

# A FEMINIST GIST

## ASIA PACIFIC NGO CAUCUS ON BEIJING+25

JANUARY 28-29, 2019

MIRIAM COLLEGE, QUEZON CITY, PHILIPPINES



### BACKGROUND

The year 2020 will mark 25 years since the United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women (FWCW) was held in Beijing China in 1995. The Beijing Platform for Action which came out of the Conference is, along with the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), the major blueprint for gender equality and the empowerment of women. In March 2020, a global review and appraisal of the implementation of the Platform will take place at the 64th Session of the UN Commission on the Status of Women (UNCSW) in New York. UN member states in the region have begun their review and appraisal of the outcome of the FWCW and will submit their national reports to the UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UN ESCAP). ESCAP will convene the Asia-Pacific regional intergovernmental meeting on Beijing + 25 in Bangkok in November 2019.

A most special feature of the Beijing Conference was its highly participatory nature. The preparations for the Conference involved a complex consultation process at national, regional and global levels. The partnership with NGOs throughout the process, though not without tension, was unparalleled. The observance of and preparations for Beijing + 25 should be highly participatory as well. The Asia Pacific NGO Caucus on Beijing +25 was organized to facilitate a systematic and coordinated engagement by feminists or feminist organizations in the official review of the outcome of the FWCW in the Asia and Pacific Region.

The caucus discussed how women's movements in Asia and the Pacific want to engage the regional review process and how this involvement should be organized. The caucus also sought to ensure that women's movements in the region, especially the younger generation of feminists, can substantially participate in this review and appraisal process. Below is the feminist gist of that caucus.

### ENVIRONMENTAL SCAN - OPPORTUNITIES

**Information Communications Technology.** The Internet and social media could be used as a tool to communicate, learn and gain information about the feminist movement, mobilize, connect different feminist groups, & promote feminism and the movement in general.

**Inter-movement and Inter-government Solidarity and Cooperation.** Alongside the introduction of younger feminists into the movement, there is also an expanding public consciousness on gender equality and ending violence against women and girls. These issues are becoming central in building critical public discourse. This may be an opportunity to strengthen grassroots activism through community work, inter-movement work, as well as public policy discourse on emerging gender issues.

**Intergenerational Feminism.** New voices and partners, especially younger feminists, are being brought into the feminist movement. Not only are these young feminists bringing in different forms of protest, they are also seeking to expand women's rights in the areas of mobility, autonomy, and bodily integrity.

**Feminist Agenda Setting.** Feminist groups in sub-regions like South Asia have come together to build a feminist agenda. There are also beginning initiatives and interests in other sub-regions like Southeast Asia and the Pacific.

**Review Processes.** There are opportunities in the review process, not only in documenting progress or gains, evidence of lived realities, and changes or challenges in the women's human rights agenda at different levels, but also in gaining access to decision-making spaces, and gaining platforms to create and mainstream a feminist agenda in sub-regions and the Asia Pacific region as a whole.

**Critical Feminist Analysis.** Spaces and initiatives are being created for interactive dialogue, strategic conversations, and more nuanced feminist understandings between and among regional networks. These also provide an opportunity to repoliticize women's human rights, as feminist analyses of power relations, privilege, and more, are often sidelined in favor of more technical or bureaucratic approaches.

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### ENVIRONMENTAL SCAN - THREATS

**An Aging Feminist Movement.** Many feminist leaders are getting older, and there are few young feminists to pass the baton to. This is concerning as there may be gaps in continuity and growth of feminist movements in the region, and a danger of “reinventing the wheel.”

**Lack of Funding for CSOs.** Diminishing resources due to lack of prioritization of women’s issues are further divided among competing agenda points. There is a lack of resources for creating intersectional, intergenerational, and cross-regional discussions. Donor control of funding also limits what the women’s rights movement can do with funds.

**Impact of Geopolitics.** The politics of powerful state actors, in particular China and Saudi Arabia, are problematic for the region. Amidst the widening of the uneven global playing field, women are positioned in increasingly vulnerable situations.

**Misogyny as a Backlash to Feminist Gains.** The culture of sexism and misogyny continues to be a problem across many sections of society, including parts of the younger generation, right-wing ideologues, and populists, among others. This culture is often expressed as some kind of backlash against women’s rights, LGBTQI+ rights, and human rights in general.

**Rise of Conservative or Right-wing Governments.** Growing government oppression and censorship on freedom of expression and dissent, the weakening of the rule of law, attacks on human rights defenders, rising fundamentalism and right-wing ideology, regressive economic policies, as well as new forms of hypernationalism, are silencing women’s voices and constricting spaces and opportunities for dissent, debate, and the promotion of women’s human rights.

### ENVIRONMENTAL SCAN - THREATS AND OPPORTUNITIES

**Gender Mainstreaming.** Gender mainstreaming is becoming increasingly diverse and inclusive, as it now includes new types of families, new gender issues for the elderly, the LGBTQI+, and the economically marginalized. However, for gender mainstreaming to be more effective, it needs to be strengthened with an intersectional rights-based approach. It is also becoming more challenging to integrate in daily life, and in other social movements.

