Universals of Gender Policy and its Socio-Cultural Adaptation

Svitlana Hladchenko*, Oleg Domin, Ulyana Varnava, Anna Rabokorovka, Marina Paskalova

1 Odesa Military Academy, Odessa, Odessa Oblast, Ukraine.
Email: hladchenko@vaodesa.mil.gov.ua | ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8802-5111
2 Odessa I.I. Mechnikov National University, Odessa, Ukraine.
Email: world-hist@onu.edu.ua | ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5842-6926
3 Odessa I.I. Mechnikov National University, Odessa, Ukraine.
Email: ulyankk@gmail.com | ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4043-8050
4 Odesa Military Academy, Odessa, Odessa Oblast, Ukraine.
Email: amadeus24@ukr.net | ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3236-7239
5 Odesa Military Academy, Odessa, Odessa Oblast, Ukraine.
Email: paskalowa@vaodesa.mil.gov.ua | ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1976-5807

*Corresponding author

ABSTRACT

This article is devoted to the history of the implementation by the United Nations of the universals of gender policy that have developed in the context of the modern worldview. The author traces the evolution of the United Nations policy on the women's issue in the context of historical realities and on the basis of an analysis based on the most important documents of the UN. It corroborates the beginning of a qualitatively new stage in UN policy, which manifests itself in shifting the focus from the legal status of women to the gender equality discourse, and changes in social structures and relations between men and women. The sociocultural determinants of gender value orientations and behavioral stereotypes had developed in the context of various national traditions, and its role in adapting the universal concept of gender equality. The article analyzes the value gender guidelines of modern Chinese society and the West European version of gender policy. The conclusion indicates that there are varied ways to achieve gender balance in society and the need to develop a new gender universal concept that dialectically combines the general and the singular gender relations.

Keywords: Gender; Gender policy; Gender concept; Women's equality


Copyright © 2021 by author(s). This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution International License (CC BY 4.0).
1. INTRODUCTION

The value orientations of human development, defined as universal norms after the Second World War, were based on the ideological paradigm of the Modern era, which, in turn, was of a progressive Eurocentric nature. On a generalizing note, the historical perspective of humanity is reduced to a single homogeneous social structure of the European type. This kind of universalism actualizes the problem of the relationship between the general and the individual.

Let us view the designated problem through the prism of such a universal, and analytical category, such as gender. As modern researchers admit, the gender “... interacts in a hierarchical order with other categories (classes, nations, races, citizenship) giving history a universal character ...” (O’Brien, 2006: 26).

2. UNITED NATIONS - THE GUARANTOR OF GENDER EQUALITY

Since its inception, the United Nations (UN) has identified gender equality as the most important global political strategy for the world development. To be specific, this international organization, due to historical conditions, presents the universals of gender policy reflecting European values and principles that were formed during the middle of the 20th century in the context of the history of modernity. These principles were defined as basic for the human behavior, for the structure of social relations, and, generally, for both men and women. The main task of the UN was to influence the formation of public consciousness and opinion in the spirit of respecting human rights and women's rights, in particular. To consolidate these rights at the international, and then national levels, the organization developed number of international legal documents that were to become the basis of the process aimed at establishing equality for women at all levels, as one of the indicators of the world development.

In the first year of the UN's existence, the Economic and Social Council established the Commission on the Status of Women, which became the main governing body exclusively dedicated to the advancement of women, and the members of this Commission participated in the drafting process of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Since the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights on December 10, 1948, the struggle for the equality of women was actualized (UN, 2015). The United Nations primarily dealt with the issues of political equality. For this, the 1952 Convention on the Political Rights of Women was adopted, which became the first international treaty where the parties assumed legal obligations in the implementation of women's political rights, and allowed women to be more actively involved in political life (UN, 1952). Ever since the adoption of the above Convention, the UN has consistently and purposefully carried out work to implement the political rights of women de jure and de facto.

Feminist movement of the late 1960s and 1970s was one of the factors causing the crisis of the worldview paradigm of modern era. However, it was organically connected to it, the principle of hierarchical dualism was at the heart of this worldview i.e., the world was perceived as an opposition of two ambiguous values, which are in a state of permanent conflict and constant struggle. At the same time, the feminist movement was largely influenced by the decision of the UN General Assembly to declare 1975 the International Women's Year and to hold the first World Conference of the International Women's Year in Mexico City (1975). The Mexican Declaration emphasized that further world development is not possible without the active participation of men and active involvement of women. In general, the Declaration called for every effort to create conditions for women equal to the men in order to realization of their rights. The Mexico City conference adopted a series of resolutions and recommendations for the national action by the governments of the participating countries during the decade 1975-1985, which was declared as the “decade of women”.

