

# ECONOMIC & SOCIAL COUNCIL



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# ECONOMIC & SOCIAL COUNCIL

Dear Delegates,

Welcome to the Economic and Social Council of Cambridge Model United Nations 2012!

Economic and Social Council is established by the United Nations with the intent of fostering economic growth and development in order to ensure global stability and co-operation. During the course of 3 days you will have the chance to experience the debate and diplomacy that goes into international policymaking. You have a daunting task ahead of you, and it all begins here. Our training & research team has spent countless hours researching and compiling the following study guide, but there is still much work to be done. You must continue to grapple with various issues ranging from ensuring gender equality to solving Challenges of Sustainable and Equitable Progress.

On 5<sup>th</sup>, 6<sup>th</sup> & 7<sup>th</sup> of April, you will take the place of international diplomats. But do not let this be the culmination of your consideration of global issues. The aim of Cambridge Model United Nations is to foster the next generation of leaders, a goal that is only possible if you continue to pursue your love of international diplomacy after the conference has ended.

These few days of careful deliberation of international issues will not only help you develop your public speaking and diplomacy skills, but also allow you to grow as a person. As such, I am determined to ensure that you have the best experience possible. Please feel free to contact me before the conference with comments or concerns, or just to say hello.

All the best!

Sincerely,

*Areebah Shakeel*

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Director

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## ***INTRODUCTION***

The world's economic, social and environmental challenges are ECOSOC's concern. A founding UN Charter body established in 1946, the Council is the place where such issues are discussed and debated, and policy recommendations issued. As such, ECOSOC has broad responsibility for some 70% of the human and financial resources of the entire UN system, including 14 specialized agencies, 9 "functional" commissions, and five regional commissions.

The Council also receives reports from 11 UN funds and programmes. The Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) serves as the central forum for discussing international economic and social issues, and for formulating policy recommendations addressed to Member States and the United Nations system. It is responsible for:

- promoting higher standards of living, full employment, and economic and social progress;
- identifying solutions to international economic, social and health problems;
- facilitating international cultural and educational cooperation;
- encouraging universal respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms.

## TOPIC AREA A: GENDER EQUALITY

### *Statement of the Problem*

The first topic to be discussed is MDG 3 - Gender Equity and Women's Empowerment. Under the Millennium Declaration, the United Nations General Assembly (UN GA) gave *Gender Equality* the designation of Millennium Development Goal (MDGs) to be achieved by 2015. As we are in the middle of year 2012, it is necessary to evaluate the progress made, consider what alterations should be made, and decide upon a more effective route of action. The first target set by the GA toward establishing equality amongst genders is to "eliminate gender disparity in primary and secondary education, preferably by 2005, and in all levels of education no later than 2015." The goal of eliminating enrolment disparity in primary and secondary education by 2005 remains unachieved. Girls' enrolment rate in primary school as compared to boys has increased over the last 10 years; however, in many areas, girls still do not have equal primary school access.

However, this statistical disparity exists, even in spheres other than education. Very often, women are not given the same employment opportunities as men and receive lower salaries as well. Violence against women is openly accepted in many parts of the world. To ensure we reach any of the MDGs, it is necessary to practice gender equality and treat women with respect.

Taking an average enrolment ratio across developing countries, there were 94 girls for every 100 boys with primary school access in 2006. Primary school access refers to the availability of primary school education to the children in question. It is measured as a combination of the proximity to a school and its

affordability, coupled with enrolment statistics. Developed countries seem to have a balanced girl-boy ratio. However, enrolment trends do show that girls' education has shown more development than boy's education, i.e. the fraction by which enrolment has increased is greater for girls than for boys. There is still a need to redefine the first target of this MDG in order to attain gender equality in education by 2015 at the very least. A recent publication of the UN also confirmed that this target is unlikely to be achieved so soon. Only 18 countries are likely to even out their enrolment statistics between 2005 and 2015.

The ratio of female employees is woefully disproportionate, with almost 80% of all female workers in the Southern Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa employed in unstable, vulnerable jobs. Between women and men, the gap in employment is huge. In 2006, only 39% of employees in non-agriculture wage employment in the world were female. Even this statistic is misleading because it has been raised by the percentages in the developed world, where females make 46% of such employment, and the Commonwealth of Independent States, where they make up 51%. The Commonwealth of Independent States is the only region in which women make up a majority. While most nations have shown more and more women rising to managerial positions and paid work outside of agriculture, the situation in Northern Africa and Southeast Asia remains unchanged. Women still face barriers to higher paid jobs across the globe. Various jobs continue to be gender-specific and are considered inappropriate for women, leaving them with employment that is regarded as inferior and devoid of power.

Female representation in politics adheres to the same trend as those in education and employment. It has been on the rise, but slowly. The number of seats held by women in lower level parliaments in the world has shown a marked

increase in 2006 as compared to 2000. Despite this, women are generally absent from the highest administrative positions. In 2008, only 8 out of the 192 members of the United Nations had female heads of state. Since 2000, the proportion of seats for women in parliaments only increased from 13.5 to 17.9 per cent. Women occupy at least 30 per cent of parliamentary seats in 20 countries, although none of these countries are in Asia.

