exchange in 1922, the resistance during the German occupation in the 40s and the extreme poverty of the Greek society in the years that followed. The Greek mother was always the main figure, the one that kept the family together, the one that created something from nothing. Stories of solidarity and cooperation between families

and neighbours were a great part of the narrative of the great struggle of the 20th Century.

In the last few years these stories have emerged again into the everyday narrative, this time not as family tales from the elderly but from the daily news feed: stories of destitution either between the natives or the hundreds of thousands of refugees that cross the country to find a safe place for their children. Again the mother and wife figure is at the forefront. A woman who, no

matter the obstacles and defeats, gets back up to her feet, who has always a higher purpose – that of protecting her family – who stays always balanced, resourceful and supportive. A resilient woman.

We live in an era where resilience has emerged as the most valuable skill and attribute. In governance, the economy, in society, resilience is a fundamental quality to overcome crisis and move forward whatever form it may take. Whether this is related to the private or public sphere, the individual or the community, women have proved throughout history that they are, above all, resilient. They have shown that it is more important how you deal with a problem rather than the actual problem itself and this is what determines whether or not you're going to make it through.

However, Greek women's resilience is more a hidden skill than an acknowledged attainment. Although

Greece has been a pioneer in women's rights legislation within the European Union, Greek women still face conscious or unconscious biases against them that stem from a general mentality within Greek society. Many people still believe that women are the leaders of the house and family but not the leaders of the nation, the city, or the company.

The issue of women's rights and the role of women in leading today's economy, government and society is not only about equal opportunities, it is rather an issue of how our society and especially my country can move towards a new path where everybody wins. But this requires solidarity, mutual support and common effort between women of all ages and backgrounds, whether an immigrant mother

or a company executive. There is a need of understanding that how we act today determines our future and the future of our children for the establishment of an inclusive and thriving society.

TUNISIA

Celebrate and Embrace Women's Independence, Engagement and Active Participation

By Sirine Ben Brahim



Sirine Ben Brahim is a 24 year-old English teacher and MA researcher majoring in Diasporic Literature and International Relations. She has been a debater and debate trainer for three years with Young Arab Voices Tunisia (a project jointly launched by the British Council and Anna

Lindh Foundation). She is also an alumna to the American Middle Eastern Network for Dialogue at Stanford (AMENDS) and former Vice President of WeYouth Tunisia, a local youth-led NGO endorsing youth's participation in decision making and civic engagement.

In classical Greek mythology, Pandora was the first woman to put feet on earth. She was celebrated by all the Gods and Zeus gifted her with a jar full of values and feelings, including Hatred and Evil; Love and Hope. The myth narrates that Pandora's curiosity overpowered her, forcing her to open the jar, thus releasing to the world all the evils. Pandora hastened to close the jar and could only keep Hope inside. This is where expressions of "to open Pandora's Box" and "women are the root of all evil" came from. According

to this myth, the world is fraught with evil and Hope is withdrawn, kept with Pandora, the woman.

I began with this story to share two interpretations: one is that women have always been associated with problem-making and distress; two is that women will always be synonymous with hope and great expectations. The principal focus of this article is on women's condition in Tunisia in 2016. It is about the changing nature of these challenges that are incessantly growing in tandem with the country's developing socio-political

and economic circumstances. My contention is that in 2016 and in a post-Revolution Tunisia, woman is the face of a purely classical ideological fight where she is used and abused to attain glossed over, political ends.

Because the word "woman" has become ideology-laden, and because where there is a political and partisan campaign women are invited to share a spot in media broadcasts and the fight for her "rights" seizes a quasi-large parcel of their agendas, I see that Tunisian women are endangered and threatened. They are threatened more when acknowledged than they are when left alone. Tunisian women have been pioneers in the Arab world in terms of equality and progress. The gains we enjoyed date back to the country's Independence. It was as important and historic a step as that of independence itself. The first post-Independence president,

Habib Bourguiba, did not fail to give weight to women and liberate them from ideological shackles and patriarchal dictates. And so the problem with Tunisian women is not that traditional one of how to earn the same income as men or have a strong hold against them in courts, it is that of safeguarding what she has already acquired and work on proving herself by strengthening her position in the political and civic domains.

After the Revolution, a lot of Tunisian women held leadership positions in the Parliament, political parties or civil societal organizations. Others were everyday leaders in hospitals, schools, markets, farms and houses. They occupied streets to denounce dictatorship and undo strictures and limitations, and they have shared the fear and anxiety about the country's future. However, I detect a danger in that talks in TV shows and public

debate discuss how there is still a risk of losing some of the most fundamental gains of women and how women still are in a weak relegated position. Raising outdated debates from scratch is futile. It is to my mind a step backward and not the opposite. Celebrating and embracing women's independence, engagement and active participation in the matters of a newly democratic country should not be channeled through victimizing and scape-goating women. It should be rather done though believing in women's capacity and potential to manage, lead and accept that she is indispensable in the societal texture. The preoccupation and interest in women's risk-filled predicament is limiting. It is becoming a kind of bidding process, where women are constantly reminded that a stigma attaches to them, no matter the achievements they make; it is a

reminder that, in practice, the world is still unfair to women. This is the reason why as a Tunisian woman, the contention that I live on the verge of loss and threats, going back to times where women are bereft of prerogative and utility, is unfathomable to me.