In 1979, the “Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women” (CEDAW) was adopted. The Article 1 of this international instrument states, “For the purposes of this Convention, the term ‘discrimination against women’ means any distinction, exclusion or restriction on the basis of sex that is intended to weaken or negate the recognition, enjoyment or exercise of women, regardless of their marital provisions based on the equality of men and women, human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural, civil or any other field” (OHCHR, 1979). At the same time, the Convention emphasizes, “the adoption by the States ... of temporary special measures aimed at accelerating the establishment of de facto equality between men and women is not considered discriminatory, but it should in no way entail the preservation of unequal or differentiated
standards; these measures must be lifted when the goals of equality of opportunity and equal treatment are achieved” (OHCHR, 1979). In fact, the Convention allowed for the adoption of special measures by State-parties in the form of “positive” discrimination or quotas aimed at improving the status of women and did not consider them discriminatory towards men. The adoption of this document was based on a long-term collection of information on the status of women around the world and was aimed at initiating the legislative consolidation by the States of the legal and civil rights of women.

Two more world conferences took place over the next two decades: the World Conference on Women in Copenhagen (1980), and the World Conference to Review and Appraise the Achievements of the United Nations Decade for Women Equality, Development and Peace in Nairobi (1985). The purpose of the World Conference in Copenhagen was to analyze and evaluate the implementation of the 1975 World Plan of Action at the national, regional and international levels. The conference was supposed to give a new impetus to the struggle for the equality of women. The Nairobi conference received wide international recognition. It was attended by representatives of 15,000 non-governmental organizations that treated the conference as an act of “the birth of world feminism.” It was emphasized at the conference that although over the past decade the main goals of the fight for women’s equality have not been fully achieved. However, it drew public attention to the need to take urgent measures to ensure women’s real equality with the men, and the participation of women in many actions carried out in the framework of the UN Decade of Women increasing their self-awareness. The Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies to 2000, developed and unanimously adopted by 157 UN member States, are an improved draft of a plan for the advancement of women by the end of the 20th century. The participation of women in decision-making and access to management of all spheres of human activity were recognized not only as their legal right, but also as a socio-political necessity - factors that had also to be introduced into all institutions of society. The Conference encouraged all bodies of the UN system to develop a set of concrete measures to assist in the implementation of the Nairobi Strategies, both at the international and regional levels. All of this was to be implemented through monitoring the implementation of strategies, technical assistance, training and the provision of certain services.

It should be emphasized that the Strategies and Action Plans developed at the conferences listed above have gone through several stages in their development - from looking at women almost exclusively in terms of their development needs to recognizing their significant contribution to the development process as a whole, striving to expand their rights and opportunities for full participation in all activities at all levels. However, historical experience has shown that the traditional principles and methods of struggle for women’s rights at the international and national levels proved to be ineffective, as evidenced by gender studies. Since the general principle of equality without distinction between men and women, properly justified in law, often entails latent discrimination against the latter. As a consequence of the difference in the social roles of men and women, de jure equality often leads to de facto discrimination, and the allocation of women’s rights to a special category of legal regulation, as it was customary to some extent, limits their application within the framework of a social group.

The main reason for these contradictions in the implementation of the principle of non-discrimination on the basis of sex is the factor of a woman’s reproductive function, which manifests itself most often in the family, socio-economic and labour relations. Of course, the need to implement the State policy in the field of maternity protection was beyond doubt. However, the presence of such special legal norms hampered the social adaptation of women in society. On the other hand, the full equalization of the rights of women with men is virtually impossible due to the biological characteristics of the female body; the absence of special measures to protect women during pregnancy and childbirth will endanger the life and health of the mother and child. The need for a woman to combine homework, childcare and professional activities also does not contribute to her career growth and career advancement. Thus, the effectiveness of the implementation of the principle of non-discrimination and equality on the basis of sex depends not only on changes in the legal status of women, but also on changes in the social determinism of gender roles.