Violence against women is still a major obstacle in the goal of achieving gender equality. Studies show that incidents of gender violence can result in loss of household income equivalent to 25-30 percent of the monthly income of poor households. All the information above is tied together. Due to prejudices and outdated beliefs, women are kept away from education and mostly employed in unpaid household work. This results in their absence in high-level positions in management or governance. Many national laws give women lesser rights than men. As recently as 2005 were women in Mozambique given the legal right to divorce, create pre-nuptial agreements and inherit property. Problems such as lack of water and sanitation also affect education and employment, because the onus is generally on females to attend to those tasks.

It is necessary to define the goal of gender equality and consider newer or more comprehensive targets in order to achieve this MDG by 2015. Expelling parities in education between men and women completely is impossible unless we can guarantee equal opportunity to women. In order to do this, women's rights must be protected and old prejudices must be replaced. Furthermore, it is necessary to consider all manifestations of gender inequality that exist. The committee will also need to tackle the issue of how culture ties in with gender equity. Different nations have widely varying ideas of what constitutes equality

between genders, and whether such an aspiration is in fact necessary. The committee should assess the need to establish certain standards for gender equality that member nations must adhere to and what these might be. Also, the committee should ascertain the need for disincentives to prevent people from violating women's rights and recommend penalties against defaulters.

There is a need to set a more comprehensive standard for worldwide gender equity. This goes beyond the information that can be provided through school enrolment statistics. There are countries in which women might be educated but are not allowed to drive on public roads. *The committee should define what gender equity means as a MDG, and what qualifies as worldwide equal treatment of men and women.*

## ***History***

Discrimination against women has existed for centuries. As historian Eileen Edna Power states in her book *Medieval Woman*, "The position of women is one thing in theory, another in legal position, yet another in everyday life." They have been treated as second-class citizens in almost every country in the world and are still treated this way in some. The inferiority of women to men has unfortunately found root in many interpretations of religions. Ideology and attitude are shaped by religion and culture, and in our world the subjugation of women is deeply ingrained in both. It is not a problem that is limited to a particular region or economic backdrop; rather, it has manifested itself in every sphere of life. To provide a complete history of the world's women is impossible. It is not an isolated conflict in one particular region, but a problem that has raged for hundreds of years across the earth. There is no easily identifiable single cause.

Every country has its own unique history, and the manner in which women are treated in a particular region depends greatly on the region's social and cultural norms.

Most of the world's major religions retain some patriarchal characteristics, ranging from the exclusion of women from clergy or priesthood to forbidding women from entering certain areas of worship. These religious norms come to influence social customs. The male child is favoured in many ways in many nations in South and East Asia. These seemingly small prejudices have far-reaching consequences. In South Asia, this preference has in the past resulted in greater respect toward male progeny and a general consideration of women as inferior. This in turn led to the rise of practices such as female foeticide and infanticide, child marriage, and barring girls from education and employment opportunities.

In Europe, in the early Middle Ages, the clergy and aristocracy managed to impose its view on the common public, before it could form its own opinion on the matter. She was inferior not because of who she was as an individual, but solely because of her gender. A woman was considered subordinate to her husband, and he had the right to "correct her when she was disobedient."

In the Middle East, treatment of women still remains a matter of debate between historians. In other places in the world, the supposed inferiority of women has led to devastating practices that would seem inhumane to an outside observer. In South Asia, the preference for male progeny, the idea that a woman's identity is tied to her husband and the traditional role of the woman as the homemaker define how women were perceived. Female children were considered a burden, as they were considered incapable of earning an income



and weddings were also an expense to the bride's family. These things have changed, but most individuals continue to hold the mindset that women are inferior in some way. In Africa, physical mutilation of women has been rampant. In several parts of the world, women have been forced to undertake dangerous and crippling measures to appear more attractive. From wearing impossibly high necklaces to make their necks appear longer in Africa, to binding their feet so that they remain small and 'beautiful' in China, the best interests of women have often been swept aside to ensure that the men to whom they are subordinated remain satisfied. The notion of the feminine ideal varies across the planet, and causes further projection of patriarchal expectations onto women. It is considered necessary to live up to these standards, suppressing the individual desires and ambitions of the women that get caught up in these societal prejudices.

All of these beliefs have translated into the problems we tackle today to give women their rightful place in the world. Even if some of these practices in particular have been stopped, the underlying mentality still remains ingrained in the psyche of many people around the world. It is because women are not considered worthy of education that girls are not educated. There seems to be no place for it in a life of doing household chores and raising children. Because women are considered inferior to men, they are not allowed to move to the upper levels in professional spheres and kept away from political leadership. Because of all of these reasons, women do not have the power to claim their rights, and continue to struggle for equality. *It is imperative that we address the issue of feelings and attitudes while also tackling the practical constraints – for both are integral parts if we are to achieve gender equality.*

## Current Situation

### *Education and Enrolment*

The current situation gives us several reasons to hope. There has been considerable, and sometimes, even shocking progress along the path to gender equality. The first target set for gender equality as an MDG dealt with education standards. It called nations to “eliminate gender disparity in primary and secondary education, preferably by 2005, and in all levels of education no later than 2015”. Most actions under Goal 1 have been towards achieving this particular target. However, even parities in education are multi-faceted and have several factors tied to them. There is a need to simultaneously resolve the problems of prejudices against women and the suppression of their rights, along with ensuring education. Education and the traditional role of women are linked and form a vicious cycle, with a lack of education holding women back and a traditional view of their role preventing them from seeking an education. While the goal of providing equal access to primary and secondary education still has not been achieved worldwide, there have been several notable success stories in the last few years. In places like Southern and Western Asia that have been characterized by poor female enrolment in schools in the past, there has been marked improvement. In 2006, the school enrolment ratio was 85 girls to every 100 boys, up from 77 in 2000 for Southern Asia. There are several stigmas associated with female children in these parts of the world and education is often considered unnecessary for them. However, to still see such improvement is extremely heartening. The enrolment ratios in areas such as East and Southeast Asia and Latin America and the Caribbean are favoured towards girls rather than boys. Algeria is another country where parity between the genders has been

achieved at the primary school level, and where the proportion of girls exceeds the proportion of boys at the secondary and higher education levels. While this is encouraging for the female population, it is slightly worrying when considered from the male perspective.