Tunisian women's fight these days is ideological, per se. Our challenge is to prove that women are no longer a subject matter, but agents. It is a challenge that conditions our participation in the political and social landscape of Tunisia. And our collective strife is that of advocating for more gains and working towards the stability of a country that boasts of both her men and women and is built on the basis of gender equality and equity.

HUNGARY

“No place for women please, we are dealing with a crisis here”

By Katalin Ertsey



Katalin Ertsey is a Senior Advisor of the International Centre for Democratic Transition (ICDT), an associate researcher for the Institute of Foreign Affairs and Trade, and an Executive Board member of the Tom Lantos Institute. She launched Capilano Women in 2014, a mentoring program

for female leaders. Currently she is pursuing a PhD in Politics and Gender at the University of Bristol. She served as a member of the Hungarian parliament for the Greens between 2010 and 2014.

In Hungary, an entirely new challenge arose in the past few years in terms of women's role in society and their political representation. The rest of the Western world acknowledges that there is a lot to do to close the gender gap because governments, political leaders and public figures do not question that gender inequality is a problem. In Hungary, however, a new, surprising tendency is emerging.

Important public figures, including top political leaders like the Speaker of the Hungarian Parliament or even the Prime Minister, as well as many others, like a popular singer, believe that there is nothing wrong with women being confined to their “natural” traditional roles and they should not be treated equally.

A scandal broke out before Christmas when Ákos, a favourite

singer on the right, said a “woman's job... is not to earn as much as men, but (...) to give birth to someone”.

The following media uproar resulted in an unprecedented reaction by the government: it ordered all ministries to cancel contracts with Magyar Telekom, the Hungarian branch of Deutsche Telekom, because MT had terminated its sponsorship deal with the singer. Telekom said Ákos' remarks were not “compatible with our beliefs and value system”, prompting the government to slam a “dictatorship of opinion”, calling it a discrimination that the telecommunications firm stopped sponsoring the singer.

Ákos' remarks however, only added fuel to an already brewing sexism row ignited earlier when the Speaker of the Parliament

implied women should be content in life with producing children.

“We would like it if our daughters considered it the highest degree of self-fulfilment to give birth to grandchildren”, László Kövér, the Speaker of Parliament, said at a congress of his ruling right-wing Fidesz party.

Apart from such political leaders, a small group of antifeminist women also emerged in social media who simply deny there is a problem. They claim that since women got the right to vote and work, any other issues may only stem from lack of ambition or capabilities. They explain the gender pay gap as a preference issue, which simply means more women prefer to stay at home, take care of their family as their natural role in society. These women are

mostly white, middle class, young and childless, which means that although they are educated, they are simply blind to the problems of women in different situations.

Even the Prime Minister, Viktor Orbán, made strange remarks, noting at a public talk in Helsinki that Hungarian politics is not for women, it is too harsh, a view which he repeated and elaborated at a closed discussion with young Hungarians saying that Hungarian politics is so much built on character assassination that women should not aim at higher office because they could not handle such personal attacks. No wonder that the number of women in Parliament remained around 10% throughout the 25 years since transition,

and today there is not a single female member of government, presenting a stark contrast to most European governments, including conservative ones.

All this fits into the broader challenge facing Hungary: the building of an illiberal state.

As is obvious from the above examples, recent years have presented a completely new approach to “western” ideas including equality: an open, overt opposition to ideas “imposed” on our societies by the West. These new narratives are openly challenging the very idea of equality, as being part of an outdated, “impotent”, “failing” liberal agenda. Leaders emerging in the Eastern part of Europe (most recently in Poland) are not

only attacking liberal democracy but also offer a counter-narrative: masculine power is the only legitimate and effective force that is able to put things in order and offer a way out of the dead-end street of liberal democracy.

Recently, the migration crisis offered a perfect example for these leaders, spearheaded by PM Orbán in Hungary to say: “when the “hordes” [his usage] of Eastern civilization suddenly breaks through our doors, weak, liberal, naïve approaches will only bring the death of European civilization. This other civilization is young, vital and potent, masculine, while Europe is old, tired, shy and feminine”.

