

## **UNITED NATIONS WOMEN (UNW)**

### **Introduction**

*The United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, also known as UN Women, is a United Nations entity working for the empowerment of women. UN Women became operational in January 2011. President of Chile Michelle Bachelet was the inaugural Executive Director, and Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka is the current Executive Director. As with UNIFEM previously, UN Women is a member of the United Nations Development Group.*

### **Topic 1 : Addressing the rise of poverty among women**

### **Introduction**

Poverty is known to be one of the biggest global issues mankind has in this age. poverty is a state or condition in which a person or community lacks the financial resources and essentials for a minimum standard of living. Poverty means that the income level from employment is so low that basic human needs can't be met. Poverty-stricken people and families might go without proper housing, clean water, healthy food, and medical attention.

Sadly, statistics have shown that approximately 70 % of the world's poor are women. Especially with the coronavirus pandemic raging out of doors, the poverty gap between men and women has widened alarmingly. The root cause, of course, goes back to gender inequality that is still very evident in various sectors and in daily life even in these modern times. The effects of sexism on institutional structures and across society limit the employment opportunities available to women, availability of caregiving supports, access to public social assistance programs, and more, leading to higher rates of poverty among women, particularly women of color, compared with men.

### **History**

According to the United Nations, the rise of women, also known as the feminization of poverty, dates back to the 1970s and became widely spoken issue in the 1990s. The 'feminization of poverty' was first noted by Diana Pearce in the late 1970s, and since that time, various scholars have examined trends in men's and women's poverty rates.

In the modern era we live today, the ratio of men's and women's poverty rate is still wide. Various factors such as the income gaps, social and cultural exclusions that contribute to the feminization of poverty still exists in the current society. As of 2020, the global impact from the Covid-19 pandemic has taken a negative toll on women's economic situation. The poverty rate for women was expected to decrease by 2.7 per cent between 2019 and 2021, but projections now point to an increase of 9.1 per cent due to the pandemic.

## Key Terms

- **Poverty** - a state or condition in which a person or community lacks the financial resources and essentials for a minimum standard of living
- **Feminization** - the shift in gender roles and sex roles in a society, group, or organization towards a focus upon the feminine
- **Femonomics**- a term made and licenced by Reeta Wolfsohn defined as “the gender of money” where the income and expenditure of money favours a certain gender.
- **Female-headed households** - Household in which an adult female is the sole or main income producer and decision-maker.

## Causes

- **Wide income gap between gender**

As the years pass, the difference between the earnings of women and men has shrunk, but only by an incremental amount each year. There remains a disparity in how men and women are paid, even when all compensable factors are controlled, meaning that women are still being paid less than men due to no attributable reason other than gender. Statistics have shown that an average woman in the uncontrolled group loses \$900 000 over a lifetime due to this issue. Therefore, it can be said that the gender wage gap is a significant contributing factor to women's disproportionate experience of poverty.

- **Education**

Factors of the feminization of poverty goes back to the inequality against women and girls to receive education. This also include the difference the way boys and girls get treated in households, girls not getting the education desired, increasing dropout rates from school for girls, the need in pushing girls to be married off quickly, girls having no right or control over fertility and girls choosing prostitution as an escape. This portrays the inequality and the difference between the situations girls and boys suffer. The lack of education fuels poverty in women, especially those forced to lead single mother households.

- **Single mother households**

A single mother is a person who lives with a child or children and who does not have a spouse or live-in partner. A woman becomes a single mother when they undergo divorce, break-up, abandonment, death of the other parent, childbirth by a single person or single-person adoption. Statistics have shown that there is a continuing increase of single mother households in the world, which results in higher percentages of women in poverty. The inability of the single mothers, especially in LEDCs to support the household due to factors that are also related to discrimination makes them the poorest women in society.

## **Solutions**

- **Raise the minimum wage**

According to the Center of American Progress, women make up for about two-thirds of all minimum-wage workers while nearly two-thirds of mothers are breadwinners or co-breadwinners for their families. Therefore, increasing the minimum wage will go a long way in aiding women out of poverty. The current minimum wage as of 2020 is \$7.25 per hour, which means someone working full time, year round earns only \$15,080 a year. That is below the poverty threshold for any family with children and not far above the poverty line for a single person. Raising the minimum wage can help hard-working women better support their families, improving poverty among women as a whole.