In a few regions around the world, there has been a decrease in the general school enrolment ratios in 2006 from 2000. Sub-Saharan Africa went from 82 to 80, Oceania from 91 to 88 and also in the Commonwealth of Independent States. These decreases can be attributed to living conditions in certain areas. In Sub-Saharan Africa, girls in particular are affected by drought, food shortages, armed conflict, poverty, child labour, HIV and AIDS. They not only bear the direct effects of these problems but must also shoulder extra responsibility by doing work to keep the household functioning. A high grade retention rate coupled with low retention within school rates has also contributed to lowering the ratio. Meanwhile, the situation regarding secondary and tertiary school enrolment for girls is dramatically different than that of primary school. Due to early marriages, higher fees, and a lack of sanitation facilities, drop-out rates for girls are extremely high.

But sustainable solutions to this problem are possible, as illustrated by a project undertaken by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. The foundation recently awarded \$19 million to a United Nations Development Program (UNDP) – supported project that used low-cost technology to boost the productivity and income of female farmers in Burkina Faso, Mali, and Senegal, three of the least developed countries in Africa. The project's major undertaking is a multi-functional platform consisting of a diesel-run engine mounted on a steel frame, to which a wide array of processing equipment is attached, including a cereal mill,

husker, battery charger, and joinery and carpentry tools. Platforms such as this provide electricity for lighting and refrigeration, as well as mechanical power for agro-processing and pumping clean water. These platforms would also perform the milling and husking of sorghum, millet, maize and other grains. This is a particularly tedious, time-consuming task that was previously performed by women and girls, using a mortar and pestle or a grinding stone. Women were also responsible for collecting firewood and fetching water, which required an even greater amount of their time. Women started devoting the free time they now had, thanks to the platform technology, to literacy courses and income-generating activities, such as establishing small agro-business enterprises. After a few years, a majority of surveyed women in platform-equipped villages have tripled their revenues. Having being freed from the most time consuming of their activities, women have been allowed to obtain education and be gainfully employed, as their household responsibilities were carried out by these platforms. Some 94 percent became literate, compared to 62 percent of women living in villages without platforms.

### *Gainful Employment and Political Representation*

An ever-increasing number of women are receiving gainful employment outside of the agricultural sector. Around the world, women now make up 40% of the workforce engaged in non-agricultural employment as of 2006, which is a step up from 35% in 1991. But when we break down the averages by region, women in the developing world, approximately 66 percent, are largely self-employed or engaged in unpaid family work. Also, women tend to be employed in short-term or seasonal jobs, depriving them of the benefits associated with job stability. Prejudices and stereotypes continue to plague the female component of

the labour force, limiting women to jobs considered ‘inferior.’ However, progress is being made and about one sixth of bilateral aid is being focused on women’s development, enabling them to seek out better employment.

In politics, women still remain under-represented in governing bodies. The percentage of seats allotted to females in parliaments across the world is higher now than it was in the past; and in January 2008, the global proportion of parliamentary seats held by women reached a high of nearly 18%. However, this number continues to fluctuate and global averages conceal the differences between regions. There are success stories. Women constitute 40% or more of the parliaments of five nations: Rwanda at 48.8%, followed by Sweden with 47%, Cuba at 43.2%, Finland at 41.5% and Argentina at 40%.<sup>19</sup> In another 20 countries, women hold more than 30% of seats in parliaments; however, none of these countries are in Asia. However, this progress is not mirrored in all nations. The differences in proportions are not incidental; they are usually a result of well-designed strategies, such as electoral quotas. There are places where the new strategies and encouragement given to women has shown magnificent results. Rwanda’s constitution, adopted in 2003, guarantees a minimum of 30 percent of parliamentary seats and other leadership positions to women. Rwanda currently has the highest proportion of women parliamentarians in the world, with women constituting nearly 50 per cent of elected officials in the Chamber of Deputies and about 35 percent in the Senate. In the government cabinet, 36 per cent of posts are occupied by women. In Rwanda, the gender gap in primary education reached its goal of zero in 2005, and the gender gap in literacy is close to zero. Quotas have helped ensure that more women make it to elected office. Despite such measures, women continue to be excluded from the highest levels of

power. Of the 192 member nations of the UN, only eight of them feature a woman as head of state.

## *Women's Rights*

Many problems women face in gaining employment, education, or political and professional success can be traced back to traditional stereotypes and stigmas held against them. There are many places in the world where women face discrimination even by the legal and judicial system of the countries in which they are citizens. Even where the law holds women to be equal, societal gender apartheid keeps women from being treated as equals. In many parts of the world, women are traditionally held responsible for household work and the upbringing of children. In such situations, the education of women is regarded as unnecessary and a waste of resources. Kept away from education, these women lack the skills necessary to be employed in anything other than own-account or family work. They are also considered inferior to men and withheld from high profile positions in society.