Because it is an entirely new reality that Europe has yet to understand and deal with, democrats are struggling to find answers and solutions. It seems that gender inequality – while suitable for creating major media campaigns – will in reality be side-lined because “more important” issues, such as the restoration of democracy are at stake. It is not by accident that the only other government that did not include women was the caretaker government of leftist-liberal technocrats, cleaning up the

mess after the financial crisis hit Hungary hard. No place for women please, we are dealing with a crisis here. Nobody seems to realize that one of the reasons why Hungary ended up here was the absence of women in decision-making right from the beginning of transition. I am convinced that if post-89 Hungary had started rebuilding democracy in a more diverse manner, with regards to equality, including the equal rights of women, the erosion of democratic values could not have happened so rapidly. Therefore when the tides turn, we will have to build up a new, liberal democracy with an outstanding accent on equality.

RWANDA

Economic Empowerment Remains the Biggest Challenge

By Prudent Gatera



Prudent Gatera holds a Master's degree in Project Planning and Management and is currently the capacity building officer at the Rwanda Men's Resource Centre (RWAMREC), a local organisation promoting gender equality and men-women partnership in raising families and governing society. He is a British

Council Active Citizen and his current social action project consists of reinforcing community dialogue for women's empowerment through a male engagement approach in 215 villages in Rulindo district (Rwanda).

The politics of colonialism until 1962 and the post-independence regimes before July 1994, as well as the culture of Rwanda, have created limited secondary educational opportunities for girls and women. The education system, established by the Belgian colonialists and followed by the Kayibanda Gregoire (1962–1973) and Habyarimana Juvenal (1973–1994) regimes, was shaped by the type of education they thought was appropriate for girls and women. They imposed a Western, Christian, patriarchal social organization and used schooling as a tool to shape

the place of women. This situation led women to feel that they were second-class citizens: the type of education intended for girls prepared them to become office secretaries, teachers and nurses, and they were taught to believe that they were not good at science and technology subjects. While the daughters of the elite got a chance to go to school, many girls and women from poor rural families lacked educational opportunities and others lost these opportunities when they fell pregnant, or had to fulfil other family roles and responsibilities. That was their fate.

This situation, as well as the 1994 genocide, which left so many disempowered widows and orphan girls, inspired the politicians to consider the benefits of removing the gender stereotypes which had been maintained over the decades, and to find ways to empower women. Since then, changes have been made to Rwandan laws and policies that had disadvantaged women. There are now many civil society organizations advocating for greater gender equality. The government established a gender monitoring office in 2007 to ensure that gender issues are taken into consideration in both the private and public sector.

Despite the efforts Rwanda has made to eradicate all the barriers to equal socio-economic and political opportunities, and to promote equal rights for men and women, I believe that women's economic empowerment remains a big challenge. This

empowerment will come through overcoming cultural barriers, education, financial support, and through monitoring and supporting women's income generating activities.

In most cases, the gender-based violence found among married couples is due to a poor interpretation of the gender policy and matrimonial law relating to the management of family assets. Normally, couples who marry on terms of joint ownership of property have equal rights to family assets; however, due to cultural reasons, the decision of the husband prevails because he is deemed to hold the power. This situation is even worse for couples who are not legally married. In both cases, it is hard for women to get bank loans because men hold the economic power over family assets. Moreover, men's income is statistically higher than women's in most cases and it is not always easy to get men's flexibility over family assets when banks ask for collateral before issuing a loan.

The Government of Rwanda has established a Business Development Fund (BDF) with office branches in all the districts across the country. These business development centres (BDCs) have taught people how to start and grow businesses with ethical values, as well as giving people training in basic ICT skills (such as opening e-mail accounts and using the Internet to access market information). The risk of running a bad business is still high among uneducated women and women from rural areas, who lack sufficient knowledge to develop their business proposals and partner with banks. The proportion of women supported by these business development centres is still low compared to the number of women in need of such financial services and support.

Over the last 20 years, many positive things have been achieved, thanks to the Government's political will and people's commitment to changing the inequalities of past generations. Considering what women

endured during the genocide, Rwandans have acknowledged the contribution of women to the rebuilding of the nation from both social and economic perspectives. Rwandans thought that women's participation in decision-making bodies could speed up the expected change. The British Government has supported a number of policies and initiatives promoting girls' education; other development partners have supported amendments to the past gender-biased laws. The Rwandan government has put in place a number of strategies to support family planning initiatives, to reduce child and maternal mortality (by 40%), and to promote children's health. Universal health insurance, known as *Mutuelle de Santé*, was introduced in 1999 for every citizen in the country. Women's inclusion in the finance sector has been achieved through the introduction of Women Development Banks, microfinance institutions and business development centres. These financial institutions offer a range

of services that encourage women to get involved in doing business in the country and abroad. As a result of the revised education system, women are now applying for, and taking up positions that were formerly assigned only to men.

The promotion of gender equality is a choice made by Rwandans and any form of gender based violence or discrimination is prohibited by the law.

The high performance of girls and women in all sectors – education, sports, police, finance, banking and business – has proved that “Women can do it”. Various initiatives have been taken by civil society and women’s rights organizations to educate all Rwandans in overcoming the former socio-cultural norms of the country’s development: social, economic, politics etc. Women are being consulted by the government whenever gender-related laws need to be revised or evaluated.

