

Women's Long March for Equality Isn't Over Yet

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As the head of an international women's rights organization, March is one of the busiest months on my calendar. I'm presenting on panels that mark International Women's Day on March 8 and giving talks that commemorate Women's History Month. I'm hopping from one coast to the other to meet with California-based supporters of women's rights and decision-makers in New York for the United Nations' 60th session of the Commission on the Status of Women.

Throughout March, the message I will be sharing with funders, advocates, activists and policymakers is that the long march for gender equality isn't over, that women's collective advocacy matters and that financial support for women's collective advocacy is central to its success.

It's important that every one of us who cares about gender equality takes stock of the progress we've made here in the United States and around the globe -- and that we also use this time to motivate ourselves to take on the next set of challenges and to think critically about how to achieve success.

In the last 150 years alone, women and girls have experienced exponential change in political and economic participation, health, education, and in breaking barriers and ceilings.

After a long, hard-fought battle, American women won the right to vote in 1920. This year, we've had two female candidates for the U.S. Presidency. In 2011, Saudi Arabia finally gave women that same right to elect their representatives in government.

In 1908, France's Therese Peltier became the [first woman ever](#) to pilot an airplane. This past November, Ethiopian Airlines announced that its [first ever all-female flying crew](#) led an intercontinental flight between Addis Ababa and Bangkok, Thailand.

After years of research and development funded by Planned Parenthood, [the FDA approved the pill in 1960](#), bringing oral contraception to millions of American women.

Around the globe, women are increasingly using contraceptives of all kinds to plan their families. [In Rwanda](#), for example, 51.6 percent of women between the ages of 15 to 49 use contraceptives, compared to just 13.2 percent in 2000.

In nearly every country on earth, the gap between girls and boys in primary school has closed, and [more women than men now attend university in two-thirds of countries](#) where we have available data.

Behind each of these gains there are some famous faces--Shirley Chisholm, Amelia Earhart, Malala Yousafzai. There are also countless women whose names we may never know but whose energy and commitment to seeing women in their communities advance has propelled gender equality to new heights in the 20th and 21st centuries.

We've seen women take to the streets *en masse* in India, Spain, Nigeria, Argentina and elsewhere to protest violence against women. In other contexts, women have come together to strategically push world leaders to ensure gender equality is on the global agenda, as when the United Nations formally adopted Sustainable Development Goal 5 this past September.

There's no time to rest, though. Too much work remains.

One in every three women will experience sexual or physical violence in her lifetime. While generally equal numbers of girls and boys are in school, the number of out-of-school children greatly skews

female. Of the 775 million adults who are illiterate, [two thirds of them are women](#). Women earn less than men in paid employment, and we work longer hours when you factor in care work and unpaid labor.

To meet these challenges, we need all hands on deck. Those of us who are leaders in championing gender equality must focus on cultivating a strong, sustainable feminist movement in every country. I know this from having personally seen what grassroots, community-led movements can do, and the research says the same thing: [in a study of 70 countries over four decades](#), strong feminist movements had a bigger impact in reducing violence against women than the economic growth of countries, women's political participation, or progressive politics.

Collectively pushing for gender equality through policy and programs holds decision-makers at every level accountable to women and girls. A strong and clear voice united around core beliefs is vital for being heard and heeded by those in power.

When donors join together with everyday activists and civil society organizations, we're amplifying the priorities and solutions of all community members, including the most marginalized women and girls.

I believe that that's how we will get to stronger policies that meet women and men's real, everyday needs. I believe that's how we will finally achieve gender equality in every corner of the globe.

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