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Beijing +20 and education: How far have we come?

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Thank you very much for giving me this invitation and the opportunity to meet, talk, and learn with you about areas that are of such powerful interest and concern to me. The brief I have been given is to reflect from the perspective of education on the history of the process that was initiated in 1995 at the 4th World Conference on Women in Beijing. I want to think about how far we, in the community concerned with education, have come down the path laid down in Beijing, and whether other good, and possibly not so good roads have opened off from it.

The Beijing Declaration and Platform of Action expresses the fullest vision of women's rights and gender equality that any transnational meeting of states and civil society organisations has signed up to. But the Beijing process was more than these documents. It has been carried in the friendships, networks, approaches, and commitments to change that blossomed in the build-up to the 1995 meeting. These informal, but important, affiliations have been sustained across distances of time, space, language, generation, political change, and the ups and downs of personal, professional and political lives. Thus, in talking about the Beijing process and what it means for education, I want to stress that it is fed by many streams. Since 1995, there have been many adoptions, adaptations or evasions of the Beijing process. Twenty years on, in 2015, looking to an uncertain future, how does it talk to us?

In 1995 the World Conference on Women agreed a wide-ranging Platform for Action on women's rights and gender equality. Education and poverty featured prominently. The dynamics of the conference put multilateral organisations, national governments and a large NGO/civil society community into discussion with each other. These conversations, while often robust, coming from different perspectives, seemed to promise a great deal. They signalled multiple levels of engagement across diverse interests.

The second Strategic Objective of the Beijing Platform gives detailed attention to education, gender equality and women's rights. It calls for action on access, progression and completion of different levels of schooling, adult literacy and training. It does not just concentrate on the primary level. The objective outlines a comprehensive engagement with gender equality and the quality of education provision, particularly stressing the content and organisation of what is taught in school. It points to the need to address inequities through monitoring and research,

building lifelong learning pathways and enhancing women's participation in leadership and decision-making. Access to information, participation in sport and artistic and cultural arenas are highlighted. This is a vision of education, which encompasses much, much more than school enrolment .

Strategic Objective 1 of the Beijing Platform identified the high numbers of women worldwide living in poverty. This was linked in the text with reductions in or lack of provision for social development, such as education and health. Lack of education programmes resulted in limited opportunities for women to participate in 'economic power sharing', and some of the effects of migration placed burdens on women caring for dependents. Poverty, it was noted, had many guises , these included 'lack of income and productive resources sufficient to ensure a sustainable livelihood; hunger and malnutrition; ill health; limited or lack of access to education and other basic services; increasing morbidity and mortality from illness; homelessness and inadequate housing; unsafe environments; and social discrimination and exclusion' .It can be seen how the Beijing Platform analytically brought together inadequate education, forms of discrimination and many facets of poverty.

The Platform for Action set out that ending poverty would not be achieved by anti-poverty programmes on their own. The comprehensive nature of poverty and disadvantage required substantive changes including 'democratic participation and changes in economic structures ... to ensure access for all women to resources, opportunities and public services.' Education was thus clearly expressed as a thread in integrated work, to address poverty drawing on strategies of participation. Many actions concerning participation were outlined. These included changes in macro-economic policies, laws, women's access to economic opportunities and research. All rest on aspects of education.

The last Strategic Objective of the Beijing Platform outlined policies, on 'the girl child' . This identified the need to address 'negative cultural practices and actions against girls', and to enhance their access to education, skills development and training. It emphasised the need for actions to take account of girls' health and nutrition, to eliminate the economic exploitation of child labour, eradicate violence against girls and promote their social, economic and political participation and awareness. This objective identifies a whole terrain of vulnerability and harm, key to any transformational agenda in education concerned with women's rights and gender equality.

This brief summary of some of the core education components of the Beijing Platform highlights how in the document gender equality and women's rights are linked, that education is not confined to one phase of schooling, and indeed extends beyond school into art, culture, sport,

information, skill formation, research, employment and political participation, Education is a multi-faceted space, that connects many areas. In the Beijing documents it is integrated with all spheres of advancing women's rights and is central to work on, poverty, employment, child health, and engagements with violence.

