

Taking Stock of Gender Equality Policies, Results, Vision and Prospects: South Korean Experiences

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The Korean Women's Development Institute (KWDI) celebrated its 40th anniversary on 20 April 2023.



[KWDI's 40th Anniversary] The Changing Society and the Future of Gender Equality Policy

Keynote Presentation 1: Advancing Gender Equality in Times of Crisis and Change

Anna-Karin Jatfors,
Director of Strategy,
Planning, Resources,
and Effectiveness Division,
UN Women



Keynote Presentation 2: Gender Equality Policy in Korea: Achievements in 40 Years and Future Tasks

Heisoo Shin,
Chair of the Board,
KOCUN



Roundtable Discussion: How Will Korea's Gender Equality Policy Respond in Transition Era?

Discussants from:

Academia,
Government,
Public institution,
Women's organizations,
Business enterprise;



[KWDI's 40th Anniversary] The Changing Society and the Future of Gender Equality Policy

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KtP92FWDZt4>



[KWDI's 40th Anniversary] The Changing Society and the Future of Gender Equality Policy

South Korean Experiences:

- Who and what were the drivers of gender equality policies?
- How far is gender equality achieved in South Korea?
- Future tasks?

Main Areas of Gender Equality Policy

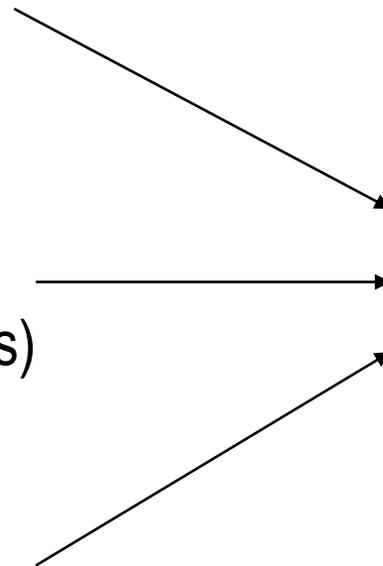
- **Economic independence** – decent employment, healthy working conditions, no sexual harassment at workplace;
- Elimination of **violence** (on-line & off-line) – sexual violence, domestic violence, stalking, sexual exploitation, trafficking;
- **Sexual and reproductive health and rights** – health policy by women's lifecycle, including pregnancy(abortion), childbirth and childcare;
- Equal participation in **politics and public decision-making** – administrative, legislative and judicial bodies, at national, regional and local levels;
- Eradication of **gender role stereotypes** – care work, domestic work, change in the traditional gender roles;
- Enhancement of the rights of **vulnerable women groups** – older women, women with disabilities, rural women, indigenous women, etc.

Key Elements of Gender Equality Policy

- **Will** to change the unfair reality
(individuals/groups)

- Gender equality **policymakers**
(government/parliament/women's org's)

- Social **environment**
(politics/international community)



Gender equality Policy

(formulation, implementation, M&E)

South Korea: Historical Background

- **Before 1980s**: liberation, US military rule, division, war, poverty, military dictatorship;
- **1980s**: from dictatorship to democratization, beginning of women's movement org's;
- **1990s**: joining the UN, globalization, women's self-help efforts & legislative movements;
- **2000s**: institutionalization, expansion and continuous improvement of gender equality policies during globalization;
- **2010s~present**: progress and set-back, retrogression, new problems, continuous efforts

Before the 1980s

Social environment

1945 Liberation from Japan

1948 Republic of Korea established

1950 Korean War

1961 Military Coup

1975 International women's year
The 1st World Conference on
Women (Mexico)

1979 Adoption of the Convention on the
Elimination of All Forms of
Discrimination against Women
(CEDAW)

Government departments

1948 Department of Women's Affairs,
Ministry of Social Affairs

1955 Department of Women's Affairs,
Ministry of Health and Social Affairs

Institutions Women's organizations / Movement

1922 YWCA

1952 Women's Affairs Research Institute
(Association)

1956 Legal Aid Center for Women in the WARI
(→ 1966 Legal Aid Center for Family Relations)

1959 Korean National Council of Women

1967 Korea Church Women United

1969 Korean League of Women Voters

1970s
Democratization movements;
Women's awareness-raising movements;
Family Law amendment movements

