

Exceptional Women are Our History and Our Future:

Let's Envision Gender Equality-Nothing Else is Working from Jane Roberts and thanks to The Solutions Journal

Jane Roberts is someone who does envision a world of gender equality. The co-founder of 34 Million Friends and author of 34 Million Friends of the women of the world is an exceptional woman herself and we are always pleased to have her with us.

At the 2007 Women Deliver conference in London, The Lancet put out a special edition with this message on the cover: "Since the human race began, women have delivered for society. It is time now for the world to deliver for women."

I envision a world where people, men and women together, will deliver for women, who will climb over the barricades in a nonviolent struggle for enormous change. We have to make it happen. We need a peaceful, purposeful, stubborn, and obstinate revolution.

Gender inequality is the greatest moral challenge of our age. There has been a willful denial of girls' and women's full humanity by individuals, governments, religions, cultures, and customs.



We have to imagine a world where all people, men and women together, in equal partnership, with no artificial legal, cultural, religious, or economic barriers, work together for the greater good. We must imagine a world where all people, regardless of their gender, are judged, as Dr. Martin Luther King might have said, only by the content of their character.



Nothing else is working. To be pessimistic about the future is to be realistic. With food, water, energy, environmental, climate crises present and looming, we need all human beings to be educated and motivated to demand long-term solutions that won't be sacrificed on the altar of short-term and private gain. Wow, wouldn't that be revolutionary!

Envision a world where all female babies were welcomed as much as their male counterparts. This would mean an end to sex-selective abortion, female infanticide, and neglect of the girl child. This cultural shift would have enormous implications for both people and planet.



Envision a world where the education of all their citizens might be the first priority of governments. Universal education as encompassed by Millennium Development Goals two and three would affect many more girls and women than men and boys. The whole world is saying that girls' education is crucial. Educated, literate girls value themselves, marry later, marry "better," have fewer children, educate their children, and keep them healthy. They become educated women who participate in their communities and are empowered to earn both income and respect. Country-specific budgets must prioritize quality education for girls. If this is done for girls, boys will benefit, too.

In important ways, education leads to health. What if every girl and woman on the planet were given access to health? For instance, what if every baby were guaranteed to have a birth weight of seven to eight pounds and to be AIDS-free? That would give every baby a good start. Imagine the revolution in health that this guarantee would imply. It would imply a world commitment to every aspect of reproductive health. It would imply that early marriage might disappear. It would mean the end of female genital mutilation. It would probably mean that every pregnancy was wanted, that prenatal care was universal, that every birth was safe, that obstetric fistula and maternal morbidity and mortality would disappear. It would mean that family planning would be universally available, as promised in human rights documents—particularly at the International Conference on Population and Development in Cairo, Egypt, in 1994

The health benefits of family planning are so vast as to be almost invisible. 200 million women lack access to family planning. The underlying cause of this dereliction of duty is gender inequality. The Cairo Consensus has been more honored in the breach than in the

implementation.

Fulfilling the Cairo Consensus to the letter would mean that the huge toll of unsafe abortion (70,000 deaths and 5 million injuries, hemorrhages, and infections every year) would disappear. The acronym PAC (post-abortion care) would disappear. The fact that abortion remains illegal and that family planning remains controversial, especially in the developing world, results from gender inequality, from women's disempowerment politically and culturally, from enormous hypocrisy on the part of power structures, and from, in my view, the pernicious influence of certain religious persuasions. When the world takes care of women, women take care of the world. We have to envision a world that takes care of women.

Let's be honest—for once! Africa is on a path toward a humanitarian disaster. Its population, if present predictions hold true, will nearly double by 2050, from 1 billion to 2 billion people. Women do most of the work in Africa, and men make most of the decisions. Forty percent of Africa's children are undernourished. If maternal mortality is a measure of the African continent's well-being, then Africa fails. If infant and child mortality are measures of health or lack thereof, then Africa fails. Africa does not take care of its women.

Beyond Africa, the countries of the world that are the most unstable and have the highest misery index, and whose people are the most poverty-stricken, the least educated, and the least healthy, are those where women's status is low.

On February 28, 2010, on the eve of the two-week session of the 45-member U.N. Commission on the Status of Women, Thoraya Obaid, executive director of the United Nations Population Fund, said, "We can't continue to pay lip service to gender equality.... World leaders should not just say they are committed, but must prove their commitment with tangible allocations of budgets and people.... When men and women have a respectful relationship in which they recognize each other as equal partners, men will benefit as much as women." That is the whole point. Gender equality would achieve enormous tangible benefits for people, the planet, and peace.

I do not believe that change will come from the top without pressure from the bottom, from the grassroots, from both women and men. Media attention to this profound issue is the key to mobilizing world opinion. Come on, CNN! Stop twittering and dithering. Come on, Bono. Write us a song. Come on, peoples of the world! Ponder the prophetic words of Stephen Lewis, the UN special envoy for HIV/AIDS in Africa: "I challenge you...to enter the fray against gender inequality. There is no more honorable or productive calling. There is nothing of greater import in this world. All roads lead from women to social change."

And those of the late Dr. Allan Rosenfield, a world-renowned champion of women: "It is not enough to know for the sake of knowing. We have the responsibility to act on what we know. Acting on knowledge is an imperative. And that imperative we can truly delight in."

At 3:00 a.m. on the morning of July 23, 2002, I lay in my bed lamenting how Colin Powell had sold his soul the day before by announcing that the George W. Bush administration was not going to release \$34 million to the United Nations Population Fund—for what I knew to be totally spurious reasons. After all, the whole world knows that UNFPA takes care of the world's women.

My thought was to ask for one dollar from 34 million Americans. It was time for me to take a stand. I envisioned, and still do envision, that 34 million people—not only Americans, but people from around the world who hear about 34 Million Friends—would eagerly comply. Grassroots at its purest and finest!

The world is out of balance, careening toward an uncontrollable unknown. Gender equality in education, health, and the opportunity to contribute to family, community, and world is at the very core of any acceptable future. So I repeat: We need people, men and women together, who will deliver for women, who will climb over the barricades in a nonviolent struggle for enormous change. We need a peaceful, purposeful, stubborn, and obstinate revolution.

Envision gender equality. Make it happen.