This joined up approach to thinking about education had been a feature of much of the women's movement led global convening on women's rights and gender equality, which has a long history reaching back into the anti slavery movement at the beginning of the 19th century, the trade union and anti- colonial movements at the end of that century. While two World Wars and the pressures of the Cold War put enormous strains on this transnational approach to convening, networks, friendships, and some organisations sustained it, and the centrality given to education was part of a tacit knowledge, a taken-for-granted language and space of aspiration. This was one important feature of the past of the Beijing process, and your presence here today echoes this.

However. this was not the only stream feeding into Beijing. In writing a history of this process I have identified a period, which I have called 'the get girls into school' phase, evident in national and global policy making from around the 1960s. This is initially linked to population policies, but by 1990, 'get girls into school' is one of the signature concerns of the Education For All (EFA) movement, and comes to be given considerable prominence by UNICEF and the World Bank . Indeed, in a much quoted Foreword to an influential set of essays on girls' schooling edited by Beth King and Anne Hill of the World Bank, In 1993, Lawrence Summers, then Chief Economist at the World Bank, asserted 'investment in the education of girls may well be the highest-return investment available in the developing world' .

The argument I have made in charting a history of global policy discussion on gender and education, is that unlike the bottom up women's rights agenda, which worked in local, national and transnational spaces and was centuries old, 'get girls into school' in the 1990s was driven, largely top-down, by multilateral organisations, and national governments, and was often linked to agendas, set beyond school, such as population policy, economic growth, or maternal health. It tended to see girls' education as *instrumental* to achieve other goals, while the women's rights mobilisers saw education as *intrinsic* to substantive forms of gender equality. While this policy focus on 'get girls into school' does not eclipse the rights activism, it has difficulties connecting with it. And the political distance is mutual, so that much of the post Beijing women's rights activism, does not talk to the education community. By way of example, the 2015 UN Women assessment on the progress of the world's women, which develops important formulations regarding substantive

equality, that I will return to, looks at economic s. It has no chapter on education, consigning it to a statistical annexe, with minimal discussion.

‘Get girls into school’ as a policy approach has a very limited engagement with poverty as a site of multiple oppressions and violations. It tends to define poverty in terms of income, and sometimes features of marginality associated with location or ethnicity. But it generally does not entail any strategy to confront , question or transform relationships of poverty and the forms of public policy or market strategy that produce it. The ‘get girls into school ‘ policy approach is also often silent on questions of gender equality, and only rarely looks at outcomes beyond school.

The transnational women’s rights activist groups and the donor and government driven policies around ‘get girls into school’ built professional knowledge, solidarities and reflections on strategy. But they were marked by difference and division. Some of these concerned whether to work with or against the grain of official state structures, how to regard and mobilise to secure better work conditions in some of the long established spaces of women’s employment, such as teaching or childcare, and how to address areas of complex and sometimes contradictory affiliation, associated with nationalism, religion or race. These divisions kept the Beijing agenda alive as an area of lively, critical engagement.

Within the education sphere, different meanings for gender and education were being contested, associated with contrasting kinds of politics. To illustrate this I’d like to think about the Beijing Platform of Action as an extended lesson plan, in which we, as teachers are engaged in supporting developing the understanding and practice of learners with many different histories, learning needs, and styles, friendships and enmities, attracting different levels of resource. I’ll distinguish between the three different ways of approaching the question of the politics of gender and education, using the image of the lesson plan and I’ll call these: a focus on worksheets, thinking about learning styles, and understanding relationships of power. As any teacher knows you need to think about all three, but the interpretations of the Beijing Platform in practice did not tend to connect them.

The most mainstream meaning of gender sees the term as denoting the numbers of girls and boys, entering into or achieving at school Using my image of the Beijing Platform as a lesson plan this approach to the meaning of gender would suggest a teacher prepares an appropriate number of colour coded worksheets for the girls and boys in her class. Implementing Beijing from this perspective entails giving out the worksheets, which signal access, and ensuring all children successfully finish the test at the bottom. Gender equity is understood in terms of gender parity, that is that equal numbers of girls and boys have

access to school and adequate attainment. To the extent that this meaning of gender and education is about social action, it entails giving everyone a worksheet and making sure the test is complete. In social policy it entails taking groups of people over a line, say, completing primary school, or minimum income, or survival to a particular age. The teacher here is positioned as a passive worker and told to do a particular task. This was not the joined up vision of Beijing, but it was the pragmatic way in which many initiatives to expand education provision were advanced and gender equality was discussed, particularly after 2000.