Gender equality policy

1953 maternity leave (2 months)

1961 Act on Prevention of Prostitution

1973 Mother and Child Health Act

1980s

Social environment

1980 The 2nd World Conference on Women (Denmark)

1985 The 3rd World Conference on Women (Kenya);

1986 Asia Pacific Forum on Women, Law & Development established

1987 6.29 Declaration & Constitutional amendment; CEDAW review of Korea's Initial report

1988 Launch of the 6th Republic

Government departments

1981 Department of Women's Welfare, Ministry of Health and Social Affairs

1983 Establishment of Korea Women's-Development Institute; Women's Policy Review Committee (Office of the Prime Minister)

1988 Ministry of Political Affairs (II) +14 Focal Points on Women

Institutions Women's organizations / Movement

1983 Korea Women's Hotline

1987 Korea Women Workers' Association; Korea WomenLink; Korea Women's Associations United

1989 Korean Women Farmers' Association

Gender equality policy

1984 Ratification of CEDAW (With reservation on Article 9 & Article 16-1 c, d, f, g)

1986 Mother and Child Health Act amended; Initial report to CEDAW submitted

1987 The first private shelter for DV victims; Equal Employment Act; Medical Service Act, banning fetal sex identification

1989 Family Law amended, but with patriarchal family headship system maintained; Mother and Child Welfare Act; 2nd report to CEDAW submitted

1990s(1)

Social environment

Government departments/institutions

Women's organizations/movement

Gender equality policy

1990 Ratification of International Covenants on Human Rights

1991 [Joining the UN](#)
(both South Korea and North Korea)

1992 Presidential election

1993 [Inauguration of Kim Yeong-sam](#)
[Civilian Government](#);
[CEDAW review – 2nd periodic report of Korea](#);
[UN World Conference on Human Rights](#);
[UN Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women](#)

1994 Creation of Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women

1990 The Korean Council for the Women Drafted for-Military Sexual Slavery by Japan

1991 Committee for 'Kim Bu-Nam Incident';
Sexual Counseling Center;
Public testimony by Ms. Kim Hak-Soon;
Discussion on peace in Asia and the roles of women

1992 Beginning of Wednesday demonstration-
in front of the Japanese Embassy in Korea;
Movement for legislation on sexual violence;
Countermeasures Committee for 'Kim Bo-Eun /
Kim Jin-Kwan Incident';
Raising the 'comfort women' issue at the UN;
Asian Solidarity Conference (Seoul)

1993 Committee for the case of sexual-harassment at Seoul
National University;
Testimony by Ms. Kim Bok-Dong at Vienna Conference;
Asia NGO Forum for the Beijing Conference

1994 Movement for legislation on domestic violence;
Korean NGO Committee for preparation of-
the Beijing Conference;
1st East Asian Women's Forum (Japan);
Women's Solidarity pushing for quota system

1991 [Withdrawal of reservation on CEDAW Article 16-1 c, d & f](#)

1992 Government receives report from the victims of-Japanese military's sexual slavery system

1993 Act on Support for Women Drafted for-Japan's Military sexual slavery;
Special Act on Sexual Violence (punishment + protection)

1994 Special Committee on Women, Korean National Assembly

1990s(2)

Social environment

1995 The 1st nationwide local election;
The 4th World Conference on Women;
Country visit by the special rapporteur of
the UN Sub-Commission on Human Rights;
Country visit by the special rapporteur of
the UN Commission on Human Rights

1998 Inauguration of Kim Dae-jung Peoples'
Government;
CEDAW review - 3rd & 4th periodic reports of Korea

1999 Adoption of Optional Protocol to CEDAW

Government departments/institutions

1998 Presidential Committee on
Women's Affairs
+ women's policy desk in 6
government ministries

Women's organizations/movement

1995 Hotline on Equality,
Women's Labor Counselling Center
1995 Beijing World Conference on Women
(500 Korean women participated)

1996 2nd East Asian Women's Forum (Korea)

1997 Sex education center - Tacteen Naeil;
Declaration on use of both parents' surnames;
Women Making Peace

1998 3rd East Asian Women's Forum (Mongolia);
NGO's first participation in CEDAW review;
Women's late-life divorce raised

