

Celebrate the advances made towards the empowerment of girls and women

Carolyn Handschin
March 10, 2015
Director, WFWPI-UN Office
59th UN Commission on the Status of Women
United Nations. New York



We are here today to celebrate the advances made towards the equality and empowerment of girls and women. We are also being asked to re-think ways of achieving these global goals.

There is no doubt that we are living in a turbulent time in world history. For example, bright young women from England and Canada are dropping out of universities and travelling to Iraq and Syria in order to support fraudulent nation-building. Why? I believe it is because a deep human longing to contribute to justice and change is not being properly addressed in our educational curricula, our institutions and even in our families. As another example, some men are still convinced that it is justifiable to rape a young girl because she is out too late. We cannot accept that, but what can we do? What are we missing?

As one answer to that question, I'd like to mention here a few conclusions of our report: "WFWPI and the Beijing Process."

Global Paradigm Change Is Needed to Utilize Women's Advocacy and Networking Skills

It is not only because we are more than 50% of humanity that we must be involved in decision-making. More critically it is because the basic building block of our world—the family--requires both a father and a mother as keys to creating peace. Peace in the community and world should rest upon the foundation of peace in the family.

In Beijing in 1995, just three years after our founding, WFWP hosted a side event entitled, "True Families and the Moral Renaissance," with more than 500 participant. In her keynote speech, Maureen Reagan, daughter of former President Ronald Reagan, explained, "Women are builders of our communities, peacemakers on a daily basis. Ask any mother the art of family peace and you will receive a lecture in psychology and understanding which will rival any course in a university."

Insisting on our "Human Rights" alone will not work, nor is that the golden thread of community, or peaceful nation-building. Only by reversing the psychology of self-centeredness, by investing in others, empowering others to step forward in peace-building, will we make women's involvement valuable, noticed and, obviously, indispensable.

This has been the work ethic of WFWP as an organization. Its broad mandate, “Let us form loving families and establish sound societies and a peaceful world ensured and protected by the maternal love of women,” challenges us to contribute to the resolution or prevention of almost any problem, any time of day. The bottom line is that a strong, deeply concerned feminine perspective is needed in every area of life, most especially those areas that have been long dominated by men.

Girls have been endowed with the instincts that prepare them to become good mothers later in life. Those talents and propensities are innate, not just an evolutionary result of female roles over the ages. Our instincts include tenacity, strong will, strategic thinking, and long-term vision. Women tend to think and plan not just lineally, but with consideration of broad effects. Because women are protective of their own children, we can also empathize with other mothers’ situations, and this is actually a key ingredient for sustaining a culture of peace.

WFWP has educational programs on every continent that address discrimination at its root. This, again, should be part of that Global Paradigm Change package. Through Character Education courses, youth -- parents-to-be -- are taught how and why their treatment of each other with dignity and equal value is critical to the prevention of many future violations, not to mention an element in the most profound joy in life: successful parenthood.

Even though there is not time to go into too much detail about specific findings of the “Report on WFWPI and Beijing + 20” here today, I will present just a sampling of many WFWP programs that have contributed to the Twelve Strategic Objectives of the Beijing Platform. I hope you will take this, not necessarily in the spirit of how great WFWP is, but to understand how amazingly effective and creative women can be as leaders when confronted with real problems.

Constructive Self Criticism Is Needed Via Introspective Assessment

The second broad category of our report is the need for constructive self-criticism. Too few women really understand our “public” value. Due to our history and often subservient roles, girls and women tend to undervalue ourselves and each other.

If women want to change their profile, be taken more seriously in governance and development at any level, we need to be able to “demonstrate” convincingly the difference that we can make in words and in actions --more so than men -- because it is always like that when a paradigm is being changed.

Women NEED to lead, not with anger because it has taken so long, but with confident insistence because we know we are right on this point. This assertion was made so graciously, but firmly, by Gertrude (Mama) Mongella yesterday. (She was Chair of the Beijing 4th World Conference on Women in Beijing 1995.)

Around eight years ago, WFWP Japan decided to do a study of their 100 + overseas projects and attribute each one to the support of a particular Millennium Development Goal (MDG). All eight MDGs were easily covered. In Geneva, WFWP interns are working on a similar project with the 30 Articles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Here too each article is being addressed by WFWP activities somewhere. These studies have helped to prove (something we already know) that women tend to be brilliant problem-solvers.

Beijing Platform’s 12 Strategic Objectives & Some Corresponding WFWPI Programs

1. Alleviating the Burden of Poverty: Job training programs in dozens of developing countries; Agriculture Projects in Africa; Poverty Eradication Conferences at UN in NY; Youth Volunteers for International Cooperation
2. Female Education & Training: Scholarships; Schools with Character Education Classes; Marriage Preparation and Counselling Programs; Series of Conferences on Education for Global Citizenship at UN Vienna; Women’s Development Centers.
3. Overcoming Inadequate and Unequal Access to Health Care: Nutrition Guidance Programs; AIDS prevention programs; Multi-Sectoral Educational Programs for Preventing FGM.
4. Eliminating Violence against Women: Seminars and Conferences on Prevention of Domestic Violence; Marriage Counseling; Self-Defense Training.
5. Healing the Effects of Conflict and Foreign Occupation on Women: Sisters of Faith for Peace Program in Europe; Middle East Women’s Annual Conference Series (19 Years); Palestinian Scholarships; Medical Aid and Humanitarian Aid to Palestine, Syria, DRC, North Korea, etc.

