

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to explore the possibility of multilateral diplomacy, as an instrument, to advance women's rights in the realm of international relations. Multilateral diplomacy has proven to be an effective instrument for managing order and change in the international arena quite effectively. The United Nations, as an international organisation, provides a style of diplomatic interaction that is available for public scrutiny. Sensitive issues, such as the advancement of the status of women, have been prioritised on the global agenda and could be subsequently incorporated into the policies of participating states. The diversity of role players attending an international conference is another positive feature of multilateral diplomacy. By virtue of its nature, multilateral diplomacy is therefore an effective instrument for focussing globally on the issue of women's rights.

The position of women in international political theory is dealt with by theorists from various perspectives. The feminist theorists ensure that social and political debates on the authority, legitimacy, democracy and universal human rights are considered from a woman's perspective. Where women are and where they should be are two questions that are equally important and crucial to dealing with the advancement of women's rights on the global agenda. Global issues, such as war, have had a shift in perspective from security-awareness to humanitarian-awareness. In its partnership with civil society, the United Nations as a diplomatic instrument, has become a voice for women internationally.

The patriarchic system of apartheid in South Africa managed to entrench discrimination within its legislation based on both race and gender. A particular focus is the national machinery set up within South Africa to ensure that what was agreed on to at the international conferences makes a difference to the lives of women in South Africa.

This paper intends to build on the existing body of knowledge currently available on the status of women in international relations theory. From a diplomatic perspective, it examines how the instrument of multilateral diplomacy has contributed to the advancement of women's rights.