The Rwanda Men’s Resource Centre (www.rwamrec.org) is one of the leading local organizations

promoting gender equality through a focussed male engagement approach that strives to build strong men-women partnerships.

The organization is currently running a number of projects to promote this engagement: projects such as ‘Boys-4-Change’, ‘Girls’ Future’ and ‘Girls-Take-The-Lead’– all of which aim to prepare future generations of men and women to work more closely together.

NEPAL

Technology Empowering Girls in Nepal

By Deepanjali Shrestha and Nabodita Subedi



Deepanjali Shrestha is a Project Officer for EDGE (English and Digital for Girls' Education) at British Council Nepal. She is currently completing her Masters in Gender Studies from Tribhuvan University, and is keen on working for women and girls in South Asia. She started

her career as a computer trainer for underprivileged girls through the Tifa Jiritsu Kai Institute and has worked as an intern at CCS Italy NCO for School Health and Nutrition Program.



Nabodita is a Program Officer for EDGE. She previously worked on a production team of a youth empowerment radio program called Saathi Sanga Manka Kura (Chatting with my best friend) which was based on various life skills in association with UNICEF and Equal Access

Nepal. Since 2012 she has been involved in various projects related to youth empowerment, social mobilisation, public health, media assessment and violence against women.

Nepal is a unique country set between two giants, China and India. It is a diverse and heterogeneous country – multi cultural, multi ethnic and with different religious beliefs. Political instability in the country has

blocked progress, the socio-economic status of country is very poor and there is gender discrimination due to patriarchal notions in society. Women in Nepal face difficulties at different stages of their lives, from limited access

to education to lack of ownership of land and property. Women are not considered equal to men in all social norms. A woman's life is greatly influenced by her father, husband and son; and marriage is one of the most important events in a Nepalese woman's life.

The most challenging situation for women in Nepal is the lack of recognition of their contribution to the economy and other areas. A large part of women's work is not considered as economic activity. As a result only 45.2% of women as compared to 68.2% of men are classified as economically active. Women's average work burden has increased more than ever as male members of the family started migrating for work. The work burden for women has increased slightly over the past 12 years from 10.8 hours per day in 1981 to 10.9 hours per day in 1995 (Bhadra, C & Shah, M.T., 2007). Similarly, though the enrolment of girls in education

has increased at primary level, as girls reach secondary and higher levels, the dropout rate increases enormously. Despite having made good progress in enhancing equal access to basic education from grade 1 to 8 girls, especially the poorest, cannot continue on to post-basic schooling and the quality of education at all levels remains a problem. Girls are not sent to school as they are expected to be involved in household chores and support their overburdened mothers. Young girls are married at an early age as they are treated as a burden on the family – giving a daughter away in marriage allows poor parents to reduce family expenses by ensuring that they have one less person to feed, clothe and educate.

Education has always been a privilege for only a few fortunate people in Nepal. Though Nepal has signed conventions and has shown commitments for

improving the level of education, the national literacy rate for women is projected at 57.5% in comparison to 89.2% for men. Women are excluded economically, socially and politically in Nepal. There are women who are on the frontline and high profile but they are very few and their voices are rarely or never heard.

Looking back at the past 20 years, Nepal has made significant achievements in some key areas. For example, Nepal has reached gender parity in primary education, with a significant increase in enrolments for girls in schools. By halving extreme poverty in just seven years, Nepal achieved the first Millennium Development Goal ahead of time. Nepal has also made great progress in reducing the maternal mortality rate ahead of the 2015 deadline. Progress in the promotion of girls' education has been made as a result of International Women's Year and

the International Women's Decade. Several measures have been taken to amplify girls' education. Female teachers were appointed in each school. Nevertheless, education has yet to be effective in empowering women in Nepal. Education in Nepal is not yet linked with the lives of the people. Equality and the empowerment of women is simply a lip-service and yet to be considered seriously.

There have been some, although gradual, changes in women's conditions as a result of both development interventions and broader processes of urbanization (though women have benefitted less, in both respects, than men). In broad terms, women's literacy rates have increased though they remain low, fertility rates are slightly reduced and the age of marriage has increased marginally compared to 15 years ago. Indicators are more encouraging in urban than in rural areas. However, a significant

trend over the past decade is one that points to an increased work burden for women. The majority of women continue to be engaged in the agricultural sector although, in view of a commercializing national economy and increases in the incidence of poverty, increasing numbers are joining the formal non-agricultural sector, a labour market in which they are marginalized in lower-paid, less productive avenues of employment. Women have started migrating for unskilled and lower paid jobs risking their lives. Despite some increase in literacy and social mobility, women's political and legal awareness, even about issues of direct concern to them, remains low. Although the situation of Nepalese women has improved somewhat, they still fare poorly in comparison with the achievements made in other countries in the region over the same time period.

