

# Beijing Plus Ten cyber dialogues

*An African and women's movement initiative to  
"Make IT work for gender justice"*



Women of Africa making their voices heard at the Beijing Plus Ten Review in New York

**Report**  
**April 2005**

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## Acknowledgements

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UNIFEM in New York provided infrastructural and administrative support including office space, equipment, IT support and the video conferencing facilities.

Microsoft and Internet Solutions provided software, hardware and hosting services. The World Bank created access to the cyber dialogues through their Public Information Centres and providing the infrastructure for three video conferences.

We are deeply indebted to our sponsors, the Ford Foundation, the Netherlands Institute for Southern Africa (NiZA) and HIVOS.

Most important, we wish to thank the 333 people across the globe who participated in the cyber dialogues, and the 28 expert panelists from 18 countries who gave so willingly of their time.



**Letitia Shahani, Secretary General of the 3<sup>rd</sup> World Conference in Nairobi, participated as a panellist in the cyber dialogues.**

***Cyber dialogues: a view from India***

When I received the press release for Cyber Dialogues, I was delighted for it answered two questions that had been on my mind ever since the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) in Geneva, 2003.

First, whose right is it anyway? It seemed absurd to me that decisions and policies regarding the rights of women in the South were being made in some western country, by men and organisations that don't have a clue as to the complexities of the problem on the ground.

Ironically, women whose lives are going to be affected by those decisions have no say in the matter. Women like me may not have the money to attend a summit in Geneva or New York but we definitely have the will to make our voices heard despite the hassles raised by various governments. The cyber dialogue initiative by women in Africa provided many of us in countries of the South a chance to voice our opinions and tell it like it is on the ground.

My second question was, how do we network to understand the existing problems and systems in other countries? Living in a semi-urban town, networking with women in other countries, especially across continents is hard as one doesn't know exactly who to contact. The cyber dialogue forum helped me meet and interact with dynamic women and activists in various countries of the African continent, Mauritius and Uzbekistan. The interaction proved to be informative, enlightening and a learning experience.

This initiative has also proved to be an effective model and needs to be replicated across countries of the South on a sustained basis that culminates in an annual summit in one of our countries – not in the west – as we all share the same problems and can learn from each other.

I see this initiative as a beginning of the formation of a Women's Pressure Lobby in the South with which we can take on unjust laws and ignorant practices in our countries and elsewhere.

*Deepa Kandaswamy, India*

## Executive summary

### Quick facts

- 333 users logged into the chat room during the 7 cyber dialogues.
- 28 expert panelists from 18 countries participated in the dialogues.
- 262 respondents from 26 countries responded to the poll questions (see annex three for list of countries).
- 7 editions of the newspaper were published.
- 1500 hard copies of each edition were distributed.
- 1500 people across the globe received each online edition of the newspaper via list serves.

The Beijing Plus Ten cyber dialogues comprised a series of seven online chats during the review of the Fourth World Conference on Women that took place from 28 February to 11 March in New York. These chats brought the voices of women not able to attend the CSW, especially in Africa and in the South, to the conference. They also engaged them in the news and debates emanating from the review.

