

Building a Personal Manifesto

My image of a perfect world is a world where everyone is treated equally with kindness, regardless of their age, gender or background. A society where opportunities are fairly given to everyone without emphasizing on gender. Is there a perfect world? You may wonder if this is just a dream, as in reality, a perfect world does not exist as gender discrimination is very prominent in all walks of life around the world. I strongly believe that men and women are equal and should be given equal opportunities in various aspects of life. In this manifesto, I will be explaining why gender equality is important and what actions should be taken to help achieve equality.

Gender is, in a sense, a societal construct that refers to the assumptions or stereotypes that the public have about women's and men's qualities, abilities, and likely behaviours. Gender equality, on the other hand, is the idea that men, women, girls and boys, have equal conditions, treatment, and chances to reach their full potential, to exercise their human rights and dignity, and to contribute to and benefit from economic, social, cultural, and political growth to make the world a better place.

First, men and women should be given equal opportunities and treatment in everything that they do in life. This applies to all environments such as at work, education, and in society. Girls should have the same opportunity as boys to shape their future and make their own decisions. However, gender disparity in social institutions is created and maintained by concepts of masculinity and femininity, expectations of women and men, judgements of their behaviours, and mandated rules regarding women's and men's behaviour, among other things. This causes gender norms, attitudes, and stereotypes to be produced and reproduced in social and cultural settings, as well as in the organisations that organise them and the individuals who act within and outside of these institutions. From this, if anyone acts differently from what society considers to be normal or accepted, it leads to discrimination of the person's attitude and lifestyle. When women and girls face systematic discrimination, they are denied the well-deserved opportunity to fully realise their rights and utilise their resources.

Discrimination can happen at anytime and anywhere globally, it occurs at home, at work, in education, and in the division of household responsibilities. It occurs in local communities,

where traditional gender roles are maintained through standards for women's and men's participation in work and home life. Cultural norms include the assumption that women are expected to do house chores and work in the kitchen. In addition, the fact that violence against women is frequently justified. This is shown in rape cases where the blame is often pinpointed on the female victim for wearing revealing clothing that led to the incident instead of the male perpetrator.

Gender discrimination can also occur at the national level, where a lack of gender equality may be established in anti-women legislation and expressed in many kinds of cultural expression as well as the amount of involvement of women and men in politics and in boardrooms of businesses. In order to prevent more women and girls from being discriminated against and feeling inferior because of society's perception towards women, I believe that today's society should be more open-minded, inclusive to accept everyone as different individuals and not stick too much to general stereotypes.

Secondly, our gender should not be treated as a barrier to our potential. This is also known as gender-based constraint. It is the limitations that women and men encounter as a result of their gender. One example is women farmers in Africa may face restrictions such as not having title to their land due to their husbands being the head of their household, denied access to training due to male-dominated cooperative memberships, and being more linked to their houses, which prevents access to extension services. All of these would inhibit their potential as a farmer and it also denies them the right to their inheritance. With this, I believe that the appropriate authorities should implement measures to ensure that women have equal access to economic resources, including land and other forms of property, financial services, inheritance, and natural resources, in compliance with national laws.

As I see it, children should be taught about equality from a young age. Our society usually has an innocent impression on children, regardless of whether they are male or female but once they become old enough to understand how the world works, society's impression of them changes and it could have a negative effect on a child's mind. For a child who was once adored by society for their innocence, to suddenly feel the drastic change of attitude, it could be a traumatising

experience. In addition, gender bias is conditioned in children at an early age, based on the colour of their clothes or toys or even games which they play. For example, the colour blue is normally associated with boys and the colour pink is for girls and some parents even force a gender bias onto their children when they disallow their sons from playing with dollhouses because it is not masculine or prevent their daughters from roughhousing because it is not feminine and ladylike. This is why I strongly feel that children should learn and be aware of equality and the impressions that society has on men and women so that it would not come to a shock for them later. As a result, this could help to create a future generation that does not adhere to any current gender norms and is more accepting of different lifestyles and approaches.

Furthermore, I perceive that women should be given more opportunities in any decision-making process. Not only should women have the right to make decisions in the household, but we should also have the right to make decisions in political, economical and societal settings. According to global statistics from the United Nations, only 36.3% of women are being represented in local governments and 28.2% are being represented in managerial positions. The rest of the positions are all being held by men similar to Malaysia. The reason for this is quite simple, most people still have the 'boomer' mindset that women are incapable of making sound decisions. They think that women are very emotional and irrational when it comes to decision making which leads them to have the impression that women are incompetent. I would like to see a female Prime Minister for Malaysia. However, that is not the case as there are a lot of women who are currently thriving in their positions such as Jacinda Ardern, the Prime Minister of New Zealand, Kamala Harris, the Vice-President of the United States and many more.

