

From Noeleen Heyzer, Executive Director, UNIFEM

30 Years of Challenge-30 Years of Change

Thirty years ago, the women's movement embarked on a mission to create a women's fund in the United Nations that would dedicate itself to improving women's lives in the developing world. UNIFEM was born. And for three decades it has worked with a wide range of partners to advance women's human rights, to empower women in an unequal world, to help women access social and economic opportunities and to assist countries to achieve societies that are freer of violence, poverty and discrimination.

As Executive Director, I am proud of how UNIFEM has used the power of money, ideas and partnerships to cause change. I have witnessed how investing in women's leadership and participation has brought about economic and social transformation. Where discrimination once existed, today women's human rights are enshrined in constitutions and laws and women participate as political and economic decision-makers from village to parliament and ministerial levels.

It takes persistence to make change happen. As this report shows, UNIFEM's continuous work on key areas of concern and the strong and lasting partnerships formed early on were the basis for much of the successes we can celebrate today. Soon after it was established, for example, UNIFEM started to work extensively with women's organizations. One early partner was the Green Belt Movement whose founder, Wangari Maathai, won the Nobel Peace Prize in 2004. UNIFEM was also one of the first to insist that women in conflict zones have special needs that must be addressed. Today, we have Security Council resolution 1325 on women, peace and security and are supporting women to actively participate in peacebuilding and reconstruction efforts and assisting them to make their voices heard in post-war elections. We also celebrate the first democratically elected female Head of State in Africa - Ellen Johnson Sirleaf of Liberia, with whom we had the honour to work in the area of women, war and peace.

Throughout its history, UNIFEM has responded to emerging challenges and embraced new opportunities to advance the women's agenda. We were an early voice in pointing out that the fight against HIV/AIDS can only be won when we also combat gender inequality - a point we have demonstrated by working closely with women and men in the so-called 'Gender Empowerment Zones' described in this report. UNIFEM also took advantage of gender-responsive budget analyses that emerged in the mid-1990s and look into how the allocation of public resources benefits



women and men to address inequalities. By now, we have supported the development of gender-responsive budgets in 30 countries, often resulting in a significant shift in public policies.

Although much has been achieved, much remains to be done. UNIFEM will continue working and meeting challenges, and being a powerhouse for women in the United Nations. We know about the power of partnerships and have remained open to forging new alliances for the benefit of women around the world. The private sector has been an important ally in recent years. In 2005, UNIFEM partnered with Calvert, the largest family of socially responsible mutual funds in the United States, to develop the Calvert Women's Principles, a comprehensive code of corporate conduct focusing on gender equality and women's empowerment. Last, but certainly not least, in early 2006 we welcomed actress Nicole Kidman into our midst as a UNIFEM Goodwill Ambassador.

On our 30th anniversary, my wish is for a stronger UNIFEM that can reach more people with power to change the conditions under which women work and live, making the world a more just and equitable place.

Noeleen Heyzer

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Years of Challenge
Years of Change

Enacting laws to protect women's rights must be tied to making sure that judicial systems uphold them. UNIFEM has pioneered strategies to ensure that comprehensive forms of gender justice take root, especially in the nascent legal systems of post-conflict countries. UNIFEM assistance helped women in Peru convince the national Truth and Reconciliation Commission to define rape as a weapon of war and to grant reparations to victims of sexual violence. Sierra Leone's Truth and Reconciliation Commission now includes witness protection and trauma counselling for women. UNIFEM is working with the country's Law Reform Commission on drafting new laws against gender-based violence.

Milestone

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