1999 Korean Association of Women with Disabilities;
Gender Politics Research Center 'Yeoseyeon';
Headquarter for the movement for abolishing-
patriarchal family headship system;
Korean Women's Trade Union

Gender equality policy

1995 Framework Act on Women's Development;
Quota program for employment of female-
public servants;
3rd report to CEDAW submitted

1997 The 1st Framework Plan for Women's Policy;
Act on Prevention of Domestic Violence

1998 Women's Hotline 1366;
4th report to CEDAW submitted;
Amendment of Nationality Act;
National Pension Distribution System upon
Divorce

1999 Withdrawal of reservation on CEDAW Article 9;
Act on Prohibition of Discrimination against
Women and Relief thereof

2000s(1)

Social environment

Government departments/institutions

Women's organizations/movement

Gender equality policy

2000 Millennium Development Goals;
General election;
Beijing+5;
UN Security Council Resolution 1325;
Adoption of UN Protocol to Prevent,
Suppress and Punish Trafficking in
Persons, esp. Women and Children

2001 Establishment of the
Ministry of Gender Equality

2003 Inauguration of **Roe Moo-Hyun**
Participatory Government

2003 Establishment of the-
Korean Institute for Gender Equality-
Promotion and Education (KIJEPE)

2004 General Election;
UN Special Rapporteur on Trafficking
appointed

2004 Expansion of the Ministry of Gender Equality
(adding responsibility for infant/childcare)

2005 Beijing+10

2005 Ministry of Gender Equality and Family

2000 Women's International War Tribunal on the Crimes of
Japanese Military's Sexual Slavery (Tokyo);
General election campaigns –
"No Nomination, No Votes" for bad candidates;
Beijing+5 review;
4th East Asian Women's Forum (Taiwan);
Committee for 'Gunsan Fire Incident';
Citizens' Solidarity for Abolishment of Family Headship
System

2001 Opening of the shelter for migrant women laborers

2002 Committee for the 2nd Fire Incident in Gunsan

2003 The 5th East Asian Women Forum (Hong Kong);
"Dasihamkke (Again, Together)" Center;
Women's Network for Clean Politics

2004 Nationwide Solidarity Against Sexual Exploitation of
Women;
National single parents' network

2005 Participation in 2005 Beijing+10;
Migrant Women's Human Rights Center
Seoul YMCA Campaigns to eliminate discrimination
against women;
Women's Human Rights Defenders 'Jong-Ee-Hak'

2000 Quota system for women – proportional
representation (30%, National Assembly &
Provincial Council);
Act on Protection of Children and Youth against
Sex Offences sexual discrimination

2001 Establishment of National Human Rights Commission-
including sexual harassment;
Maternity leave extended to 90 days;
(amendment of three laws related to maternity)
Act on Support for Female Farmers & Fishermen;
Constitutional Court ruling to abolish the incentive
system for military service

2002 Quota for women's representation for proportional
seats in in city/local council – one female for every
two candidates

2003 Fixed targets for equal employment;
Quota system for employment of female professors
at national/public universities;
5th report to CEDAW submitted

2004 50% quota for female proportional representatives
at the National Assembly;
Use 10% of the political party subsidies for
women's development;
Framework Act on Healthy Family;
Act on Prevention of Sex Trafficking

2005 Constitutional Court ruling on the family headship-
system (unconstitutional);
Introduction of Gender Impact Assessment;
Framework Act on Low Fertility/Aging Society;
Transfer the tasks related to sexual discrimination to-
the National Human Rights Commission

2000s(2)

Social environment

Government departments/institutions

Women's organizations/movement

Gender equality policy

2007 CEDAW review - 5th & 6th periodic reports of Korea

2008 Inauguration of Lee Myung-bak Government

2008 Ministry of Gender Equality

2009 Establishment of Women's Human Right institute of Korea

2006 Hotline for victims of eggs collection for stem-cell research;
A sit-down strike by KTX female attendants;
Migrant women hotline 1366

2007 Participation in CEDAW's Review;
Single mother support network;
Watchdog on on-line sexual exploitation;
Urge the government to turn non-regular workers at schools-
to regular employees