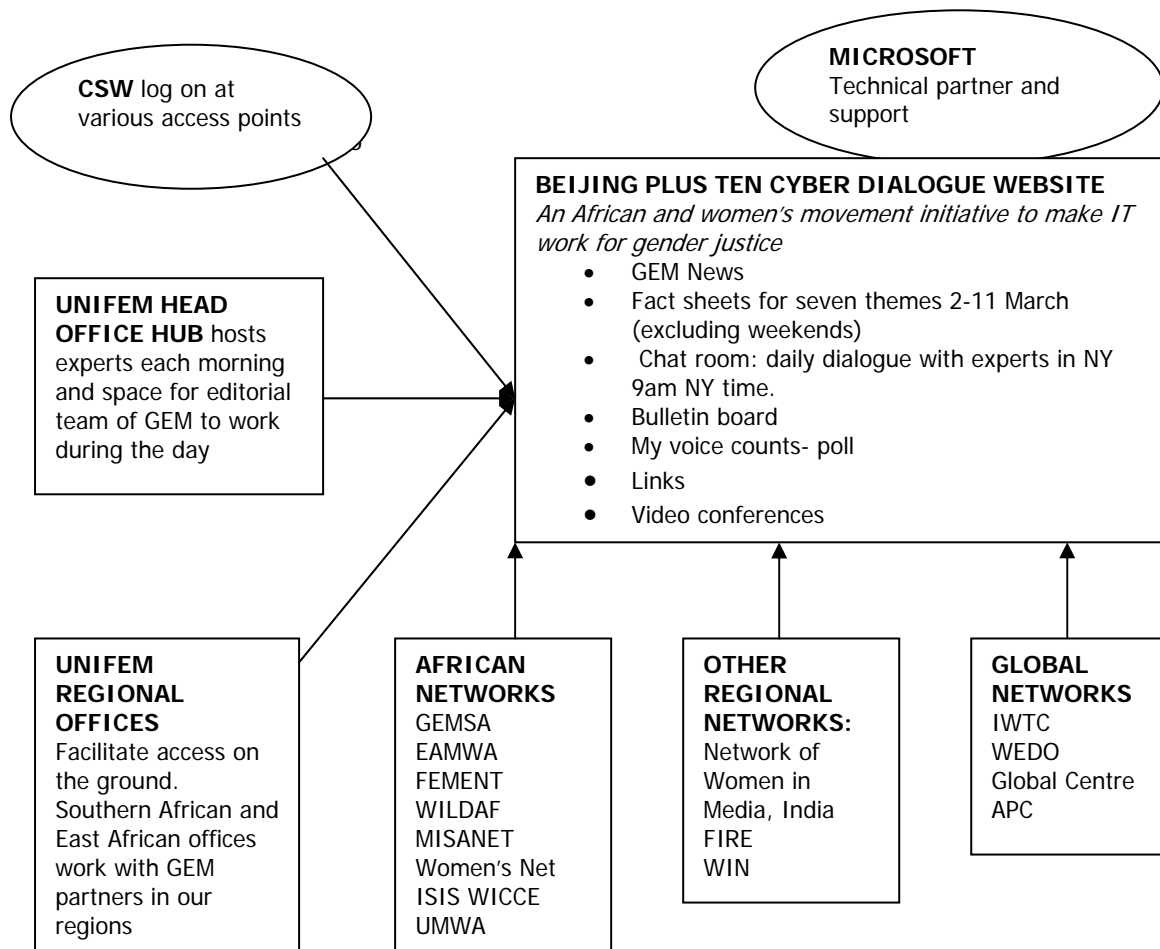
The cyber dialogues were based on a model developed by GL during the Sixteen Days of Activism on Gender Violence that the UNIFEM Executive Director, Noelene Heyzer participated in during her visit to South Africa in November. The core partners in the project were UNIFEM, GL, the Gender and Media Southern Africa (GEMSA) Network, AWC, Microsoft and Internet Solutions. Several networks and institutions around the globe participated in the cyber dialogues (see **Annex One**).

The discussions focused on themes (see **Annex two** for full list of themes and speakers) taken from the Beijing Platform for Action and Millennium Development



Lynn Muthoni Wanyeki, Director of FEMNET, participated as a panellist during the Media and ICTs cyber dialogues.

Goals. The cyber dialogues were an integral part of a multi-media and IT strategy to ensure that discussions and debates from the CSW were taken outside of the conference halls to people all over the world. The three pronged approach included the online chats; the production of a daily conference newspaper in hard copy and an online version and three video conferences. The structure of the Beijing Plus Ten cyber dialogues is illustrated in the diagram below:



Preparing for the launch of the cyber dialogues launch, video shots from each location.