- **Organising training projects to help women across the globe**

Poverty among women escalates due to the lack of sufficient financial support to obtain basic needs. This links back to the shortfall of education to make them qualified for a decent paying job. Training projects function to help women across the world, especially in LEDCs to gain the knowledge and skills they need to participate in the economy and in their country's development such as agricultural and entrepreneurship skills. By doing so, these women will have the opportunity to pursue these fields, generating income to support their livelihood.

## **Past UN Actions**

- A/RES/70/219 Resolution adopted by General Assembly on Women In Development (15 February 2016) <https://undocs.org/sp/A/RES/70/219>
- Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action in Advancing Women's Rights, inclusive on women in poverty (15 September 1995) [https://www.un.org/en/events/pastevents/pdfs/Beijing\\_Declaration\\_and\\_Platform\\_for\\_Action.pdf](https://www.un.org/en/events/pastevents/pdfs/Beijing_Declaration_and_Platform_for_Action.pdf)

## **Questions to Consider**

- Why is poverty focused more on women?
- What are the repercussions faced by the rising level of poverty among women and how can we address it?
- How does the Covid-19 pandemic play a role in widening the gap of poverty between men and women?
- Could gender inequality be said to be the root cause of feminization of poverty?

### Links to further information

- [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Feminization\\_of\\_poverty#:~:text=Women%20are%20more%20likely%20to,disadvantaged%20groups%20on%20the%20planet](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Feminization_of_poverty#:~:text=Women%20are%20more%20likely%20to,disadvantaged%20groups%20on%20the%20planet).
- <https://www.sciencedirect.com/topics/psychology/feminization-of-poverty>
- <https://www.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2020/8/press-release-covid-19-will-widen-poverty-gap-between-women-and-men#:~:text=The%20data%2C%20summarized%20in%20a,whom%20are%20women%20and%20girls>.
- <https://www.sciencedirect.com/topics/psychology/feminization-of-poverty>

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- S.S. McLanahan, M.J. Carlson. "Feminization of Poverty". *Science Direct*, 2001, <https://www.sciencedirect.com/topics/psychology/feminization-of-poverty>
- "Does Money Have Gender?". *KBK Wealth Connection*, 12 June 2009, <http://www.kbkwealthconnection.com/women-and-money/does-money-have-a-gender/#:~:text=Femonomics%20is%20defined%20as%20%E2%80%9Cthe,Reeta%20made%20up%20and%20licensed.&text=This%20is%20true%20in%20many,to%20clothes%20to%20health%20care>.
- J. Chen. "Poverty". *Investopedia*, 4 September 2020, <https://www.investopedia.com/terms/p/poverty.asp#:~:text=Poverty%20is%20a%20state%20or,needs%20can't%20be%20met>.

## **Topic 2 : Improving the political participation of woman**

### **Introduction**

Political participation includes a broad range of activities through which people develop and express their opinions on the world and how it is governed, and try to take part in and shape the decisions that affect their lives. These activities range from developing thinking about social issues at the individual or family level, joining groups and organizations, and campaigning at the local, regional or national level, to the process of formal politics, such as voting, joining a political party, or standing for elections.

However, when we think about our political leaders, it is undeniable that more men come to mind than women. Studies have shown that women do not even make up 50 % of the men in the political scene. When we talk about women's political participation, it is easy for us to imagine the empty seats around the decision-making table, and a little more difficult to picture the many obstacles and challenges women face to get into those seats. Even in this age, the stigma against women in politics is still alive and well. They continue to face structural, socioeconomic, institutional and cultural barriers.

### **History**

The political participation of women has evolved in the course of history. The first nation to grant women the right to vote was New Zealand in 1893. As of 2015, women in every country in the world have the right to vote, ending with Saudi Arabia. Today, several countries are led by females and some countries, such as Finland, also have a cabinet dominated by women. These achievements have been possible due to the gender equality measures that have been carried out. In the Arab region where progress has been slowest, the adoption of quotas by 12 countries helped increase the percentage of women in parliaments from 10 to 18 percent between 2012 to 2017.