Other than that, do you think girls should be encouraged to complete their secondary education? In many first world countries, that is the case. However, in other developing countries, especially in certain parts of Asia, there is a high percentage of girls who become school dropouts at the early age of 15 years old. In some cases, the parents are not able to afford their children's education so some of these students dropout of school and start working with the hopes of helping their parents to earn a living. Though, in other cases, the reason why a number of girls do not continue their education is because their parents believe that their daughter's only purpose is to serve their husbands and family. In this regard, the parents would encourage their daughters to

get married and this is where a lot of child marriages happen. Not only in certain Asian countries, but also in African countries, the rate of child marriages is substantially high. During the recent coronavirus lockdown in South Africa, there was a rise in cases of teen pregnancies as they experienced limitations to gain access to reproductive health services. It saddens me to see a lot of children lose out on achieving their dreams and are forced to start their own family before they even reach their adolescence. That is why I call onto society to start encouraging young girls all over the world, to go to school and complete their education in order to abolish the practice of early and child marriage.

Moreover, companies should be responsible for respecting women's rights in the workplace. Human rights, especially the rights of women and girls, are fundamental obligations for all businesses. Companies can additionally assist the empowerment of women and girls through core business, social investment, public policy participation, and collaborations, in addition to these basic obligations. Some examples of how companies can ensure that human rights are being respected is by paying equal salary, including benefits, for equal value labour, and try to pay all women and men a decent wage. Companies can also ensure that there is a gender balance in terms of staffing and also play an active role in preventing workplace harassment or discrimination by establishing a zero-tolerance policy for all forms of workplace violence, including verbal and physical abuse, and taking steps to avoid sexual harassment.

Additionally, I believe that women should have sexual and reproductive health rights. The right to sexual education, freedom from sexual abuse and compulsion, and the right to choose whether or not to have children are all examples of sexual rights. Access to contraception, including emergency contraception, menstrual and sanitary products, safe and legal abortions, and ensuring safe pregnancies and childbirth are all examples of reproductive rights. Sexual and reproductive health rights, on the other hand, deals with issues like ending female genital mutilation (FGM) and forced sterilisation, as well as avoiding sexually transmitted infections. Sexual and reproductive health rights are not only necessary for establishing gender equality and advancing women's rights, but they are also an important part of healthcare. They empower women to make decisions about their own bodies and sexuality on their own terms. They keep women safe, healthy, and dignified.

Take Europe for example, although abortion is currently legal in 39 European nations under certain conditions, several countries still have time constraints on performing abortions that finish around the first trimester, and abortions are still illegal in certain areas such as Malta. Not only that, according to the Contraception Atlas Index published by the European Parliamentary Forum for Sexual and Reproductive Rights (EPF), several European countries' national health systems still do not provide adequate reimbursement for contraceptive supplies or sufficient information on how and where to obtain them.

Furthermore, third-party consent requirements continue to be a barrier for women. This means they must first see a doctor, who will decide whether to allow them to use contraceptive methods and, if so, whether to write a prescription. This becomes a barrier as in some countries general healthcare is not always available. This adds to the stress because there is only so much time to get and use emergency contraception while it is still effective. With already limited access and complicated doctoral procedures that add to the financial burden, it's inevitable that such restrictions will disproportionately affect women in poverty, women with disabilities, and others. It is my belief that sexual and reproductive health rights need to be promoted as a part of healthcare and as a legal requirement with the help of national equality bodies. This is so that we can work towards ending the ostracization of girls and women in our society.

To top it off, there should be a balance of responsibility in unpaid care work between men and women. Women do at least two and a half times more unpaid home and care work than men, from cooking and cleaning to fetching water and firewood and caring for children and the elderly. As a result, they have less time to work for pay or work longer hours mixing paid and unpaid labour. Unpaid employment by women subsidises the cost of child care, which keeps families afloat, helps economies, and often compensates for a lack of social services. Despite this, it is rarely referred to as "work." Unpaid care and domestic work are estimated to account for 10% and 39% of Gross Domestic Product (GDP), respectively, and can contribute more to the economy than industry, commerce, or transportation departments. In order to expedite progress on women's economic empowerment, policies that provide services, social safety, and

basic infrastructure, policies that encourage men and women to share domestic and care duties and also generate more paid jobs in the care sector are urgently needed.

To conclude, these are only a few of the many issues concerning gender equality that are close to my heart and I am able to highlight in this essay. There are many more problems and challenges happening all around the world, which need to be addressed by many countries. Therefore, we should continue to work together and find solutions to ensure that women and men are treated equally and given equal opportunities in all aspects of life. Only then, can we achieve my perfect world where everyone is treated equally with kindness, regardless of their age, gender or background.

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