The World Bank and UNIFEM provided the infrastructural support for three video conferences during the cyber dialogues. The cyber dialogues were launched at the UNIFEM offices in New York on the 1 March 2005; partners from Washington, Cameroon, Burkina Faso, South Africa and Kenya joined the launch via video conference.

## Objectives

The cyber dialogues aimed to:

- To provide a forum for women around the globe, and especially in our home base Africa, to access daily information about the Beijing Plus Ten Review and make their voices heard at the conference through a daily on-line discussion of GEM News.
- To spark off vigorous debate on progress and challenges since the Fourth World Conference on Women.
- To lobby for the inclusion of strong provisions on gender and the media in Section J of the Beijing Platform for Action.
- To ensure greater coverage of gender issues in the mainstream media through providing source material from the newspaper and discussion to the extensive media outlets that the partners work with.
- To test a concept that has been developed in Southern Africa at a global forum and assess its applicability to other global events of this nature where the voices of African women are typically under-represented.
- To empower women who participate, and especially African Women, in the use and applications of ICTs.
- To build the capacity of those who will be involved in managing the project, and especially of young African women who will work on the team.
- To strengthen networking between gender activists around the globe, and to empower African women play an effective role in these networking activities that often rely heavily on the use of ICTs.



Far right, Gladys Mutukwa, Acting Regional Co-ordinator, WILDAF, at the African women's caucus during the Beijing Plus Ten Review. Mutukwa was one of the expert panelists for the Women's human rights cyber dialogue.

## Activities

### GEM News@B+10

A team of African women journalists produced a daily newspaper from the 3-9 March excluding the weekend. The newspaper is an eight page tabloid called *GEM News@B+10*. It consisted of:

**Daily news:** Pages one and two covered conference news

**Cyber link:** Page three of the newspaper carried news from the cyber dialogues. This facilitated a two way discussion between those attending the conference and those who were not there.

**Two page thematic centre-spread:** The following seven themes were based on the twelve critical areas of the Beijing Platform for Action, the



Millennium Development Goals and critical new areas of concern since the Fourth World Conference on Women, such as ICTs and HIV/AIDS:

- Women's human rights
- The economy and sustainable development
- Gender and governance
- HIV/AIDS
- Gender violence
- Media and communications
- Looking ahead: structures and processes

**Outside in:** Pages six and seven carried news from the parallel events

that were happening during the review. These events provided an important alternative voice to the official proceedings of the Review.

**Opinion and commentary:** The back page will carried critical editorials and opinion pieces, commissioned through the GEM Opinion and Commentary Service, designed to provoke debate on the key themes. These will form an important input into the daily discussions.

The newspaper went out online late each night, starting on 2 March. Hard copies were distributed at the conference each morning.

### Daily online chats:

- **Time:** The daily cyber dialogues ran from 8h00 to 9h30 New York time each day. This time allowed for access in various parts of the globe at a reasonable hour.
- **Format:**
  - A facilitator guided each dialogue and ensured that online protocols were adhered to.



- Panelists from various parts of the world joined as experts during each chat.
- Specific questions were asked by the facilitator.
- Panelists responded to the question and then participants from across the globe joined in.
- Summaries of each session are available on the GL website and are appended to this report.
- **Language**  
Given the limited time and resources, the discussions were held in English.

### The website

This consisted of:

- The chat room.
- Themes for the day (changed each day)
- Fact sheet to go with each theme.
- A poll question that will help gauge public opinion on key issues.
- Logos of partners and links to their websites.

Maria Suarez (Co-director of FIRE, Costa Rica) in the foreground and Lydia Levin (Technical consultant to the Cyber dialogues), Suarez linked the cyber dialogues to FIRE's daily online radio broadcasts.



### Mainstream media

Content generated for the conference newspaper was sent specifically to mainstream media in Southern and East Africa. However, content was picked up by other media as well, including through the Media Pool created by organisations working on women and media issues, led by the Costa Rica-based Feminist International Radio Endeavour.