There are still many challenges faced by women in Nepal particularly because of patriarchal notions and women, in general, face a lack of opportunities and access and control over

resources. Women are bound in household work and there are many challenges faced on a daily basis; to be aware of and updated on their rights, to overcome the barriers of cultural values and practices that are firmly embedded in systems and structures of society. Thus to ensure that women can enjoy substantive equality in practice and realize their rights, a strong national legal framework is essential. The framework must protect the formal political, civil and socio-economic rights of women and must possess strong legal monitoring mechanisms. As a majority of Nepali women and men have very limited access to mainstream print and visual media, adopting newer mediums of communication such as through mobile phones as well as having anti-VAW (Violence Against Women) and pro-gender equality slogans on public transport, schools, government offices walls, and grocery bags can be effective. In recent decades, Nepal has made large investments in improving girls' access to basic education, maternal and child health and ensuring a kind of universal social

security to the elderly, widows, single women, and selected marginalized groups such as Dalits, but such services still remain outside the reach of a large section of rural women. Some more actions and investments are required to reduce inequality in educational and health access.

Literacy and life-skills play a significant role in strengthening the capacity of adolescent girls to become independent and confident enough to make informed decisions and have improved livelihood opportunities. Yet studies show that there is a high gender based digital gap especially in remote parts of the country. With this vision, the project *English and Digital for Girls' Education* (EDGE) was initiated in Nepal. EDGE believes that if adolescent girls from marginalized communities are given a platform to improve their English language, ICT skills and their awareness of rights and choices, they can use this knowledge and these skills to access information and opportunities to make informed and independent life choices.

As one of the key activities of the EDGE project, 200 girls from rural parts of the country were trained on the usage of basic computer skills and provided with phablets (large smartphones) by the British Council. To improve their English Language skills, the girls were also trained on the usage of the software LEkids and Trace Effects, designed by the British Council and the U.S. Embassy respectively. They were also supported with training in other life skills like group management, administration and leadership. Following the successful completion of the training, these Peer Group Leaders went back to their respective villages and formed EDGE clubs, with buy-in from parents and community members, where they would impart their new set of knowledge and skills to other adolescent girls in their villages and continue improving these skills among peers.

Since the outset of the project in September, so far 80 EDGE Clubs have been formed with the support of the British Council Nepal, the U.S. Embassy Kathmandu and Equal Access Nepal in five target

districts (Arghakhanchi, Gulmi, Kaverepalanchowk, Lalitpur and Makawanpur) of the country. A total of 2,080 adolescent girls from the marginalised communities of the country are on their journey of improving their English Language, ICT skills and life skills with the ultimate goal of making educated and independent life choices.

POLAND

A Changing Mind-set

By Małgorzata Druciarek and Aleksandra Niżyńska



Małgorzata Druciarek holds an MA in sociology and has been working in the field of gender equality for over four years. She is an Analyst and a Head of Gender Equality Observatory – a monitoring body, created in 2012 as a special unit inside one of the leading Polish think-

tanks, the Institute of Public Affairs. It analyses, promotes and mainstreams gender equality issues in the Polish public sphere.



Aleksandra Niżyńska is a graduate of Warsaw University and Bremen Universität. She is a Lawyer and Social Scientist. She is an Analyst in the Institute of Public Affairs and Head of the Gender Equality Observatory. Her expertise focuses on gender equality and socio-legal analysis of public policies.

Poland over the last 20 years has changed rapidly and made great progress towards acquiring democratic standards. We have developed free elections, local governance, human rights and civil society. Meanwhile gender issues have been perceived for a long time as something irrelevant and being feminist has been treated suspiciously. At the moment of

celebrating the 20th anniversary of Polish peaceful revolution in 2009, when all of the commemorated heroes turned out to be men, even though women were also active in the Solidarity movement, Polish female leaders decided to raise their voices. That is how the unique Women's Congress was established and that is when the biggest changes in the Polish mentality and

legislation started to take place. In 2011 gender quotas on the electoral lists were introduced to the Electoral Code, which resulted in the highest level of female representation in Parliament (27%) and the government being led by a woman for the second time in a row. It is even more interesting and shows a clear positive change in women's representation in politics, as Ms Ewa Kopacz (Prime Minister 2014–2015) and Ms Beata Szydło (current Prime Minister) are politicians from two opposing parties.

The fact that women take leadership positions in Polish public life is also visible in business where women are more often members of executive boards, though there are still very few of them getting to the top position in the management. A big step towards gender equality has been taken in the reconciliation of work and family life. Men have started to engage much more in

childcare and are provided with two weeks fully paid paternity leave, which can be taken within two years from when the child is born. Additionally, in 2013 paid maternity leave was extended to a whole year (52 weeks) and renamed parental leave, which clearly identifies men as also being entitled to this benefit. Nevertheless, men are not so eager to use their right to either paternity or parental leave. At the moment one of the biggest challenges is to engage men in household duties and in the fight for gender equality.