A second approach to thinking about gender, works a little like the ways in which a teacher might assume a particular learning style is typical of girls or boys. There is a common sense assumption that in class girls sit quietly and get on with the work set; in this quietness some will make progress, while others will not. Their quietness, and what is seen as 'good' behaviour means, it is claimed, the teacher does not notice or engage with them. Boys, this view goes, demand more teacher attention, because they are less well behaved. This either supports their learning, because they do more in class in response to enhanced teacher attention, or, their boisterousness leads to them being rebuked, sent out of class to get bored or learn little. Most teachers know that in real live classrooms there are as many girls and boys conforming to this stereotype as refusing it. I want to use this image of different kinds of gendered behaviours in classrooms to highlight a second meaning of gender and education, which the Beijing Platform gave a powerful vision of. This links with ways of doing or performing gender, articulating particular ways of speaking, embodying or signalling gender identities,. Doing gender may be associated, for example, with forms of dress, talk or behaviours required of girls and boys at school, or of women and men teachers and the relational dynamic that expresses this. Pedagogies in school or the multiple non-formal sites of education may limit or expand the ways in which learners can explore doing, thinking or transforming gender and foster relationships of tolerance and equality or denial, subordination and control. This approach positions the teacher as active in challenging discrimination, understanding learners' backgrounds, and intervening to encourage change. The social relations of a school may enable or constrain teachers to dress or talk in particular ways and allow pupils space to express or explore aspects of sexuality. Girls' or boys' clubs may be created as safe spaces to examine critically gender norms and

build networks to support change. Gender equity in education here is concerned with tolerating and supporting diverse ways of doing gender, transforming relationships of poverty and exploitation, supporting participation and multiple forms of engagement. The Beijing Platform of Action suggested work on education should take on this realm of teachers and learners doing gender and education to advance and protect rights in multiple spaces and settings. However policy and practice to support and sustain this has not been as well supported as counting out places to enrol in school or pass exams.

A third approach to thinking about implementing the Beijing Platform and meanings of gender and education draws on an image of how a teacher plans to address the multiple learning relationships that take place in a classroom over a single lesson. Many institutions shape this, from laws regarding the length of the school day, the curriculum in use, the training the teacher has received and can expect, the resources the school has to support different learning relationships. Any classroom is a space of inequality, where teachers and learners are positioned differently according to age, experience, levels of knowledge. Learners are diverse, with different ways and speeds of understanding and applying knowledge. In some classrooms these inequalities structure hierarchical relationships, which reproduce inequalities outside the classroom, and in others relationships and insights are nurtured to consider, assess and address hierarchies. Using this as an image to understand education, gender become a lens through which forms of power can be seen, and teachers are positioned as important actors in policy and management processes, engaged with decision-making, alliance building and the politics of education. The Beijing Platform raised aspects of unequal power associated with poverty, cultures of violence, and exclusion. Gendered configurations are evident in the organisation of work in a school, the shape of the curriculum, the assumptions teachers communicate in their pedagogy, the language children use. Schooling can reflect and reproduces hierarchies, rarely shifting unequal power in politics, the economy, health, and forms of social and cultural interaction. Gendered power intersects with other configurations of inequality, associated with race, class or ethnicity. From this perspective, gender equity in education concerns exposing and transforming the inequalities inscribed in curricula or policy, developing feminist or critical pedagogies, challenging and changing the gendered structure of pay, work conditions, or management and decision-making and addressing the gendered conditions of society

associated with school related gender based violence. It also entails interrupting the ways in which schooling might reproduce wider social inequalities, such as those associated with the growth of the private sector to undermine public education. It is centrally concerned with poverty and related inequalities, super-charging strategies for redistribution, protection and transformation. Much of the Beijing Platform of Action sought to work with this multidimensional meaning of gender suggesting practices, like gender mainstreaming, participation, and research as important aspects of a grand extended lesson plan that both comprehended and sought to change deep-rooted inequalities.

I have tried to illustrate that the Beijing Platform suggested gender and education can be interpreted in three different ways, and in combination. It could be seen as little more than counting how much schooling, girls and boys receive. It could be understood as offering girls and boys a range of different ways to do gender, building up the ways that are about equality, diversity and tolerance, and challenging damaging stereotypes. It could also be understood as establishing relationships, institutions, laws, funding streams, and structures that shape a society either in the direction of austerity, inequality, and limited learning or towards more equality and solidarity, and participation challenging poverty and discrimination.