6. Equalizing Economic Structures, Access to Resources: Microcredit Programs for Women; Business Start-Up Training; International Marketing for Indigenous Products.
7. Power Sharing: Youth Leadership Training Programs; Model UN programs; Marriage Preparation Programs; Interreligious Marriage Re-Dedication Programs.
8. Mechanisms to Promote Women: UN Internships in NY, Geneva, Vienna; Young Women's Awards; Mentoring Programs for Young Women; Essay and Drawing Contests.
9. Human Rights: Prevention of Trafficking Campaigns; Interracial Reconciliation Projects in the USA; Advocacy at the Human Rights Council and CEDAW; "Bring Our Girls Back" Advocacy Campaign across Europe.
10. Media Stereotyping: Europe-wide Campaigns for Dignity of Women in Advertising; Penpal Programs across cultures.
11. Safeguarding the Environment: Tree Planting in North Korea and Africa; City or Beach Clean-Up Projects; Clean Water Project for Africa.
12. Eliminating Discrimination against the Girl Child: Young Women's Leadership programs; Character Education programs; Scholarship programs; Building and Funding Girls Schools.

All this came about, not because of a decision from the top to apply the Beijing Platform, but because these needs were discovered to be most important by the women volunteers focused on the grassroots.

The small and large successes of grassroots programs initiated by women still need further prioritizing within the United Nations to glean their real contribution to conflict resolution, peace and development. These are the Best Practice Models that must contribute to policy and program development.

My point today, as a recommendation for the future of the Beijing Platform for Action, in the category of Constructive Self-Criticism Needed, would be for us to put more emphasis on systemizing and documenting our results. We've been busy "doing" peace, but we need to also devote our minds and passion to building our portfolio. This is not just for our glory, but for the future of peace. We need documentable proof of what works. We will not be taken seriously if we do not have that, or if we wait for someone else to do it for us.

Two words sum up what WFWP is promoting these days. Both are associated with expertise, but have not been necessarily associated with the grassroots peace building initiatives of women. Those words are: Methodology and Advocacy. "Methodology" is defined as a set of principles and rules for regulating or systemizing a given discipline. "Advocacy" has to do with systematic persuasion towards a public issue or opinion.

While rarely realizing it, it seems to me that women, especially mothers, are geniuses at both creating effective methodologies and developing advocacy action plans at the familial level on a daily basis. Yet those talents, those years of training and expertise, are still largely un-mentionable on a Curriculum Vitae. This also falls under the category of "Global Paradigm Change Needed."

Mothers discover while "on the job" that equality or parity, as we speak about so often in terms of human rights, is only partially about equal access to opportunity and a fair share of things. The work of holding a family together involves, of course, trying to assure that each member is adequately equipped. But the most critical aspect of the job of raising responsible, empathetic, future "Global Citizens" involves the nonstop, day-to-day sacrifice, skill, intuition, mediation, patience and unconditional love that only a mother and father can give. Through this talent of the parents, each family member can feel equally appreciated, yet amazingly unique.

Feminism, a movement for women's political, social, and economic "equality with men" is an aspect, but not the core methodology, of WFWP because it covers only part of our goal. In this respect WFWP is different from some other women's organizations. While we are very concerned about human rights, we know that a global peace structure can never reside solely upon laws, regulations and threats of punishment. Parents may utilize rules and threats of punishment with their very small children, but the goal is to help children find a deeper incentive for living properly. In order to develop a sustainable, peaceful world society, each person is required to tap into the awareness of our human ties as Family. "Her pain is my pain," and "his joy" is also felt as mine.

"Familiarchy"

I often use the term "Familiarchy," a term that came to me based upon an explanation of peace by the co-founder of WFWPI, Dr. Sun Myung Moon. I see it as a term describing the natural framework for

replacing patriarchy. Such a paradigm change could not and would not need to be forced. Its blueprint is already found in the basics of ecology. It would be a social system in which the family unit is the nexus: Parents, children and extended family members cooperating according to unique, but interdependent, roles tracing to a common Creator who remains engaged through their interconnectedness.

The family contributes as a whole -- and as individual members -- to the development of the larger community, becoming intertwined networks of empowered families. And then, of course, it would expand to networks of governance across nations, in which all people – male and female-- share responsibility for governance rooted in concern for each member and the shared prosperity of all. Herein, women's essential role in leadership is obvious.

Simply put, WFWP's methodology for substantively advancing peace leading up to the year 2020 is:

- 1) Be a model of strong feminine leadership, complementary to the masculine style, in our families and within the larger community.
- 2) Accelerate change by working with like-minded women and women's organizations. Create partnerships and a grassroots mobilization of female energy (not unlike the Culture of Peace Manifesto aspirations).
- 3) Influence governance and policy, based on evidence that we will have collected, that priorities need to be set straight. Women must be in any sustainable leadership paradigm because their role in families, the microcosm of human society, is irreplaceable.

Some may criticize, "That is very vague, not professional," but don't be fooled. It is not vague to those women who have ambitions as peacemakers. Each WFWP region, each local chapter, and each UN Office within WFWP breaks this broad guideline into incremental steps.

Let's start with gathering the evidence – our Portfolio -- of our contribution to peace. Then let's ask ourselves the following:

Can we prove convincingly with our actions (methodology) and words (advocacy) that being a good wife, mother, daughter, is a valid credential for public leadership, and perhaps the one that can make all the difference?

Can we convince our husbands, fathers, sons and brothers to speak up for us?

Can we prepare our daughters with the mindset and expectation that the world needs them to stand up and stand out?

An inspirational quote in closing:

The day will come when man will recognize woman as his peer, not only at the fireside, but in councils of the nation. Then, and not until then, will there be the perfect comradeship, the ideal union between the sexes that shall result in the highest development of the race.
Susan B. Anthony 1820-1906, American social reformer.