#### **From a media perspective:**

The following is an excerpt from an E mail sent by journalist who read GEM News:  
*" I am journalist from Beijing and attending the NGO forums here in New York. I've read with interest all of your articles in GEM [News@B+10](#), as we rarely hear voices from women of Africa. I've attended several panels and events and listened to our African sisters share with us their experiences and worries. Still what I've heard is limited and your coverage is much more informative. I've seen your reporters at work. They are very professional. I am currently writing a feature article about Beijing+10, for China Daily, the national English language newspaper in China. I would appreciate it if you granted me permission to quote from your newspaper in my article. I will give due credit to your newspaper and your reporters."- Li Xing*

## Networks, local dialogues and participation

The main aim of the cyber dialogues was to ensure interaction with the news coming out of New York, especially among African women. This was greatly enhanced through forging partnerships with networks in our region as well as around the globe. The partnership with the World Bank ensured that all the Public Information Centres (PICs) of the World Bank became access points (see Annex one for a full list of networks and PICs.)

### Students get into the action

In Zambia, the head of the Zambia Institute of Mass Communication (ZAMCOM) , also Deputy Chair of GEMSA, Emmanuel Kasongo, facilitated access by students to the daily chats. The following are some of their comments:

*"I am completely a novice to the whole spectrum of gender and gender issues. I did not understand a thing and I thought gender was all about women who just trying to prove them self or compete with men. I now have a different perception and thanks to the cyber dialogues and people like Deepa from India that dialogued positively. Mwatita Lubinga, 1<sup>st</sup> year student.*

*"I knew very little about the connections between gender, HIV/AIDS and women's rights. Participating in the dialogue opened my eyes to why it is important for women to be given greater access and be empowered in so many areas of social economic development. This kind dialoguing should be encouraged because it allows countries to share experiences and chart a unified vision for progress." Bruce Chooma, 2<sup>nd</sup> year student.*

*"It is important that journalism students get to know what is happening in the world. Current affairs are something that a journalist cannot do without. It was good that our students were exposed to such rich and extensive dialogues. The information will greatly enrich their understanding of gender issues." Mwiika Malindima, lecturer.*

## Outputs



Jennifer Radloff, APC-Africa-Women Coordinator, facilitated some of the cyber dialogues.

### Cyber dialogues

- Seven online chats.
- Seven summaries.
- A permanent cyber dialogues website.

### Newspaper

- Seven editions of the hard copy of the newspaper.
- Seven edition of the online version of the newspaper.
- News content from the newspaper was sent to the media in East and Southern Africa.

## Outcomes

"It's a good as being at the CSW from Nairobi. You are doing a wonderful job for African women. I like your GEM newspaper. The depth of analysis and the voice of Africa is coming out clear and loud, whilst remaining connected to the global agenda." *Nyaradzai Gombonzvanda, UNIFEM East Africa.*

### Outreach

- A list serve of two hundred people who accessed the cyber dialogues.
- One thousand five hundred hard copies of the newspaper were distributed to participants at the Review.
- One thousand five hundred people received the newspaper online.
- 333 people from across the globe participated in the chats as follows:

Date	Topic	No of participants
2 March 2005	Women's human rights	35
3 March 2005	Economy and sustainable development	34
4 March 2005	Gender and Governance	36
7 March 2005	HIV and AIDS	33
8 March 2005	Gender-based violence	37
9 March 2005	Media and communication	25
10 March 2005	Looking ahead	19

Participants became very engaged over the 2 weeks Dialogue process and very few "lurked" i.e. logged on but did not participate. Some "chatters" were totally new to the Internet and chat room technology, but even more seasoned Internet users had

not used chat much before. They were all, however, intrigued, found value in the global exchanges which took place, and wanted them to continue.