In looking at the roads that led from Beijing, we need to consider which of these three meanings of gender got the most attention in terms of policies and outcomes, and where there was limited action, despite the Beijing vision

The policy framework at national and transnational level that gained the most traction drew mainly from the idea of counting girls and boys in to school and through specific learning outcomes . The interpretation of the Education for All(EFA) Dakar Platform of Action of 2000 and later the Millennium Development Goals, notably MDG2 and 3, focussed almost entirely on getting girls and boys into school, and more recently on assessing what they had learned . This was a narrowing agenda, from the Beijing vision. However, even on this narrow policy vision we did not deliver worldwide to all children. We especially did not deliver either access or learning to those forced to the lowest levels in various hierarchies- the poor, children who suffered subordination, violence, discrimination and exploitation. This narrowing agenda confused gender parity with gender equality, and made the focus

rather exclusively on the gender gap, rather the ways in which inequalities were reproduced and rights not supported.

The information on the slides summarises some key indicators, which show how the numbers of children out of school have declined since 1995, and that girls, are no longer an enormous proportion of this group. They also show that more children and young people are completing different phases of schooling and higher education, and that the proportion of girls in this group is on aggregate large. However, when we disaggregate, by region and by socio-economic characteristics of populations, we see a different story, so that the opportunities for accessing and staying in school, decrease the poorer a child is, the more stigmatised his or her racial or ethnic group, and the poorer his or her country. The education poverty trap is harsh for girls and boys at the lower levels. At higher levels it reproduces particular gender based exclusions. Many boys dropout of school to earn money, while girls might be married or pregnant before the end of school,, with few opportunities to return. With regard to the employment of teachers, women are a majority in Early Childhood care & Development and, in most countries, in primary school. At levels where teacher status or pay is higher, greater proportions of men are employed. Men continue to dominate education management, even in countries, where they comprise a minority of teachers. There has been an enormous growth in testing as an indicator of assessing education outcomes in the last 20 years. I am not sure that testing improves education regarding gender equality or transforming relations of poverty. It does tend to show that in societies where children are prepared well for the tests, they do well, and analysis of the PISA tests suggest that gender and socio-economic status are features of Aptitude, Behaviour, and Confidence in approaching tests. Counting girls and boys at school, since Beijing, we can thus see some advance, though not deep enough to reach the poorest or to transform wider relations of inequality.

However, if we take the second meaning of gender and education as providing spaces to challenge stereotypes and norms, and do gender and equality differently, there has been much less policy work, , and many fewer documented initiatives. Work is often small-scale, and not sustained. However, in the last five years defining and addressing school related gender based violence has become an important area of policy and practice intervention at local, national and trans-national level . This focus on the education space, and the kinds of actions learners, teachers and managers take, connects with concern at Violence against Women more broadly. The successor framework to the MDGs, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are currently in draft and will be adopted at the General Assembly of the UN in September. The draft SDGs have a gender goal, and an education goal, and they open the terrain for engaging with SRGBV and an expanded meaning of gender

equality in education. At present a number of initiatives for further work on SRGBV with governments, IGOs, and organisations like trade unions are under discussion. There is also much work to be done, in lobbying, policy formulation and critique, and technical inputs in identifying forms of evaluating gender equality and education that talk to classroom and school processes.

With regard to the third institutional or structural and relational meaning of gender and education, however, there have been many silences and limited national and trans-national work. The areas of the Beijing platform that talk to integrated gender and education policy, addressing the many sites and institutions associated with hierarchies and structures of inequality have not been adequately addressed. Much work is still to be done building towards more equitable laws, management regimes, labour market strategies and supporting learning for political participation. These processes have been made harder because gender equality in education has largely been defined as gender parity, and we have limited metrics to measure how far we have come. Making gendered assessments of content and organisation of what is taught in school happens only in local initiatives and internet discussion groups. It is not a well supported nationally or transnationally. In a rigorous review of literature by a team I led in 2014, commissioned by the UK DFID, we found that published education research concentrated on identifying and evaluating resources and policies to get girls into school and assess learning outcomes, but little addressed changing gender norms, or developing integrated work on institutions for gender equality and women's rights. Building lifelong learning pathways, challenging gender stereotypes around skill and enhancing women's participation in leadership and decision-making get hardly any attention. Access to information, participation in sport and artistic and cultural arenas are the concern of small, local initiatives, rather than large national or international programmes. Other silences concern how education projects connect with addressing the many features of poverty, including health and nutrition, and eliminating the economic exploitation of child labour. The connected social development envisaged in the Beijing Platform, using gender mainstreaming and participation around rights and equalities has happened sporadically in some places, but we cannot point to a large transnational engagement.

