Finding strength in struggle for gender equality and human rights

FEATURE

The year 2025 marks 30 years since the landmark Beijing Declaration and its Platform for Action was adopted in 1995. Despite rising anti-rights and antigender pushes, some progress on these bold promises gives hope and strength, to strive for achieving SDG5 fully by 2030 or earlier.

"As we commemorate the 30th anniversary of the Beijing Declaration and its Platform for Action this year, we are called to reflect not only on how far we have come but how far we must still go. The Beijing Declaration was a bold promise to the world's women and girls that their rights, dignity and health would be nonnegotiable, that promise remains unfulfilled," said Nazneen Damji, Chief (ad interim), Governance and Participation Section, and Senior Policy Advisor, Gender Equality, HIV and Health, UN

"Universal health coverage cannot be truly universal if it does not prioritise gender equality and human rights. Health systems that ignore the unique needs and barriers faced by women and girls are not only unjust, they are ineffective," she said in her video message at a special Side Event alongside WHA78 organised by Global Centre for Health Diplomacy and Inclusion (CeHDI), International Planned Parenthood Federation, Fos Feminista, CNS, and part-

"We are facing a rising coordinated push back on women's and girls' health and rights, particularly their sexual and reproductive health and rights. In just the past few months we have seen drastic funding cuts, impacting not only civil society and governments, but also UN agenand life-saving HIV treatment. This is not just a budget issue, it is a crisis of political will. Let us be clear: sexual and reproductive health and rights are not optional, they are fundamental human rights and yet only 56% of married women aged 15 to 49 can make decisions about their own reproductive health. This is not a statistic, it is a reflection of deeprooted structural inequalities and harmful social norms that continue to deny women agency over their own bodies," said Nazneen Damji of UN Women.

The consequences are devastating: - Every 2 minutes a woman dies from preventable pregnancy related causes - In 2023, over 700 women died each from complications that could have been avoided with access to quality care - HIV incidents among adolescent girls and young women remains alarmingly high in parts of sub-Saharan Africa where they are more than three times as likely to acquire HIV as their male peers in at least 22 countries

Gender discrimination block access to healthcare

Racism, stigma, and genderbased discrimination within healthcare settings block access to healthcare services. "Survivors of gender-based violence also need access to healthcare services. But that is often restricted for a wide variety of reasons including financial barriers, lack of capacity of the health system itself to be able to respond, social barriers like stigma and discrimination, as well as because healthcare system is at times a site of vi-olence itself," said Fadekemi Ak-infaderin, Chief Global Advocacy Officer, Fos Feminista (International Alliance for Sexual and Reproductive Health, Rights and

"I tend to think myself as a







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privileged person - an educated and middle-class woman - but when I had both my kids, I was denied access to epidural (epidural is a type of regional anaesthesia which is often given during labour and delivery to relieve pain). I was denied epidural in a health centre because the healthcare worker wanted me to give birth like a Hebrew woman," said Fedekemi

"These are not isolated issues rather these are symptoms of a global system that continues to devalue the lives and health of women and girls. The newly re-leased World Report on the Social Determinants of Health Equity confirms that gender discrimination blocks access to healthcare even when user fees are removed. Women especially those who are young poor migrants or from ethnic minorities, still avoid care because of abuse and mistreatment," shared Nazneen Damji.

UHC is fundamental to reducing health inequalities

"We are seeing a global push back against gender equality and the principles of human rights to health which are inextricably linked. In my mandate as a UN Special Rapporteur on Right To Health, I have recommended a human rights approach for many of the thematic areas recalling the political declaration of the UN High Level Meeting and resolution adopted by the UN General Assembly 2019 on Universal Health Coverage under the theme "Universal health coverage moving together to build a healthier world." I stress and underscore that universal health coverage is fundamental to reducing health inequalities, and ensuring just, peaceful and inclusive societies," said Dr Tlaleng Mofokeng, United Nations (UN) Special Rapporteur on Right To Health and Executive Director, Centre for Global Health Policy &

Dr Tlaleng added: "The world is experiencing protracted war, humanitarian crisis, economic crisis, climate crisis, genocide, all of which had an impact on the right to health. Inequality, violence, stigmatisation, discrimination and criminalisation, all are incompatible with the realisation of the right to health and therefore impact universal health coverage. Delivering on UHC in an era of push back against gender equality and human rights must consider that every human being is entitled - with no discrimination - to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of health, and also a life conducive to living of dignity.

Women's rights groups are often the first responders delivering lifesaving services

"We must recognise the vital role of women's rights groups which are often the first responders delivering life-saving health care protection services and psychosocial support to survivors of violence. Yet their ability to serve those most at risk, especially

women and girls facing intersec tional discrimination, is becoming severely hampered by shrinking funding and growing back-

lash," said Nazneen Damji. Despite challenges, progress towards gender justice gives us

hope and strength Governments committed to a political declaration at the recently concluded 69th UN Session of the Commission on the Status of Women. "This political declaration is reaffirming governments' commitment to the Beijing Platform for Action. This is a powerful reminder that women's health remains a key priority on the global agenda. It is a moment of renewed momentum and we must seize it," said Nazneen Damji of UN Women.