Violence against women is also rampant and even the MDGs fact sheet states that there is a need to adopt comprehensive laws against violence against women and guarantee women's land and property rights. There are several kinds of violence perpetrated against women. Domestic violence is rampant in both developed and developing countries. In the United States of America, a woman is beaten every 18 minutes. In Peru, 70% of all crimes reported to the police are cases of domestic abuse.

The Special Rapporteur of UN has stressed the need for passage of legislation to prosecute the offender in such cases. In many countries, men are protected by laws involving matrimony in cases of domestic abuse. Sexual violence against

women also continues at alarming frequency. Assaults within marriage are often never considered.

Preference for male progeny is a major factor in low female-male population ratio and subsequent maltreatment of the girl child and predominant in Asia. Pregnancies in China and India are frequently terminated when the foetus is known to be female; sometimes an infant child is killed soon after its birth. For this reason, sex determination prior to birth has been made illegal in India. In cases where the child survives such attempts at sex discrimination, there is considerable neglect of the girl child and any male siblings are often given priority in nutrition, basic health care, and education.

Violence perpetrated by the state is also common, especially in war zones and areas in conflict. Rape is used with frightening frequency as a weapon of war in many countries across the world. However, several nations have also made efforts to take legal action against violence perpetrated on women. The difficult part is ensuring that these laws are obeyed.

One of the biggest roadblocks to achieving gender equality remains traditional attitudes and customary beliefs. As it takes longer to shake century-old beliefs than it does to build schools, getting females to attend schools once they are built becomes another challenge. Spreading awareness about the ill effects of violence and injustices against women is perhaps more important in the long run, rather than taking legislative action. However, legal action has more immediate results. It is also necessary for nations to advocate non-violent solutions to disagreements in order to reduce the instances of domestic violence. Most crucial in establishing a sustainable and equal relationship between the genders



is removing the biases that still exist from peoples' minds, not just the written laws.

## **UN Actions**

A crucial step taken by the UN member nations to work toward greater gender equality was the adoption of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women in 1979. Under this, which has been described as “an international bill of rights for women” the General Assembly committed itself to removing any form of discrimination against women. The convention commits all state parties to eliminate any discriminatory laws and create programs to prevent the subjugation of women by persons, organization or enterprises. The convention even has provisions for the establishment of international courts and institutions to penalize defaulters and protect women.

However, perhaps the most influential action undertaken by the United Nations to emphasize the importance of establishing gender equality was declaring it as an MDG. All of the eight MDGs need to be achieved for the actual advancement of women; meanwhile, the advancement of women will be crucial to achieving any of the other MDGs. By declaring it as an MDG, the GA has ensured that each of its 192 members is now solemnly pledged to the cause of establishing gender equality and empowering women. Besides the member nations, each of the international agencies that are UN partners on the MDGs - UNDP, UNESCO, ILU, UNEP, World Bank, UNIFEM, the Millennium Campaign, and others – are also committed to creating a more equal world.

The United Nations Development Fund for Women, UNIFEM, in particular is implementing different strategies across its 15 sub-regional centres, each of



which work with individual countries. UNIFEM has four main operations, which are reducing feminized poverty, ending violence against women, halting the spread of HIV/AIDS, and achieving gender equality in democratic governance. All of these goals will constitute a part of ensuring gender equality. In Kenya, UNIFEM is working with the government to ensure those women's interests and steps to empower them are factored into policy-making. This is part of a project to integrate national MDG efforts involving 5 countries that UNIFEM is undertaking for the UN Development Program. In Morocco, UNIFEM has been instrumental in galvanizing the media, private sector, NGOs, and the government to reduce gender disparities through ongoing educational reforms and it has partnered with Cambodia's Ministry of Women's and Veteran's Affairs to do so. UNIFEM has helped forge new policies in collaboration with the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean. On a global level, UNIFEM has made concerted efforts to raise awareness of the issue by providing resources that explain the use of the MDGs and resolutions like CEDAW. Additionally, the UN set up the UN Trust Fund in Support of Actions to Eliminate Violence against Women under the management of UNIFEM. Since it was established in 1997, the trust fund has allocated more than US \$44 million between 291 programs in more than a hundred countries. These grants generally support recipient governments in implementing policies to combat violence against women.

Previous actions undertaken by the UN include the appointment of the Special Rapporteur in March 1994 in resolution 1994/45 of the Commission on Human Rights. The UN Special Rapporteur was appointed to "collect and analyze

comprehensive data and to recommend measures aimed at eliminating violence at the international, national and regional levels.”

The goal of gender equality has become paramount for many of the UN's agencies. The Priority Gender Equality Action Plan was released to the executive members of UNESCO in April 2009 and officially presented to all member nations in the General Conference's session in October 2009. The Inter-Agency Network on Women and Gender Equality (IANWGE) consisting of 60 UN member nations and 25 UN entities has also become a focal point for achieving the MDG of gender equality and has dedicated a task force to work toward its completion.