3. INTERNATIONAL RECOGNITION OF GENDER EQUALITY ISSUES

The international community has finally recognized the need to shift the focus from the legal status of women to the gender equality, to rethink the entire social structure and relations between men and women. The first step towards the implementation of this concept was the holding of the Beijing
World Conference under the auspices of the UN in 1995, where a gender approach to the issue of equality between men and women was first tested at the international level. This approach to the assessment of legal relations between representatives of both sexes allowed us to consider the problem of discrimination not only of women, but also of men. The Beijing Conference emphasized that “gender equality is a universal problem that everyone benefits from” and stated that “real equality of men and women cannot be achieved without the active participation of men in this process” (UN, 1995). Thus, the Beijing conference testified the influence of feminism on the world women’s movement and the transition from the struggle for women’s rights to the search for gender harmony.

The main achievement of the Beijing Conference was the recognition of the need to reassess the entire structure of society and relations between men and women, which were defined as gender. It was recognized that only through a fundamental restructuring of society and its institutions women will be able to take their rightful place as equal partners of men in all spheres of life. Thus, it was emphasized that women’s rights are human rights, and that gender equality is a universal issue from which everyone benefits. The Beijing Conference can be called the final link in the chain of world conferences and a concrete call to action for joint efforts at all levels, using an integrated approach to address a wide range of gender issues. The Beijing Conference adopted a renewed international commitment to empower women everywhere in the context of the gender equality. The Conference adopted the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, which was a plan for the realization and effective implementation, protection and promotion of equal rights and opportunities for men and women in realizing “their potential in society while shaping their lives in accordance with their own aspirations” (Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, 1995). The Final Act of the Beijing Conference is a mechanism for influencing States with the aim of practical implementation by the State parties to the Conference of their obligations to improve the status of women. The effectiveness of the implementation of this document was due to the definition of its legal nature, recognition of it as a form of international lawmaking, a form of existence of international legal norms.

The subsequent activity of the UN allows us to conclude on the universal recognition and application of the outcome documents of the Beijing Conference in international law. The Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court defined the term “gender” as “two sexes, male and female, in the context of society ...” (ICC, 2011: 6). Accordingly, the concept of ‘gender’ began to be interpreted as a set of social and cultural norms defined by society in relation to each biological sex. It is not biological differences, but sociocultural norms that ultimately determine the psychological qualities, behaviour patterns, types of activities, professions of women and men.

The problem of sociocultural determinants of gender value orientations and stereotypes of behavior that have developed in the context of certain national traditions and their role in the implementation of the universalist concept of gender equality is actualized. At the same time, it is obvious that absolute equality is socially and biologically impossible and unnecessary for the society itself, whose priority is the creation of a balance of gender relations. The history of the past 25 years since the Beijing Conference allows us to recognize the existence of variable paths to achieving gender balance in society. This was especially clearly manifested in relation to such a social institution as the family. A striking example of this is the Chinese experience, which in many respects represents the adaptation of Confucian social ethics to new historical conditions. Note that the European tradition of the women’s movement was dominated by the struggle for civil rights. De jure equality between women and men, in the opinion of the Confucian elite, is only a minimum; an appropriate moral education is needed to achieve a balance of gender relations.

The Confucian tradition, first of all, was preserved in the family-oriented social structure of the Chinese society. In Confucianism, the family is the main social institution. The idea of the family as a State in miniature and the ideal of the State as an enlarged model of the family led to the realization that family stability is vital for society and the main function of the State is to ensure the natural cohesion of the family (Chernikh, 2019: 28). It is in the family, as the Chinese researchers emphasize, that the basic humanistic values are inculcated. Dyadic relationships within the family, depending on age, gender, rights, status and hierarchy, provide a very rich natural environment for gaining knowledge of how a person should be. The principle of mutual cooperation in the form of bilateral interaction between people determines all forms of ties in the family. Age and gender, which are potentially two different things in the immediate environment, combine in a continuous stream of personal experiences and care for others. Personal self-improvement is at the heart of the regulation of family relations and gender relations are
formed on the basis of "interconnected solidarity", which excludes sexism. The concept of "interconnected solidarity" is represented in the Chinese model of modern gender relations as a system-forming moral principle of society (Weiming, 2012: 15-16).