2008 Opposition to the government's plan to merge the Ministry of Gender Equality and Family to other ministry;
Petition for retention of the Ministry of Gender Equality and Family

2009 Opposition to downsizing of the National Human Rights Commission;
Death of Jang Ja-Yeon, an actress and supporting activities for female entertainers' human rights

2006 Gender-responsive budgeting introduced in the National Finance Act;
Affirmative measures for women's employment;
Migrant women's hotline 1366 (with interpretation)
Ratification of CEDAW Optional Protocol

2007 6th report to CEDAW submitted;
Act on Equal Employment & Work-Life Balance;
Marriage Brokerage Act

2008 Single Parent Support Act;
Multicultural Families Support Act;
Economic Activity Facilitation Act for Career-Interrupted Women;
Family-Friendly Business Certification system;
Ratification of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD)

2009 Opening of the Employment Support Center for Career-Interrupted Women;
Constitutional Court's ruling - "ban on fetal sex identification is not in compliance with the constitution";
Development of National Gender Equality Index

2010s(1)

Social environment

2010 Establishment of UN Women (Executive Board);
Beijing+15;
Establishment of the UN Working Group on Discrimination against Women in law and practice

2011 CEDAW review - 7th report of Korea

2013 Inauguration of Park Geun-hye Government

2015 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs);
Goal 5: Gender Equality;
Beijing+20

Government departments/institutions

2010 Ministry of Gender Equality and Family

Women's organizations/movement

2010 Demanding a quota system for proportional representatives;
Movement Headquarters for ensuring the rights of female non-regular workers

2011 Participation in CEDAW review;
Cyber Peer Counseling Center (Teenage Women's Human Rights Center);
Symposium on implementation of international human rights recommendations;
Campaign to secure maternity rights of women with disabilities;
Foundation of 'Jokakbo' (Patchwork)

2012 Policy recommendations to the 19th National Assembly;
Solidarity for human rights of women working around US military bases

2013 Association of care cooperatives

2014 Women's policy at local elections on June 4

2015 Discussion on ensuring labor rights of Domestic workers;
Joint action to ensure women's representation of 30% in the 20th general election

Gender equality policy

2010 7th report to CEDAW submitted;
Introduction of gender-responsive budget;
Act on Special Cases Concerning Sexual Violence Crimes;
Framework plan for international development cooperation-including gender equality;
Act on Medication for Treatment of Sexual Impulse;
Abolishment of the statute of limitations & offences subject to complaints for the sexual violence against people with disabilities

2011 Act on Gender Impact Assessment & Analysis;
Development of regional gender equality index

2012 Act on Childcare Support;
Abolishment of offences subject to complaints in the criminal law;
Abolishment of the crime of sexual intercourse upon pretense of marriage;
Act on Prevention of Sex Trafficking, nullifying the debt

2013 Establishment of the crime of human trafficking in the criminal law

2014 Framework Act on Gender Equality;
Child Maintenance Act;
National Action Plan on implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 1325

2015 8th report to CEDAW submitted;
Ratification of the Protocol on Trafficking;
Constitutional Court's ruling - "crime of adultery is unconstitutional", with the effect of abolishment

2010s(2)

Social environment

Government departments/institutions

Women's organizations/movement

Gender equality policy

2016 The National Assembly passed the bill of impeachment of President Park Geun-hye

2017 Constitutional court ruling to impeach Park Geun-Hye
Launch of Moon Jae-In Government

2018 CEDAW review - 8th report of Korea

2020 Beijing+25

2016 Opposition to Korea-Japan Agreement on the women drafted for the Japanese military's sexual slavery;
Murder of a woman at Gangnam station;
Black Protest for abolishment of abortion crime

2017 Activities to combat illegal photo-taking;
Urge the government to punish stalking as a crime;
Activities to tackle cyber sexual crimes

2018 Participation in CEDAW review
MeToo movement
A large-scale protest at Hyehwa station
Urge the government to abolish abortion crime

2019 "Flames" - the Trackers

2016 Legislation allowing women as joint agricultural operator;
Distribution of pension funds of public officials/teachers upon divorce