## **Proposed Solutions**

The committee should first reassess the target set under MDG 3: Gender Equality. Disparities in primary and secondary education are still rampant, long after 2005. Keeping this in mind, does the committee think it possible to eliminate gender differences at all education levels in the span of another five years? Since all the MDGs are supposed to be met by 2015, the committee must decide how to accelerate the progress that is being made. The committee should also decide how much advocacy efforts should be advanced. Changing traditional prejudices and attitudes is a long-term investment, but a necessary one. What is the best possible way to shape people's mindsets to the extent necessary to achieve this Millennium Development Goal?

The committee must also consider revising the definition of gender equality. If by 2015, there is no gender disparity in enrolment statistics; does that mean that gender equality has been achieved? The committee must decide whether it is

necessary to include other targets under the MDG that are more comprehensive in their meaning. These could range from assessing violence against women, suppression of their rights, and discriminatory laws. The committee may also consider how to tackle these issues if they are indeed targeted. Under CEDAW, member states committed themselves to abolish all gender discrimination in their legal systems. However, there are still UN member nations that do not guarantee male and female citizens equal rights or respect in their judicial systems. The committee should consider what action, if any, to take against them.

The committee should also discuss the ratification of CEDAW and its effective implementation and integration within the MDGs. The committee may consider the international tribunals that CEDAW makes provisions for. It may be necessary to assess whether there is a need to punish perpetrators of crimes against women internationally or allow member states to deal with these defaulters as they see fit.

The committee should also contemplate what suggestions and recommendations it would like to make to the other committees, organs, and agencies of the UN. With over 23 international agencies supporting the MDGs, the committee should come to a consensus on how best to utilize the resources available so that a rapid, sustainable global approach can be undertaken.

## Thought for Resolution

### *Definition*

What is gender equity? What quantifiable way is there to judge whether gender equity has been achieved or not? Is enrolment in education institutions decisive enough or do we need a more comprehensive definition for equity? What are the long-term goals? What qualifies as worldwide equal treatment of men and women?

### *Re-assessment*

The previously set target was to eliminate gender disparity in primary and secondary education by 2005 and at all levels by 2015. The target for 2005 has not been achieved, hence, there is a need to re-assess targets and set new ones. What are short-term targets that can help achieve equity by 2015?

### *Cultural Divides*

Different cultures have different male–female hierarchies and these are bound to come up in debate. Should all member countries be forced to give men and women absolutely equal rights? How much importance should be given to socio–cultural differences?

### *Violation of Women's Rights*

Is there a need to penalize violators of women's rights? Will this provide a disincentive to do so? Should the committee define penalties against these defaulters? Should the committee give member nations the autonomy to punish offenders?

## *Recommendations to other Committees:*

Are there aspects of the issue that could be better addressed in another committee of the United Nations? What recommendations would the summit like to make?

## **Bloc Positions**

There are aspects of the topic in which certain regions hold similar positions. All 192 members of the United Nations have agreed to work toward its achievement as an MDG. Therefore, it is unlikely that there are blocs that would directly disagree with the aim of eliminating gender disparity in education. However, differing views are common on other peripheral issues, such as expanding the definition of gender equity and setting new targets and provisions to protect and promote the interests of women.

185 of the 192 members of the United Nations have ratified CEDAW, agreeing to protect the most basic rights of women. Eight countries remain that refuse to do so. The United States of America has signed, but not ratified the convention. Other countries that have not ratified CEDAW are Iran, Qatar, Nauru, Palau, Tonga, Somalia, and Sudan. The United States is the only western, industrialized country that still has not agreed to the terms of CEDAW. The other countries abstaining from ratifying CEDAW could perhaps have a similar platform arguing against further expansion of the MDG to include international tribunals and other provisions established by CEDAW.

Traditional cultural views could also be an important basis on which blocs are formed. There are several countries that share a common cultural or religious basis that heavily influences the rights women are accorded. Member nations of

the United Nations have a duty to uphold its resolutions. Therefore, even if they do not agree with each proposition put forth, it is necessary to respect the general consensus, and incorporate all member nations' views in progress toward the MDG. However, countries differ on what they perceive to be discrimination against women. Many member states, where certain customs are considered tradition rather than discrimination, would most likely hold a similar position.

Asian and south-Asian countries that have fairly traditional outlooks, in comparison to the some countries in the West might argue that their treatment of women is not necessarily suppressive.

It will be necessary to keep viewpoints in mind while generating an all inclusive definition of gender equity.

## **Research & Web links**

In order to find more information on this topic area, I would suggest first investigating the United Nations Millennium Development Goals website. Apart from providing information in an easily accessible manner, it has links to every MDG related UN publication/report. It also allows you to easily research the past actions of international agencies sponsoring the MDGs.

Another must for research is your own country's history of women's rights. Discrimination against women occurs in some form in almost every country, albeit in a different form depending on the country's customs and traditions. Learning about how the existing state of affairs developed is crucial for understanding how progress can be best achieved. It will also be necessary to understand what views other nations will adopt that reflect their attitude towards the issue.

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From the given potential blocs, select the one in which your country best fits. If none seems apt, explore other possible bloc positions. Conduct research on the histories and ideologies of those states and find those that are similar to your own. It will help once in committee to know which nations share views similar to yours and which differ widely.