In 2016 we will probably face a gender backlash, taking into account the rise of conservative attitudes both within society and government officials. The issue which has not been solved in the last 20 years, and which will probably remain unsolved for the foreseeable future, is the public attitude to sexual and reproductive health. Paradoxically, together

with gaining democracy in 1989, women were deprived of their right to reproductive health, with the introduction of very restrictive anti-abortion laws in 1993 and limited access to contraception, which is to no extent reimbursed by the State. Additionally, the level of sexual education is very poor and many schools do not provide such lessons to teenage students. In the end, Polish women have very limited access to proper reproductive health services and facilities. This will remain together with gender based violence the most urgent, yet probably unsolved issue in 2016.

UNITED STATES

Rethinking the Ideal Worker

By Anne Weisberg



Anne Weisberg is the Director of the Women's Initiative at Paul Weiss, a major law firm headquartered in New York. A graduate of Harvard Law School, Anne is a recognized expert and thought leader on how to design inclusive workplaces that allow men and women to perform at their best.

She is writing for this publication in her personal capacity.

The American workplace is designed around the myth of the ideal worker as someone who is available to work anytime, at a moment's notice, and will always put work above everything else. This is as true at the top of corporate America, where executives are expected to work 24/7, as it is at the bottom, where hourly workers are expected to be on call and show up for shifts at a moment's notice.

Women have long struggled to fit into this model, and increasingly

men are as well. The result: everyone is feeling work life stress that is a drag on health, productivity and engagement. Research done by Stanford and Harvard Business School professors shows that long work hours can actually kill you, increasing the risk of dying by almost 20 percent (a higher rate than second hand smoke), and that highly demanding jobs raised the odds of a physician-diagnosed illness by 35 percent.

It is time to rethink the ideal worker model. America – its economy, its

families and communities, and its businesses – will all benefit from redefining the ideal worker as someone who, like most working women, is a working caregiver.

Throughout the twentieth century, women made tremendous progress in education and economic empowerment in the U.S., but progress has stalled in the 21st century. In fact, the labour force participation rate for women in the U.S., once the envy of the developed world, has been declining, and in 2015, was slightly lower than Japan's.

The President's Council of Economic Advisers has concluded that the lack of paid parental leave is one big reason for the decline – because women try to go back to work too soon after having a baby and end up exhausted and out of

work. In addition, the percentage of women in corporate leadership has been stuck below 20 percent; the percentage of women equity partners in law firms has been stuck there as well, even though women have been close to half of all law school graduates for decades. Women struggle to rise into leadership on career paths that assume continuous, full-time employment for 40 years, since they are much more likely to take career breaks – primarily to provide care to family members.

Despite the rise of dual earner households, women are still doing the majority of caregiving and housework. The pay gap in the U.S. hasn't changed since 2003, and motherhood in large part explains its persistence.

As Professor Michelle Budig, Professor of the University of Massachusetts, explains, married

mothers of minor children experience the largest wage gaps.

What we have now in the U.S. is a vicious circle between work and home that is creating tremendous headwinds against women's progress.

Redefining the ideal worker using a working caregiver as the norm would mean that the ideal worker is someone who has responsibilities outside of work, who contributes both financially and emotionally to her family, and brings that perspective to work. This ideal worker model would go a long way towards turning the headwinds women have experienced into tailwinds that will get progress moving again. But it won't be easy, because:

- For professional workers, it means redefining career paths so that they assume some

interruptions and make it possible to step out and step back in

- For hourly workers, it means redesigning staffing systems and processes to ensure a high degree of predictability in schedules
- For everyone, it means judging their performance not on whether they are willing to put work above everything all the time, but on their results
- For leaders, it means expecting them to role model having significant, active involvement in their home lives
- For public policy, it means providing paid parental leave as part of an approach to the transition to parenthood that supports both mothers and fathers to return to work prepared to perform at their best, and

- For families, it means seeing caregiving as a collective responsibility, so that our country makes the investments in caregiving across the care spectrum (from infant to old age) and caregiving is more equitably distributed among family members

Why should all Americans – not just women – insist on redefining the ideal worker? Because everyone benefits from a model of the ideal worker as someone who is actively involved in both work and home.

It is true that the current ideal worker model benefits some men in some ways. For example, “men’s wages in their post-fatherhood years are, on average, 12% higher than in their pre-fatherhood years” controlling for all work-related factors that could be involved, according to Budig. This fatherhood bonus is largest for white, professional or middle manager fathers – in other words, men who are closest to the men already at the top who are most likely to conform to the ideal worker model. But, when given the choice, a growing number of men, especially millennial men, actually would prefer the new model. Take Marc Zuckerberg, the CEO of Facebook, who returned to work from a two month paternity leave to announce another extremely strong quarter.

According to the New York Times, he also “spent a portion of the investor call on Wednesday talking about his new role as a father to his daughter, Max.”

Women benefit because they are better able to provide financially for themselves and their families, as well as to achieve their career aspirations.