**Selective Rollback of Commitments by Governments.** The selective rollback of commitments to the BPfA is coupled with the failing relevance & credibility of human rights and their mechanisms, and rule of law. While elected women officials are more common, they could become a threat if they do not support, or outright reject the women’s agenda.

**Online Spaces.** While online spaces may strengthen solidarity on issues, they also serve as a space for the spread of fake news, harassment, and threats to life. The Internet is also limited to those who have access to it.

**Others.** A range of other concerns were also cited, including the role of corporations, regionalism and the strengthening or weakening of block positions, increasingly busy lives and the need for self-care, requiring smarter work habits, especially among those in the feminist movement, potential spaces for influence in SAARC + ASEAN, more interest and participation from males, the funding process, notions of internationalism, and the culture of individualism particularly among the youth.

### WAYS FORWARD

In imagining the ways forward, the caucus agreed on doable commitments based on differing areas of interest, focus, and expertise, in the development and implementation of the abovementioned programs and activities. This included the conceptualization of a framework derived from the collective experiences and analysis of the caucus participants. It also included the sharing of the caucus outcomes with local, national, sub-regional, regional, and international groups and networks working on women’s rights, LGBTQI+ rights, and human rights in general. It included the sharing of action plans to funders deemed as serious partners in the advocacy for women’s empowerment, gender equality & diversity, human rights, peace, and development.

Diverse and dispersed feminist-led activities and initiatives that sought sustainable engagements with governments were deemed very important in further developing and pushing for women’s rights, peace, and development. The participants agreed that in moving forward, mobilizing women locally and regionally through grassroots engagements, and through regional and inter-movement conversations was key. Finally, the caucus stressed the importance of mindfully bringing into these conversations all generations, in particular, young feminists.

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### FEMINIST FRAMEWORK OF THE ASIA PACIFIC NGO CAUCUS ON BEIJING+25

One of the outcomes of the Asia Pacific NGO Caucus on Beijing +25 held in the Philippines last January 28-29, 2019, is a feminist framework for the advancement of BPfA. The framework is derived from the two-day discussions that sought a critical reflection on the gains, losses, significance, and persistent challenges of the BPfA throughout the years. The collectively derived framework provides a critical analysis of the threats to the feminist agenda in the region, as well as guiding principles in optimizing existing opportunities for ways forward.

There are seven key domains that comprise the feminist framework of the Asia Pacific NGO Caucus on Beijing +25.

#### **Re-Politicization of Feminist Agenda and Process.**

Re-politicization of the feminist agenda refers to putting forward a transformative agenda as against reformist programs that do not challenge existing structures of power and dominance. It includes a re-politicization of a feminist process that practices an expanded and dynamic power analysis. It requires a critical use of language that is reflective, inclusive, and facilitates an emotional connection to social realities.

*(Keywords: transformative agenda • expanded and dynamic power analysis • critical use of language)*

**Inclusivity and Grassroots-Oriented.** Inclusivity and grassroots oriented refers to a focus on those in margins. It asserts a strengthening of a bias and emphasis for the poor, across the various sectors and issue areas of concern. Yet it also recognizes that inclusivity is about being mindful of actors that are deemed 'organic' to the issue, but are voiceless, unheard, or made invisible.

*(Keywords: bias for the poor across sectors and issues • mindful of actors organic to an issue • sensitive to the voiceless, unheard, invisible.)*

#### **Communications as Sincere Connected Conversations.**

Communications refer to content and mediums that are appropriate, familiar, and accessible to its target audiences. It requires content and form that is grounded so as to achieve connection and not alienation. While communications can be simple, it cannot be simplistic. Communication must ensure complexities are captured, understood, and facilitate exchange. Feminist communications strive for authenticity and diversity, guided by sincerity.

*(Keywords: content and form is appropriate, familiar, and accessible • simple but not simplistic to capture the complexities and facilitate exchange • strive for authenticity and diversity guided by sincerity)*

**Inter-movement Solidarity.** Inter-movement solidarity refers to the openness of the women's movements to working with other social movements at the national, regional, and global levels. It also refers to social movements outside of the women's movements to know the feminist agenda, carry it, and engage with it. Inter-movement solidarity therefore requires providing and creating spaces for feminist practice across movements.

*(Keywords: women's movements working with other social movements • social movements to know, carry, and engage the feminist agenda • provide & create spaces for feminist practice across movements.)*

**Intergenerational Movements.** Intergenerational movements refer to knowing the different waves of feminist practice across time -- locally, regionally, and globally -- and building on them. It asserts the importance of learning from a generation's strength, bias, strategies, and visions. Intergenerational movements encourage an intergenerational approach to ways of knowing and ways of doing.

*(Keywords: knowing the different waves of feminism and building on them • learning from generational strengths, biases, strategies, and visions • an intergenerational way of knowing and being.)*

**Intersectional Analysis.** Intersectional analysis refers to an appreciation of the historical context and sensitivity to cultural specificities when addressing a challenge to the feminist agenda. It asserts the shaping of a feminist position based on identifying the critical intersections of political influence, economic status, racial norms, sexual standards, social privilege, among other salient identities, structures, and contexts for advancing the feminist agenda.

*(Keywords: an appreciation of the historical context • sensitivity to cultural specificities • critical intersections of salient identities, structures, and contexts)*

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