<http://www.unicef.org/gender/>

<http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/>

<http://www.gender-budgets.org/>

<http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0012/001211/121145e.pdf>

<http://www.history.ac.uk/ihr/Focus/Gender/articles.html>

<http://87.253.140.15/thimun/images/stories/downloads/admin%20handbook%202012%20incl%20cover.pdf>

[http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/pdf/MDG\\_FS\\_3\\_EN.pdf](http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/pdf/MDG_FS_3_EN.pdf)

<http://www.unwomen.org/how-we-work/un-trust-fund/>

<http://www.unicef.org/education/index.html>

<http://www.beta.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/ourwork/womenempowerment/ttf.html>

<http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/bkgd.shtml>

<http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/gender.shtml>

<http://www0.un.org/rights/dpi1772e.htm>

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<http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/>

[http://www.unifem.org/gender issues/violence against women/trust fund.php](http://www.unifem.org/gender_issues/violence_against_women/trust_fund.php)

<http://www.un.org/womenwatch/ianwge/taskforces/tfgendermdg.htm>



## **TOPIC AREA B: Challenges of sustainable and equitable progress: Relationships between environmental degradation and inequalities in human development.**

### ***Statement of the Problem***

This guide looks into the correlation between environmental sustainability, egalitarianism and how global improvements in these are mandatory in order to expanding human freedoms and quality of life for people of this generation and generations to come. A focused investigation reveals that environmental deterioration magnifies inequality due to its un-favourable effect on the less fortunate and how poor human development intensifies the damaged environment. Although rapid progress has been made in global human development in the not so distant past and millions have escaped extreme poverty, deprivation and illiteracy, there have been significant limitations to this progress: Economic growth has been linked to environmental disintegration; income distribution has been imbalanced; and empowerment has not risen. Environmental challenges have worsened inequality, while inequalities have weakened income, health, and education, which can further damage the environment in a vicious cycle. In June 2012 world leaders will gather in Rio de Janeiro to seek a new consensus on global actions to safeguard the future of the planet and the right of future generations everywhere to live healthy and fulfilling lives. This is the great development challenge of the 21st century. Understanding the links between environmental sustainability and equity is critical if we are to expand human freedoms for current and future generations.

## Understanding the link

The remarkable progress in human development over recent decades cannot continue without bold global steps to reduce both environmental risks and inequality. Income growth has been associated with deterioration in such key environmental indicators as carbon dioxide emissions, soil and water quality and forest cover.

The distribution of income has worsened at the country level in much of the world, even with the narrowing of gaps in health and education achievement. While empowerment on average tends to accompany a rising Human Development Index (HDI), there is considerable variation around the relationship. These projections suggest that in many cases the most disadvantaged people bear and will continue to bear the repercussions of environmental deterioration, even if they contribute little to the problem. For example, low HDI countries have contributed the least to global climate change, but they have experienced the greatest loss in rainfall and the greatest increase in its variability, with implications for agricultural production and livelihoods. Emissions per capita are much greater in very high HDI countries than in low, medium and high HDI countries combined. More generally, however, environmental trends over recent decades show deterioration on several fronts, with adverse repercussions for human development, especially for the millions of people who depend directly on natural resources for their livelihoods.

- Globally, nearly 40 percent of land is degraded due to soil erosion, reduced fertility and overgrazing.

- Agriculture accounts for 70–85 percent of water use, and an estimated 20 percent of global grain production uses water unsustainably, imperilling future agricultural growth.
- Deforestation is a major challenge. Between 1990 and 2010 Latin America and the Caribbean and Sub-Saharan Africa experienced the greatest forest losses, followed by the Arab States. The other regions have seen minor gains in forest cover.
- Desertification threatens the dry-lands that are home to about a third of the world's people. Some areas are particularly vulnerable notably Sub-Saharan Africa, where the dry-lands are highly sensitive and adaptive capacity is low.
- Adverse environmental factors are expected to boost world food prices 30–50 percent in real terms in the coming decades and to increase price volatility, with harsh repercussions for poor households. The largest risks are faced by the 1.3 billion people involved in agriculture, fishing, forestry, hunting and gathering.

The burden of environmental degradation and climate change is likely to be disequalizing across groups for several reasons:

- Many rural poor people depend overwhelmingly on natural resources for their income. Even people who do not normally engage in such activities may do so as a coping strategy during hardship.
- How environmental degradation will affect people depends on whether they are net producers or net consumers of natural resources, whether they produce for subsistence or for the market and how readily they can shift

between these activities and diversify their livelihoods with other occupations.

- Today, around 350 million people, many of them poor, live in or near forests on which they rely for subsistence and incomes. Both deforestation and restrictions on access to natural resources can hurt the poor. Evidence from a range of countries suggests that women typically rely on forests more than men do because women tend to have fewer occupational options, be less mobile and bear most of the responsibility for collecting fuel wood.
- Around 45 million people at least 6 million of them women, fish for a living and are threatened by overfishing and climate change. The vulnerability is twofold: the countries most at risk also rely the most on fish for dietary protein, livelihoods and exports. Climate change is expected to lead to major declines in fish stocks in the Pacific Islands, while benefits are predicted at some northern latitudes, including around Alaska, Greenland, Norway and the Russian Federation.
- Women in poor countries are disproportionately involved in subsistence farming and water collection; they face greater adverse consequences of environmental degradation. Many indigenous peoples also rely heavily on natural resources and live in ecosystems especially vulnerable to the effects of climate change, such as Small Island developing states, arctic regions and high altitudes. Evidence suggests that traditional practices can protect natural resources, yet such knowledge is often overlooked or downplayed.