#### **Networking and media cross-flow.**

- A high level of international collaboration by participating in the Women's Media Pool, a collective of organisations, with a wide distribution list.
- Every day we sent articles from GEM News out to the many newspapers and news agencies which were participating in the pool.
- Some articles were translated into Spanish and picked up by Latin American media.
- The transcripts of the Dialogues show the extent of networking which took place. People networked broadly around mutual interests and for common purposes. For example on the Media and Communications Dialogue, a request was made from Kenya for more information on B+10 for a Channel Radio Africa interview. FIRE arranged a radio interview with a participant who is doing mother tongue radio programmes in Africa for women who do not speak English or French.

#### **An example of networking during the chat**

"HELP! Channel Radio Africa is asking for an interview on B+10 for tomorrow, progress and issues for African women. I am in Nairobi and would appreciate a quick list of critical messages. Please send me a note on.  
nyaradzai.gumbonzvanda@undp.org. Thanks a million."

- Participants exchanged web site URLs for the sharing of information and to learn what projects others are engaged in. A chatter from India, who participated actively, offered to write an article for GEM News. She also took the opportunity to set up a virtual seminar to continue dialoguing with other chat participants.

#### **Example of networking during the chat**

Colleen: The FIRE initiative of combining radio with Internet is just great. How can the rest of us learn about this technology??

Mariasuarez:

Go to [www.fire.or.cr](http://www.fire.or.cr) or women to Costa Rica to share skills! We are our own engineers at the radio station, thus, we make technologies do what we need to get done, not the other way around. And by the way, we have never been to one single training workshop...we learned by doing and by watching other women do it.

Ruth:

Excellent Maria, we need to learn from women from Costa Rica. Immediately we take the hands on, we shall break through.

Muthoni:

In line with what Maria's doing with FIRE, the World Association of Community Broadcasters (AMARC)-Africa has recently started an Africa--wide news exchange by and for community radio stations across the continent--including a stream dealing with women's rights issues. The exchange, called Simbani, is both digital and not so that all community radio stations, regardless of their technological status can contribute to and access it. It's innovative in that it provides the means for women at the community level to exchange their stories across Africa for the first time ever...

- Articles sought and requested by the print media agencies, but articles were picked up from the GL list servs and posted to web sites, such as the Thusanang site in South Africa [www.thusanang.org.za](http://www.thusanang.org.za) .

"Congratulations for your excellent coverage of Beijing + 10. I discovered GEM News only on Thursday March, 10th, 2005. I was very impressed with your insightful analysis of women's and gender issues and how these fuel one of Africa's worst nightmares HIV/AIDS. I also liked your story about the "missing voice"." *Mariama D. Diop, Gambia*

### **Putting African women, their views and voices on the map**

GEM News and the cyber dialogues succeeded in projecting a strong African women's voice and position at the Beijing Plus Ten Review, and strengthened relations between gender activists in the region, as illustrated in the comment below by Elsie Alexander, the Chair of the National Women's Council in Botswana, and a Board Member of Women in Law and Development in Africa (WILDAF).

*"This is a note to congratulate you and your colleagues for a job well done at the Beijing plus 10 conference. You really kept us all informed and abreast of the latest issues, resolutions and debates. At the on line debate there was a suggestion by Deepa from India to establish an on going on line debate across the globe on gender issues to facilitate sharing of ideas and best practices. Do you have any information on this idea. We need on line conversations on topical issues. I also want to indicate that I will give you whatever support that may require to facilitate your work in Botswana or in the sub-region. I would like to share my experience and expertise beyond the borders of Botswana. The video conferencing activity during the 16 days commemoration was a brilliant idea and I think we should have these periodically and not only when there is an international occasion. Once again congratulations and all the best for the future."*

Elsie Alexander

## **Summary of Recommendations**

### **Gender dialogues for the MDG Summit**

Full summaries of all the cyber dialogues follow this report. The major recommendation that emerged from the cyber dialogues is that similar online dialogues be held on the gender dimensions of the MDGs prior to the five year review summit in 2005. This arises from major concerns expressed during the Beijing Plus Ten Review that the gender agenda has become lost in these broader global concerns. The output from the MDG cyber dialogues would be collated in a book to be launched at the Summit in collaboration with UNIFEM.