Referring again the Beijing Declaration, in contrast to the Chinese model of "interconnected solidarity", it included the family in the discourse of "parity gender relations." It is evidenced by Art. 15 of the Beijing Declaration Platform for Action, which emphasizes "Equal distribution of family responsibilities between men and women and harmonious partnerships between them are key to their well-being and the well-being of their families, ... to ensure the full and equal participation of women in decision-making on economic, social, cultural and political issues ... the principle of equality of rights and responsibilities of women and men in the family, at work and in the wider national and international context must be enshrined ... Equality of women and men is a human rights issue and one of the conditions for ensuring social justice, and a necessary and fundamental prerequisite for achieving equality, development and peace. The transformation of partnership relations on the basis of equal rights for women and men is one of the conditions for sustainable development...” (Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, 1995). The Beijing principles of partnership and equality in the family as a tendency are more clearly manifested in European countries, where women are actively involved in political processes. This was facilitated by the popularization of the concept of "parity democracy". Its supporters demanded that their governments take concrete measures to ensure equality of women in government structures according to the "50/50" formula. However, it can be stated that even in those countries where the process of active inclusion of women in politics is labeled with the term "parity democracy", the emphasis is shifted to quantitative parity, which, in fact, can lead to formal equality (Hladchenko, 2020: 302). It continues to reproduce the principle of "positive" discrimination, which, as it was assumed back in 1979 by the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, should be abolished. Thus, no significant progress has taken place over 40 years after the adoption of this Convention, which clearly casts doubt on both the quotas itself and the effectiveness of "positive" discrimination.

4. CONCLUSIONS

The above does not, in general, question the appropriateness of the priority goal of the international community to realize the full and equal participation of women in political life at the national, regional and international levels. To reach this goal, the role of ideology and political practices in the reproduction and change of gender relations has increased since the end of the 20th century. Gender studies in Europe reveal that the process of forming a role model woman-leader is underway for which the male style in politics is not a standard. Women politicians form and demonstrate a new style of leadership, non-hierarchical relations between subordinates and colleagues, non-aggressive and aimed at cooperating with voters while meeting their needs. When solving problems, women, to a greater extent than men, tend to be open and flexible to compromise and dialogue, which can be due to both psychological characteristics and socialization processes (Hladchenko, 2020: 303). It should be noted that such a model of a political leader is, to a certain extent, consonant with the principles of Chinese "interconnected solidarity" in society, which, again testifies to the imperfection of the universal gender concept.

The crisis of gender universals is just one aspect of the crisis in the ideological foundations of the modern era, as evidenced by the 2018 report of the Club of Rome. The world intellectual elite, today, has come to the conclusion that the growing global crisis is multifactorial and includes both social, political, cultural and moral aspects (Dahlimire, 2003: 275). Overcoming this general crisis is associated with the implementation of the principles of a new holistic worldview, where gender harmony does not at all mean the transfer of more women to “male” positions. “...We are in general in a crisis. As we develop new principles for a fundamental transformation of the worldview that will help overcome the global crisis, there are several areas in which it is imperative to achieve balance. It is between men and women...”; quoted by von Weizsäcker & Wijkman (2018). Sociocultural determinants of gender value orientations and stereotypes of behavior that have developed in the context of certain national and regional traditions actualize the need to comprehend a new universal gender concept, dialectically combining the general and the singular gender relations.
REFERENCES


AUTHORS’ DECLARATIONS AND ESSENTIAL ETHICAL COMPLIANCES

Authors’ Contributions (in accordance with ICMJE criteria for authorship)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Contribution</th>
<th>Author 1</th>
<th>Author 2</th>
<th>Author 3</th>
<th>Author 4</th>
<th>Author 5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Conceived and designed the research or analysis</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collected the data</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contributed to data analysis &amp; interpretation</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wrote the article/paper</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critical revision of the article/paper</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Editing of the article/paper</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supervision</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Project Administration</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Funding Acquisition</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall Contribution Proportion (%)</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Funding
No funding was available for the research conducted for and writing of this paper.

Research involving human bodies (Helsinki Declaration)
Has this research used human subjects for experimentation? No

Research involving animals (ARRIVE Checklist)
Has this research involved animal subjects for experimentation? No

Research involving Plants
No plant was used to conduct this research.

Research on Indigenous Peoples and/or Traditional Knowledge
Has this research involved Indigenous Peoples as participants or respondents? No

(Optional) PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses)
Have authors complied with PRISMA standards? No

Competing Interests/Conflict of Interest
Authors have no competing financial, professional, or personal interests from other parties or in publishing this manuscript.

RIGHTS AND PERMISSIONS

Open Access. This article is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License, which permits use, sharing, adaptation, distribution and reproduction in any medium or format, as long as you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons license, and indicate if changes were made. The images or other third-party material in this article are included in the article's Creative Commons license, unless indicated otherwise in a credit line to the material. If material is not included in the article's Creative Commons license and your intended use is not permitted by statutory regulation or exceeds the permitted use, you will need to obtain permission directly from the copyright holder. To view a copy of this license, visit http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/.