- The effects of climate change on farmers' livelihoods depend on the crop, region and season, underlining the importance of in-depth, local analysis. Impacts will also differ depending on household production and consumption patterns, access to resources, poverty levels and ability to cope.

Taken together, however, the net biophysical impacts of climate change on irrigated and rain fed crops by 2050 will likely be negative and worst in low HDI countries.

## **Why sustainability and equity?**

The human development approach has enduring relevance in making sense of our world and addressing challenges now and in the future. The *20th anniversary Human Development Report (HDR)* celebrated the concept of human development, emphasizing how equity, empowerment and sustainability expand people's choices. At the same time it highlighted inherent challenges, showing that these key aspects of human development do not always come together. In order to consider sustainability and equity together we need to explore the intersections between environmental sustainability and equity, which are fundamentally similar in their concern for distributive justice. We value sustainability because future generations should have at least the same possibilities as people today. Similarly, all inequitable processes are unjust; people's chances at better lives should not be constrained by factors outside their control. Inequalities are especially unjust when particular groups, whether because of gender, race or birthplace, are systematically disadvantaged.

More than a decade ago Sudhir Anand and Amartya Sen made the case for jointly considering sustainability and equity. *“It would be a gross violation of the universalist principle,”* they argued, *“if we were to be obsessed about inter-generational equity without at the same time seizing the problem of intra generational equity”*.

Drawing on the important intersections between the environment and equity at the global level, we need to understand the links at the community and household levels highlighting countries and groups that have broken the pattern and emphasizing transformations in gender roles and in empowerment.

*A key theme to remember: the most disadvantaged people carry a double burden of deprivation.* The Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI), introduced in the 2010 *HDR* and estimated for 109 countries, measures serious deficits in health, education and living standards, looking at both the number of deprived people and the intensity of their deprivations. We need to explore the pervasiveness of environmental deprivations among the multi-dimensionally poor and their overlaps at the household level, an innovation in the MPI. The poverty-focused lens will allow us to examine environmental deprivations in access to modern cooking fuel, clean water and basic sanitation. These absolute deprivations, important in themselves, are major violations of human rights. Ending these deprivations could increase higher order capabilities, expanding people's choices and advancing human development.

In developing countries at least 6 people in 10 experience one of these environmental deprivations, and 4 in 10 experience two or more. These deprivations are especially acute among multi-dimensionally poor people, more than 9 in 10 of who experience at least one. Most suffer overlapping deprivations: 8 in 10 multi-dimensionally poor people have two or more, and nearly 1 in 3 (29

percent) is deprived in all three. These environmental deprivations disproportionately contribute to multidimensional poverty, accounting for 20% of the MPI above their 17 percent weight in the index.

## **BACKGROUND**

The definition of human development is expanding the choices for all people in society and making it possible to fulfill all human needs without degrading the planet. This means that men women and children are living vulnerably below the poverty line and are a priority in the development progress. It is also preservation of the life opportunities for future generations and natural resources for the future use. The aim of development is a less limited environment in which all can enjoy long, healthy and productive life.

Economic growth is a means to sustainable human development. However *Human Development Report 1996* brought to light that economic growth does not directly lead to sustainable human development and the elimination of poverty. Frequently countries that do well when ranked by per capita income often drop down when ranked by the human development index. There are, moreover, marked imbalances within countries between the rich and poor- and these become striking when human development among indigenous peoples and ethnic minorities is evaluated separately.

The 2011 *Human Development Report* offers important new contributions to the global dialogue on this challenge, showing how sustainability is inextricably

linked to basic questions of equity— that is, of fairness and social justice and of greater access to a better quality of life.

Sustainability is not exclusively or even primarily an environmental issue, as this Report so persuasively argues. It is fundamentally about how we choose to live our lives, with an awareness that everything we do has consequences for the 7 billion of us here today, as well as for the billions more who will follow, for centuries to come.

The idea of sustainability emerged from a series of meetings and reports during 1970s and 1980s. In 1972, the UN Stockholm conference on Human Environment marked the first generation meeting on how human activities were harming the environment and putting mankind into risk. In 1980 World conservation strategy prepared by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature along with the UN Environment Program and the World Wildlife Fund, promoted the idea of environmental protection in the self-interest of the human species. The report, *Our Common Future*, captured widespread concern about the environment and poverty in many parts of the world was released by the UN sponsored Brundtland Commission in 1987. Sustainable development, which is *defined as development that meets present needs without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs* was popularized by the Brundtland report.

Rio de Janeiro saw the UN conference on Environment and development in 1992 which brought together heads or senior officials of 179 governments and included the Earth summit. It was the largest ever meeting of world leaders which brought world attention on sustainability to its peak. Rio produced two international agreements, two statements of principles and a major action



agenda on worldwide sustainable development. Series of incidents and discoveries spurred by a series of incidents like leak of poisonous gas from a chemical plant at Bhopal, India, the explosion and radioactive release from Chernobyl, Ukraine, the hole in the Antarctic ozone layer, leaking toxic chemical dumps, such as Love Canal, general fears about chemical contamination and conflicts over decreasing natural resources such as forests and fisheries. It was realized that unintended changes are happening in the atmosphere, in soils, in waters, plants and animals because of which nature which is on the verge of irreversible damage. When environmental damage reaches the point where it leads to a reduction in people's standard of living, out-migration from the area is a common response. There is a range of social and environmental ramifications of such population movements. First, there are environmental impacts in the areas to which people move. Whether they go to cities or to new ecological frontiers, these ecosystems must adapt to a rate of population growth which far exceeds the rate of natural increase. In addition, social organization in areas of in-migration must cope with the influx of people: social systems may become unstable, with social rifts developing or conflict intensifying. Even if instability does not develop, social institutions in areas of heavy in-migration must evolve rapidly, and many traditions are lost in the process. So the concept of sustainability needs to be embraced to allow the thresholds not to be crossed.