Other specific recommendations found in the detailed summaries include:

### **Education and raising awareness**

- Need to educate young girls and boys about girl's rights.
- Need to educate women about the instruments that exist to facilitate change.
- Need to ensure that grassroots women's voices are included in global discussions.

## Gender violence

- Need to establish women's rights tribunals in conflict areas.
- Critical to include men in the strategies to stop gender violence.
- Provide gender sensitivity training to those charged with implementing legislation e.g. the police, judges and health workers.

## Legislation and policy

- Need to translate international laws and declarations into local languages.
- Government's should protect and promote women's and girls' human rights as a central part of their response to HIV/AIDS.
- Mandatory provision of anti-retrovirals at all government hospitals.

## Women's empowerment

- Invest in women's access to, ownership of and control over resources such as land.
- The application and implementation of international and institutional commitments must be translated to funding support at national and community level.
- Conduct gender budgeting audits that promote gender equality.
- NGOs should collectively dialogue with donors to influence their priorities.

## Implementation

- Need to increase the number of women in decision making positions to facilitate change and implementing enabling policies.

"We have a parliamentary gender committee in the Pan African Parliament and I just wish that Gender Links comes down to SA to establish this type of talk so that we can capture your ideas for parliament. That's the way forward and that's how women can become powerful - by linking to each other and being able to exchange ideas in a very transparent manner." *Gertrude Mongella, President of the Pan African Parliament*

- Need to bridge the gap between progressive legislation and actual implementation on the ground.

## ICTs

- Harness the use of ICTs for gender advocacy work.
- Use the cyber dialogues to continue a global dialogue on gender matters.
- Use the cyber dialogues to facilitate participation in the MDG summit in September 2005 and other global and regional processes.

**Ruth Ojiambo Ochieng (Director of ISIS Uganda)** speaks about the critical need to mainstream ICTs in strategies to empower women during the Beijing Plus Ten Review.



## Lessons learned

### Power of partnerships

The cyber dialogues proved once more that the power of partnerships works. The implementation and reach of this project was achieved through partnerships between NGOs, the private sector and public institutions. This is a model that will be utilised in future projects to ensure that the number of people that are reached keeps growing.

### Retaining the cyber dialogues website

The cyber dialogues website was set up for two specific events, the Sixteen days of Peace in South Africa and Beijing Pus Ten Review. It is evident that the website should become a permanent feature that may be to facilitate ongoing dialogues and for continued advocacy work.

### A bigger team

The team to produce the newspaper and run the cyber dialogues was too small. For the next project there needs to be an increase in the number of editors and IT people in the team. This would alleviate the problem of people working twenty four hour cycles.

**Pat Made (right)**, one of the editors on the team interviewing Yasine Fall  
(Senior Policy Advisor for the Millenium Project)



## Next steps

The cyber dialogues provided an important platform for women and men from all over the globe to participate in and to acquire information from a world conference. As one of the cyber dialogues participant's stated: "This is a great way of using ICT for effective participation of women who are otherwise unable to travel to these conferences."

The next steps for cyber dialogues include:

### The MDG summit in September 2005

- A clear goal is to facilitate participation in the MDG summit. This would involve running seven chats prior to the event and feeding into the process before and during the summit.
- Produce a daily newspaper and run the cyber dialogues during the summit.

**Noeleen Heyzer**, Head



**Using the cyber dialogues for continued advocacy**

- To identify other key issues and processes during the year and engage around the using the cyber dialogues.
- Initiate online petitions to protest against unfair laws and policies or to lobby for change in policies and laws.

**Networking**

- To maintain links with the partners that joined the chats.
- Extend awareness and access to the cyber dialogues concept and website.



**Maria Suarez from FIRE, Costa Rica (right) interviewing Juliana Omale from the African Women and Child Feature Service (AWC), Kenya. Omale was one of the journalists working on the GEM News@B+10.**