And we all benefit by making our economy stronger. McKinsey’s Global Institute released a report in 2015 finding that gender equality at work, “would add... \$28 trillion, or 26 percent, to annual global GDP in 2025 compared with a business-as-usual scenario. This impact is roughly equivalent to the size of the combined US and Chinese economies today.” In addition, when public policy and workplace practices support working parents, men and women contribute to the economy both by working and by raising the next generation of workers, which is important for a sustainable retirement system.

So, this International Women’s Day, let’s proclaim a new model of the ideal worker – so that we can build a better society for all in America, and beyond.

UKRAINE

Ukraine: Stereotypes and Heroines

By Ksenia Herenko



“I was born in 1981 in the family of a Soviet engineer and dancer and my first years were “happy Soviet kid” time. Post-soviet teenage time was tough but motivating. I decided to master English to see the world and Psychology to understand the world better. The result – in 2003 – was

a “Diploma with Excellence” in English/Practical Psychology.

I’ve got 14 years of working experience as a teacher of English, practical psychologist (children’s and teenager’s issues) and a long-term interpreter/assistant (ENEMO, OSCE Election Observation missions).”

As a Ukrainian woman ...

I have no doubt that in a world struggling for human rights, freedom and equality the combination of the two words “Ukrainian women” is a reason for some stereotypes. If you google these two words, you get more than four pages of search results just about dating with ladies from Ukraine and about marriages with always-ready-to-go-everywhere Slavonic girls. Try the same search in relation to women from other countries and you’ll immediately

find lots of information about a variety of women’s organizations and their social activities.

Actually Ukrainian women were among the first educated ladies in the world (Princess Olga, 10th century) and they have played an important role in world history, such as Roksolana (Nastya Lisovska), a wise wife of the Sultan of Turkey (1520–1566). The colourful paintings of Mariya Priymachenko inspired Pablo Picasso and the emotional speeches of Yulia Tymoshenko attracted the attention

of the world’s political elite. Our civic movement (the Union of Ukrainian Women) has developed a strong and effective network connecting Ukrainian Diaspora all over the world. And now 46% of all Ukrainian scientists are women!

But the most outstanding recent example of human dignity and strength is Nadiya Savchenko, a 33-year-old military pilot, who has become a symbol of resistance and patriotism facing a politicised detention and trial in Russia. She is now on her second hunger strike, proving the strength of her will and dignity.

Nadiya’s case somehow reflects some of the new challenges for women in our country. The mothers, wives and daughters of more than 93,000 soldiers pray for their sons, husbands and fathers to return back home alive from the war. 938 participants of a bloody and harsh anti-terrorism operation are women

and even though they have not been detained, they are strictly limited in their rights. Women are not allowed to make decisions in the Army; they are not able to get a relevant salary, to obtain the official status of participant of war actions and its related social benefits. Women occupy positions they are not officially nominated to, because of the lack of law regulations, and sometimes suffer from specific arrangements designed for the needs of men. These problems are new for Ukrainian women, but of vital importance because the situation facing our women combatants obviously won't improve soon.

Armed aggression also often involves gender-based violence and sexual exploitation. Women in the occupied areas live in a situation of endless stress. They have to face real threats by armed and aggressively-behaved men. They don't know how to protect themselves from abuse and offence, they feel discriminated against and neglected because their basic human rights are being violated. A couple of years ago Ukraine was considered as one of the most peaceful countries in the world and certainly we did not expect to encounter such

problems. We were also not ready to provide new homes for more than one million internally displaced people, most of them women and children. Hundreds of thousands of women have left their houses, jobs and property in the east seeking shelter and peace. Now all of them urgently need stability, better prospects for the future and successful engagement with the life of their new communities.

Going back to google and the "Ukrainian women" search results, among the photos of attractive girls some ugly problems are hidden – human trafficking and the resultant "social orphanage". Thousands of women are trying to find a better life abroad but many of them face violence, humiliation and discrimination. Thousands of their children have goodnight hugs with their mums via Skype, from many countries where Ukrainian women work hard and often illegally, trying to earn the means to make the lives of their parents and children better.

All these problems are the results of domestic instability and problems in the labour market common to many countries in the world. Poverty, unemployment, reproductive health problems, domestic violence, high levels of AIDS and HIV, alcohol/drug

addiction were and are the problems that women face now in Ukraine, but the current solutions tend to be theoretical rather than practical. Some effective social projects related to healthcare, human rights protection, and gender equality have been already implemented, but many more well-planned and thoroughly organized approaches and to solve the current and these new painful issues, are urgently needed.

As a Ukrainian woman I must say that the significant changes in our social life, our strong endeavours and efforts to improve the quality of our lives prove that a Ukrainian woman is not just an attractive option for dating but a dignified person, deserving respect, a decent life and better life perspectives.

