

# Women's rights improve nations



GREG QUERAYNNE

**"Improving women's rights ameliorates the living standards of a society, and when women are given greater access to education and work, and more political influence, society as a whole benefits again. There's an increasingly clear relationship between empowering women and development."**

This past Saturday, 8 March, people throughout the world celebrated the 97th annual International Women's Day, a time to inspire women and commemorate their achievements.

The importance of International Women's Day can't be overstated. It reminds us of the particular challenges faced by women in all parts of the world as they continue to be victims of gender-based hardships and violence. In fact, globally, you're more likely to be impoverished, face violence, and have less political and social influence if you're a woman.

70 per cent of those living in extreme poverty—earning less than \$1 per day—are women, and some 1400 women die everyday in pregnancy and childbirth. Which is why changing this situation by granting women equal political, economic, and social rights, as well as equal access to public services such as health and education, has such great potential to profoundly transform the lives of countless people throughout the world—and not just those of women.

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Education is indispensable to a country's development. Moreover, educating women has been shown to have a critical impact on raising a country's living standards. Isobel Coleman, a senior fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations, succinctly explains the important link between women's education and development. "Educated women," Coleman writes, "have fewer children; provide better nutrition, health, and education to their families; experience significantly lower child mortality; and generate more income than women with little or no schooling. Investing to educate them thus creates a virtuous cycle for their community."

It's not surprising, then, that third on the list of the UN's Millennium Development Goals is to "promote gender equality and empower women," with a focus on eliminating gender disparity in education. However, despite the recognition of this relationship, of the 100 million school-aged children who are currently not in school across the world, most are girls.

Governments, international organizations, and many non-governmental organizations have recognized and started to embrace the important relationship between women's rights and development, and have rightfully incorporated gender into their development projects. For example, when the Canadian government provides foreign aid, it requires that receiving countries produce an analysis detailing how women and men will be affected. Similarly, the World Bank requires that its activities in low-income countries are "responsive to the differing needs, constraints and interests of males and females." Although these are welcome steps in the right direction, international actors must do more to augment women's rights in all parts of the world.

International Women's Day celebrates how far we have come in acknowledging women's rights, and reminds us of the importance of continuing the international struggle so that women in all countries may have equal life opportunities. However, it must always be remembered that doing so is not only essential for improving women's living standards, but is crucial for advancing countries' development prospects and eliminating world poverty.

# Don't look at me—I voted



JAKE PRINS

in a couple more times and voted for all of my neighbours as well. But it wasn't enough.

The joke's been made many times over that a bale of hay could get elected in Alberta if it slapped on a cowboy hat and ran under the PC banner, and the trend seems to have continued this year. This is in stark contrast to the voters of other parties, of course, as I'm sure all non-PC voters are fluently versed in all of their respective parties' policies. However, this so called "informedness" makes it all the more embarrassing for us non-PC voters (and most certainly the non-PC candidates themselves) upon receiving a sobering dose of reality with the realization that our candidate received 8000 less votes than the hay bale.

I'm apparently not the only one who feels a little disappointed by the results, judging by the reactions of a select number of irate people emailing the CBC on election night with insightful comments such as "it's clear now: Albertans are just plain stupid," as well as my personal favorite, "I'm moving." But at some point, you have to ask yourself who the stupid ones really are: the people who keep electing the same government year after year, or those of us who kid ourselves into thinking that this is the year things might actually change?

But I'm not giving up. In preparation for the next election, I'm asking all of my friends who they voted for and making a list of their answers so that, next time, I can vote correctly for them. I encourage all of you to do the same—especially considering how all you would need is their addresses. Remember, if you're not cheating, you're not trying.

Well, the provincial elections are over, and I'm disappointed for two reasons. First of all, on the drive home from work I apparently missed out on the section of the CBC's "coverage" where they read emails from children comparing Ed Stelmach to their uncle. Secondly, it seems that my suggestion of standardized testing on all of the ballots wasn't implemented this time around. I'm disappointed because it could have fixed the problem of the majority of people voting for the wrong people—again.

The proceedings started out alright, but quickly took a turn for the worse. I turned on the TV to find the early results showing a 1-1 deadlock; however, this didn't last long, and things quickly went downhill from there. Pretty soon I felt like I was watching disaster coverage on the news where you keep wanting to get up and turn off the TV, but you just can't look away. The CBC had projected a PC majority government early on in the night—although they should really be giving credit to Rick Mercer, who "projected" the same thing about four weeks ago.

I tried my best, you guys, I really did. I made sure that I went in and voted for my candidate of choice (after getting educated on the issues, of course) and after I didn't even get asked for ID, just my name and address, I went back



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