2017 Menstruation health support for female teenagers

2018 "Action with Women and Peace Initiative";
Framework Act on Prevention of Violence against Women;
Digital Sex Crime Victim Support Center;
Policy banning employers with sexual violence record from hiring foreigners;
Ministry of Employment and Labor installs hotlines for migrant women in 16 languages;

2019 Constitutional Court ruling – "criminalization of abortion unconstitutional";
Establish gender equality teams in 8 ministries;
Institutionalization of the joint fishery operator;
Distribution of military pension funds upon divorce

2020 Large companies required to have at least one woman on the board;
Act on Prevention of 'nth Room' (amendment of 7 related laws);
Appointment of "Ambassador at Large for Gender Equality";
Support for single-parent family expanded to foreigners

2020s

Social environment

Government departments/institutions

Women's organizations/movement

Gender equality policy

2021 Survey on the situation of violence against women;
Employment insurance for workers under special employment contract;
Act on the Punishment of Stalking Crimes;
Human Trafficking Prevention Act;
Women's Economic Activity Act

2021 Council of Gender-Responsive Budgeting/Settlement

2022 [9th report to CEDAW submitted](#);
Ratification of Optional Protocol to CRPD

2022 [Inauguration of Yoon Suk-yeol Government](#)
UN Women Gender Equality Center

2022 Government announced to abolish the Ministry of Gender Equality and Family

2022 Public opposition to the abolishment of the Ministry of Gender Equality and Family;
[NGO information submitted to CEDAW on the List of Issues](#)

2024 [CEDAW review expected - 9th report of Korea](#)

Drivers of Gender Equality Policy

- Active **women's movements** in South Korea
- Implementation of **UN's** gender equality policies and **CEDAW**
- **However**, depending on the government and the ruling party, differences in gender equality policies.

Areas Most Behind: 1. Women's Economic Independence

- Women's employment rate: 59.9%
(Total: 68%, as of February 2023, Employment and Labor Indicators, MoEL)
- Gender wage gap: 31.1% (2021, the worst among OECD countries)
- Short-time workers: women accounts for 70.2% (not protected by the Labor Standards Act).
→ Instability of pension/life after retirement
- Equal pay for work of equal value: applied only to the same business site.
- Need to eradicate horizontal/vertical occupational segregation by gender.
- Ministry of Employment and Labor: policies targeting women are only
“prevention of career interruption and support for re-employment”
(Details: support for childbirth/childcare, employment support through the Support Center for Career-Interrupted Women)

Areas Most Behind: 2. Women's Equal Representation

- Proportion of women at the National Assembly (2020): 19%
(global average: 25.5%, Asia: 20.4%, 2021, IPU)
- Proportion of women at local government councils (2022):
Provincial: Mayor/Governor: 0%; Council: 19.8%
Local: head: 3.1%; Council: 33.4%
Superintendent: 11.8%
- Ministry of Interior and Safety: Director-General level 24.4%; high-ranking officials 10% (2021)
- Judiciary (2021): Judges 30.5%, Prosecutors 31.0%, lawyers 27.1%
- Privileges + corruption accompanying the power

Areas for Further Improvements

- Violence: definition of rape, increase in domestic violence and low rate of prosecution, sexual harassment, online sexual exploitation
- Health: focused mostly on sexual/reproductive health; centered around married women, pregnant women and family; lack of legislation regarding abortion
- Minority groups: older women, women with disabilities, migrant women, sexual minority women, etc.
- Gender mainstreaming: limits in gender impact assessment, gender-responsive budget, gender statistics

Challenges in Gender Equality Tasks

- Regression in domestic political environment and gender equality policy
- The stronghold of patriarchy: Labor policies and welfare policies are based on the premise that women engage in unpaid/low-paying work.
- New challenges such as the pandemics, digital environment, climate change, etc. and women's reality
- Issues of vulnerable women groups: elderly women, women with disabilities, women farmers/laborers, migrant women, female North Korean defectors, etc.

*Key References

- The 1st~9th report of the South Korean government to CEDAW;
- Concluding Observations from CEDAW;
- Websites of government ministries;
- Websites of major women's organizations;

Thank you for your attention.

Questions?

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