INDIA

Battling Culture and Prejudice in India

By Shubhangi Tewari



Shubhangi is a freelance music performer, vocal coach, education professional and session artist. She has been teaching vocal music for the past five years at various schools of music in Delhi. She is a consultant master trainer for the British Council on the World Voice Project. Past session work

includes vocals on the song “Catch Me If You Can” in the Bollywood film “Xpose” (released May 16, 2014) and jingles for McDonalds. She is the vocalist, lyricist and co-composer for the Electronic/Experimental music duo “Stereo Buddha” (www.stereobuddha.com), and plays bass guitar in the Classic Rock band “Saga”. She has performed in the UK, Russia, Hong Kong, Malaysia and various venues in India.

As 1.31 billion Indians celebrated our 67th Republic Day this year on January 26th, with the French President François Hollande in attendance as the chief guest, one pondered just how many ideals laid down in the Indian constitution were achieved and how many were yet to be realised. It was on this day that the Constitution of India came into force as the supreme law of the land in 1950. This key document of

newly independent India laid down the framework of rules to enable our transition from a British colony into the largest democracy on earth. The constitution aspired to equality not just in the political sphere but also a more just and equitable social order.

Adult women were enfranchised like their male counterparts soon after Indian independence in 1947, but their journey to achieve

equality in the social order would prove to be more arduous. Women in India have had a low status due to their limited access to education and resources.

In Hindu patriarchal societies, until the Hindu succession (Amended) Act 2005, inheritance laws did not give equal claims to females in their father’s property. Christians and Muslims have a different set of inheritance laws which are in accordance to their culture and traditions. This ambivalence and difference in the laws have often meant that women have continued to be governed by pre-modern standards. There has been a growing call for a modern Uniform Civil Code governing all Indians. Needless to say, any attempts in this direction continue to be blocked by religious leaders, who call it an attempt at homogenisation and assimilation

by the majority community and an attack on their unique identity. There are also matriarchal societies in India (like the Khasi people in the state of Meghalaya), but these are few in number.

The social custom in Hindu societies of demanding a “dowry” at the time of marriage from the bride’s family is truly horrendous. Demanding or even giving a dowry is a criminal offence by law, but continues rampantly anyway. A huge percentage of marriages in India are ‘fixed’ or ‘arranged’ by the parents of the bride and groom, and the refusal or inability to give the desired dowry can jeopardise the agreement for marriage. A lot of poor people often take huge loans from the local loan-shark to enable the marriage of a daughter. This is one major reason why people consider the birth of a daughter as a burden. Often the demands for dowry continue after the marriage. Torturing the bride is commonplace and unfortunately, many are killed by the family into which they have been married.

In a report shown recently on a Television news channel, the state of Uttar Pradesh had the highest number of reported dowry deaths in the country last year (2014–15) — over 7000 women were killed for not bringing in enough dowry.

In many households, female children are considered a burden and their birth a curse. This evil mind-set has led to the selective abortion of female foetuses. The government launched a major campaign to “save the girl child”, once the sex ratio reached an abysmal figure of 933 females to a 1000 men (2001 census) and in the 2011 census the sex ratio did show a slight improvement (940 females to 1000 males). Pre-natal sex determination has been banned in India through the “Pre-conception and Pre-Natal Diagnostic Techniques (Prohibition of Sex Selection) Act, 1994”, but trust people to find ways around the law. In the first week of February this year, the Union Cabinet Minister for Women and Child Development — Smt. Menaka

Gandhi suggested that instead of banning sex determination tests, it might be more effective to actually make the tests compulsory, tell the pregnant women the sex of their unborn child, register the results and then track whether they have given these births or not.

Once females are born, their claim on their family’s limited resources is probably the least. The lion’s share is for the sons — who are looked upon as the parents’ “social security net” in their old age. Furthermore, a mind-set that assigns females into the private sphere of the family and allocates for them the role of home-maker, child bearer and rearer, has meant that having access to education has been a distant dream for most girls. Things are changing for the better now, with a massive effort from government and non-governmental civil society groups to challenge such mind-sets. Indian women continue to break glass ceilings in almost every sphere of society and polity — from being elected as representatives in

local and national governments, to being airline pilots, to CEOs of Fortune 500 companies.

Domestic violence and marital rape is rampant in the so called private sphere but probably the worst aspect of being a female in India in 2016, especially in the National Capital Region, is the sexual violence that all women, irrespective of class or religion face in public spaces — being stared at, being subject to lewd comments, just feeling unsafe and unable to travel for work or recreation, especially after dark. Unfortunately, most women struggle with the fear of rape on a daily basis...their choice of dress, route, timing is driven by it. A lot of us would like to use public transport to get around, but often if we have the choice, will opt to use private modes of transport just to shield ourselves from such behaviour. But for millions of women, this is not an option. They have to brave molestation, if they want to go out to work and have a life outside of their home.

To conclude, one would say that Indian societies like all other societies are in a state of great flux... mind-sets and perceptions about women and their role in the world are changing, but the worthy goal of gender equality will probably take a while and a lot of effort to achieve.



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