However, the rise of women in the political scene is still minimal. Women are still underrepresented in politics, parliaments and public life. Women make up less than 23 percent of parliamentarians, with an average of 18 percent in the Arab region, while men make up more than 77 percent. Attitudes towards women candidates are still largely characterized by deeply ingrained stereotypes, and political opponents will often use those stereotypes to question women's capabilities.

### **Key Terms**

- **Political Participation** - Political participation includes a broad range of activities through which people develop and express their opinions on the world and how it is governed, and try to take part in and shape the decisions that affect their lives.
- **Suffrage** - the right to vote in political elections
- **Female Legislators** - a member of a group of people who together have the power to make laws

### **Struggles of Women in Politics**

- **Electoral systems**

Electoral systems in general are not favourable to women candidates. Among the political obstacles that women face, the following feature prominently is the lack of party support, For example, limited financial support for women candidates, limited access to political networks, and the more stringent standards and qualifications applied to women, lack of access to well-developed education and training systems for women's leadership in general, and for orienting young women towards political life.

- **Gender inequality**

Gender inequality within families, inequitable division of labor within households, and cultural attitudes about gender roles further subjugate women and serve to limit their representation in public life. Societies that are highly patriarchal often have local power structures that make it difficult for women to combat. Thus, their interests are often not represented or under-represented.

- **Sex stereotypes**

Sex stereotyping has been a major obstacle in women's general representation in media. In the case of women's representation in government, it says that sex stereotyping begins at an early age and affects the public's disposition on which genders are fit for public office. Socialization agents can include family, school, higher education, mass media, and religion. Each of these agents plays a pivotal role in either fostering a desire to enter politics, or dissuading one to do so.

## **Solutions**

- **Legislation**

In Kenya, a woman's rights activist named Asha Ali was threatened and beaten by three men for standing as a candidate in front of her kids and elderly mother. Even in early 2016, a 14-year-old girl was kidnapped from her bed late at night and raped as revenge for her mother's victory in local elections in India, which is an example of sexual violence. All of this evidence suggests that the big hole in the legislation against women's safety induces the political environment where men try to suppress women whenever they try to raise their voices in politics for making positive change for women's empowerment. Measures to ensure women welfare not only creates a safe environment for women, as they can improve the political participation of women.

- **Motivational programs and education**

According to the studies by American University in 2011, they reveal that women are 60% less likely than men to believe that they are not qualified to take political responsibility. These are the results of the stereotypes drilled into their minds at young ages, as well as the manner as they are viewed by society. It is believed that motivational programs that can boost their self esteem to break down the social barriers that are put before them can go a long way in improving women's political participation. Males too, play a vital role in ensuring the future of women at the decision-making table. Education towards boys in school are deemed to be able to shape their thought process at a young age to treat females as equals and with the respect every human deserves.

## **Past UN Actions**

- A/RES/58/142 Resolution adopted by the General Assembly on Women and Political Participation (10 February 2004) <https://undocs.org/en/A/RES/58/142>
- A/RES/66/130 Resolution adopted by the General Assembly on Women and Political Participation (19 March 2012) <https://undocs.org/en/A/RES/66/130>
- S/RES/1325 Resolution adopted by the Security Council on Increasing Women's role in political decision-making with regard to conflict prevention and resolution in warring areas (31 October 2000) [https://undocs.org/S/RES/1325\(2000\)](https://undocs.org/S/RES/1325(2000))

## **Questions to Consider**

- Why are women held back by society in political participation and what are the systemic factors?
- In a society where women were considered unfit to vote, now has female legislators that lead nations. What led to this?
- Why is the growth of the number of women in politics exceptionally slow? Are the measures taken unfruitful?

## **Links to further research**

- <https://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/blog/2020/the-struggle-for-women-in-politics-continues.html>
- <https://www.inclusivesecurity.org/2014/08/20/5-ways-enhance-womens-political-leadership-africa/>
- <https://www.malaymail.com/news/what-you-think/2020/10/21/women-in-malaysian-politics-are-politicians-missing-a-point-yanitha-meena-l/1914822>
- [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Women\\_in\\_government](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Women_in_government)

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- H. Krull. "Women in Politics : Challenges and Opportunities" International Foundation for Electoral Systems, 21 March 2019, <https://www.ifes.org/news/women-politics-challenges-and-opportunities>