She added: "Over the past two decades, we have seen real gains for example: - The number of women using modern contraception has doubled - Unintended pregnancy rate has declined by 19%. These are victories worth protecting but to sustain this progress we must invest in and scale up the best practices that got us here. We must ensure that UHC is not just about coverage, it must be about equity, rights, and justice - that means guaranteeing access to comprehensive sexual and reproductive health services including contraception, safe abortion, maternal care and HIV

prevention." But, how can we protect these gains made towards gender equality and rights, and advance progress without increased domestic financing for health systems? We need to ensure that women's health services are integral to health benefit packages, and are protected and full

Research on to make drug from poisonous fungus that can defeat cancer, patients get new hope

nature has two faces. One is of

By Yogita Malviya

A poisonous fungus that once destroyed the crops in the fields has now become a hope to give new life to human lives. It is no less than a miracle in the world of science that the same Aspergillus Flavus fungus, which was considered to be like poison, will now prove effective in the treatment of cancer. A team of American scientists has extracted a special element from this fungus and prepared a treatment that can prove to be a big success in the war against

Aspergillus flavus is a fungus that is found in crops and produces a poison called 'aflatoxin'. This poison can cause serious damage to the liver and other organs of humans. But now scientists have discovered a chemical element from this fungus that has the ability to destroy cancer cells, that too without harming healthy cells.

Scientists have isolated a natural compound from this fungus, which destroys tumor cells by changing their DNA. The special thing is that this process does not affect the normal cells of the body, which also reduces the possibility of side effects. This drug is currently in the pre-clinical

trial phase, but the initial results are very promising.

So far, chemotherapy, radia-

destruction and the other is of life. What is needed is to untion and surgery have been the derstand it, improve it and use



main methods of cancer treatment. But all of these have a profound effect on the body. If this new drug is successful, it can make cancer treatment less painful and more effective.

Scientists say that clinical trials of this drug can begin in the next two to three years. If this drug proves to be as effective on the human body as it has been seen in research done in the lab, then it will be a revolutionary treatment for cancer patients.

The fungus that was once considered fatal has now emerged as a life-giver. This research is not only a big step in the medical field, but it also proves that every element of it in the right direction. This is a ray of new light for millions of patients struggling with

Engineers turn toxic fungus into potent leukemia treatment

Meanwhile, researchers at the University of Pennsylvania's School of Engineering and Applied Science have turned a dangerous crop-contaminating fungus into a promising treatment for leukemia. The study, published on June 23 in Nature Chemical Biology, explores how a team led by Professor Sherry Gao and postdoctoral researcher Qiuyue Nie developed a novel cancer-fighting

compound from Aspergillus flavus, a fungus typically associated with toxic aflatoxins.

By isolating and modifying a rare group of molecules known as RiPPs (ribosomally synthesized and post-translationally modified peptides), the team created a compound dubbed "asperigimycin" with leukemia-killing capabilipergillus flavus for its rich genome and underexplored biosynthetic potential. Despite its toxic history, the fungus yielded previously unknown RiPPs with complex structures. One major challenge, Nie noted, was isolating these molecules in sufficient quantities and ensuring their stability in-



ties comparable to FDA-approved drugs. Gao explained that lipid modification enhanced the compound's effectiveness and allowed it to selectively target leukemia cells using a specific transporter

The researchers chose As-

Gao emphasized that the next step will be testing the compound's safety and efficacy in animal models. While clinical trials may be years away, the team believes this breakthrough highlights fungi's untapped potential in drug

Dr Vinay Mishra's corner...

Question live in a joint family with two kids aged 6 and 8 years. The elders use bad words and the kids are now repeating it. How to deal with this situation?

PM, Bhopal Answer- When your child uses

bad words, respond calmly. Overreacting or yelling can make the behavior worse or turn it into a way for them to get attention

1. Explain Clearly and Set Boundaries-Tell your children that these words are not acceptable and explain why, in age-appropriate lan-

2. Be Consistent and a Good Role Model-Children imitate adults, so ensure you and other family members avoid using bad language around them. If elders in the joint family use such words, gently request them to be mindful when kids are present

3. Encourage Positive Alternatives-Teach your kids better ways to express anger or frustration. Praise them when they use the right lan-

4. Involve the Whole Family-In a joint family, discuss the issue together and agree on a unified approach to discourage bad language in front of children.

Easy Ways To Bring Tradition Into Your Modern Home

If you've always wondered about how you could bring touches of Indian culture into your modern home, Rohini Bagla, principal designer - Studio Rohini Bagla, has sugges-

More importantly, she has images of a home where she has made it happen.

Rohini envisioned the home as "a soul sanctuary... where design becomes devotion and every element hums with heritage." She chose to keep the colour palette rooted in earthy warmth and to bring in traditional touches and that desi feel with different ele-

Bring cultural touches to your modern homes -- Rohini Bagla, founder and principal designer, Studio Rohini Bagla

Blending tradition with modernity is not just about aesthetics," Rohini avers, "it's



about storytelling. When a vintage heirloom of texture that contrasts with the warmth of sits beside a sleek console, or when handcarved woodwork frames a contemporary space, it speaks of where we come from and where we're going. Thoughtfully layered, these elements create a home that's not just designed, but deeply felt."

Rich Teak

Enveloping the surfaces in the room, the grain in the teak veneer grounds the space in nature and nostalgia.

The Jhoola

The jhoola adds both weight and lightness to the room. This nod to tradition anchors the space in serenity and invites the occupants to reflect unhurriedly.

Stone Veneer

The television is framed by a striking stone veneer, which forms a cool sculptural canvas

the wood. The deliberate tension between the stone and the grain of the wood creates a narrative that speaks to contrast and bal-

The Headboard

Upholstered in a vibrant Indian motif, the headboard grabs attention, adding a burst of culture with its expressive colour and intricate patterns. It helps to anchor the space with grace and personality in a way that does not overwhelm but instead breathes life into the overall design.

Solid Wood Nested Tables

These tables, set on a handmade silk rug, make the ideal setting for brassware and brass accessories, making them an island of cultural influence within the living space.