Thus my assessment of how far we have come since Beijing is that we could indeed have done better, but that what we achieved was not nothing and was not won without effort,

What kind of future lies before us, and where are we going? Powerful actors are now lining up to support girls' education as an area of policy initiative. Some of this work is characterised by an attempt to continue to detach getting girls into school from a wider gender equality and women's rights strategy. Expanding girls' participation in school can work as a social justice project

associated with the expansion of women's rights, and a broad human rights agenda. But we need to consider that gender concerns that are limited to counting girls and boys in and out of school, can operate to obscure, sanction or sanitise relations of commodification, exploitation or continued inequalities. Thus learners, teachers, managers, policy negotiators, parents may 'do' a kind of gender and education project and the action may sometimes work as a commodity, and sometimes as a form of social projection and engagement with justice, but not necessarily always concerned to undo inequalities. Forms of public – private partnership for girls' education are an example. Sometime aid, raised from taxes, is partnered with corporate initiatives associated with companies, who use the partnership to grow businesses, which are not subject to ethical audit. The increasing interest of the private sector in girls' education is one path opening up before us that needs scrutiny and evaluation from the perspective of gender equality and women's rights..

1995 was a year marked by a great deal of optimism around social development. Strategies, like the Beijing Platform, expressed some of this hope for a new millennium. But even in the optimistic mid 1990s, there were powerful political and economic forces opposing gender equality. 2015 is a much harsher time and these forces are very evident. We cannot but see widening inequality, environmental fragility, more displaced people than at any previous moment in the world's history. The year is marked by terrible wars and forms of repression, misogyny, and violence. The effects on education of austerity programmes will be dire. Many of the institutions and organisations associated with defending rights are under attack. In the UK as I was writing this talk the government tabled harsh anti union laws, which they propose to take through parliament in the autumn, with a particular component restricting teacher unions' ability to take strike action. They are not unique in this.

In these hard times we do not know what will happen to gender. We know that whenever welfare is cut, women carry a heavy burden. But we also know that the information revolution has made doing gender particularly varied for those who have access to the new technologies. Education offers some of the best opportunities for critical reflection to understand the harshness of the times, and identify the cracks in the positions of those who are against gender equality and women's rights. Wherever we are going education is a powerful space giving skills, relationships, opportunities to protect and advance rights, understand across differences, develop the strategies for change. The negotiation around the SDGs gives us a chance to push for a more transformative agenda around gender and education, and teacher unions, which are some of the largest in the world, are a key

group in making and supporting alliances for this, and in demanding meanings of gender and education that go beyond 'get girls in school'.

The Beijing Platform gave us an integrated vision, and some key moves associated with gender mainstreaming, enhanced participation, and critical research. These remain important areas of work. The 2015 UN Women report argues for delivering on substantive equality, which it defines as resting on redressing women's socio-economic disadvantage, addressing stereotyping, stigma and violence against women, strengthening women's agency, voice and participation, and building institutions which sustain substantive equality. Not one element of this agenda can be achieved without the kind of education vision we carry with us from the Beijing Platform. Both the text of the Beijing Platform and the networks of organisations and friendships that interpret it are key. In the next 20 years, as even more children come into school, we must not lose sight of the Beijing vision of women's rights and substantive gender equality in education. This vision is part of a past, resonant with lessons, about what has been forgotten, reinterpreted and still in need of inquiry. Even in very hard times we can travel balancing our pessimism and optimism, trying to understand and act well.

In 1995, those who adopted the Beijing declaration dedicated themselves 'unreservedly' to addressing poverty and inequality, and furthering the 'advancement and empowerment of women around the world. They stressed the need for urgent action and invoked 'determination, hope, cooperation and solidarity' which would carry them forward into the next century. I think at every level from the motivational to the technical, the Beijing Platform has been a good teacher. This is an important moment for us to be good learners and to put into practice our understandings of an integrated and transformational idea of gender equality in education.

Thank you