## **UN actions**

*UNDP* is the organization set up to look after the development and sustainability, it focuses on five aspects of sustainable human development: the expansion of men and women's capabilities to pursue their lives free of hunger and deprivation, personal fulfillment and ways which people interact in society, expansion of ability – it also means equality, sustainability – man's needs and wants must be met without compromising to rights of future generations to be free of poverty, and security of livelihood including freedom from threats, disease and repression. In the 176 countries and territories where the United Nations Development Programme is working today, many disadvantaged people carry a double burden of deprivation. They are more vulnerable to the wider effects of environmental degradation, because of more severe stresses and fewer coping tools. They must also deal with threats to their immediate environment from indoor air pollution, dirty water and unimproved sanitation. Forecasts suggest that continuing failure to reduce the grave environmental risks and deepening social inequalities threatens to slow decades of sustained progress by the world's poor majority and even to reverse the global convergence in human development.

To help in the development of people the UN is providing adequate financial resources to developing countries. Investment is critical for developing countries to achieve needed economic growth to improve the welfare of their populations and to meet their basic needs in a sustainable manner, all without deteriorating the resource base that stops development.

The UN environment program was created to become the World's leading environmental agency. By 1992 the link between environment and development and the imperative need for sustainable development was seen and recognized worldwide. In the general Assembly during 1992 Commissions on Sustainable Development was established. The Earth Summit also led to the adoption of the UN Convention on Biological Diversity and the UN Convention to Combat Desertification. In countries experiencing serious drought and/or desertification particularly in Africa (1994) Global conference on The Sustainable Development of Small Island States held in Barbados, adopted a program of action that set forth Policies , actions and measures at all the levels promote sustainable development for these states. Africa and Sub Asia are the main point of view because the countries in these continents are affected the most, even by contributing a little amount of damage to the environment. People in LDC are particularly vulnerable to climate driven disasters such as droughts and flooding as well as exposure to air and water pollution. It adds up that it is not only environmental disasters, but general environment deterioration which threatens other factors crucial to human development. This year, Norway, Australia and the Netherlands lead the rankings, while the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Niger and Burundi are at the bottom of the list. These countries are facing the worst conditions of environment and human development and most of these countries like Congo are mainly in debt. Environmental deterioration threatens to reverse recent progress in human development for the world's poorest, warns the United Nations, calling for urgent action to slow climate change, prevent further degradation and reduce inequalities.

Another approach made by the UN was conservationism. This was to protect the environment and keep it away from human interference. However, the accomplishments of the conservation approach, especially in developing countries, have been limited. All too often, contradictory, the HUM policies are implemented: governments simultaneously promote conservation and environmental degradation, and the result is one step forward and two steps back. UNCED's Agenda 21, the global action program for sustainable development, is perhaps the first expression of international commitment to addressing the poverty- environment. The Agenda involves the establishment of a network on sustainable mountain development consisting of United Nations agencies, NGOs and intergovernmental institutions. The Desertification Convention offers new and exciting opportunities for collective action, as well as a fertile field for testing and nurturing innovative partnerships in development cooperation for local level action. It is the first International Treaty to squarely address poverty and environmental degradation in rural areas.

## **OUTLOOK**

Sustainable development requires increased investment, for which domestic and external financial resources are needed. Foreign private investment and the return of flight capital, which depend on a healthy investment climate, are an important source of financial resources. For many developing countries, the reactivation of development will not take place without an early and durable solution to the problems of external indebtedness, taking into account the fact that for many developing countries, external debt burdens are a significant problem. The burden of debt service payments on those countries has imposed

severe constraints on their ability to accelerate growth and eradicate poverty and has led to a contraction in imports, investment and consumption. External indebtedness has emerged as a main factor in the economic stalemate in the developing countries. Continued vigorous implementation of the evolving international debt strategy should be aimed at restoring debtor countries' external financial viability, and the resumption of their growth and development should assist in achieving sustainable growth and development.

Another UN action should aim to encourage policies conducive to sustainable development. Many indebted developing countries are undergoing structural adjustment programs relating to debt rescheduling or new loans. While such programs are necessary for improving the balance in fiscal budgets and balance-of-payments accounts, in some cases they have resulted in adverse social and environmental effects, such as cuts in allocations for health care, education and environmental protection. It is important to ensure that structural adjustment programs do not have negative impacts on the environment and social development so that such programs can be more in line with the objectives of sustainable development.

New analysis shows how power imbalances and gender inequalities at the national level are linked to reduced access to clean water and improved sanitation, land degradation and deaths due to indoor and outdoor air pollution, amplifying the effects associated with income disparities. Gender inequalities also interact with environmental outcomes and make them worse.

At the global level governance arrangements often weaken the voices of developing countries and exclude marginalized groups.

Growth driven by fossil fuel consumption is not a prerequisite for a better life in broader human development terms instead investments that improve equity in access, for example, to renewable energy, water and sanitation, and reproductive healthcare could advance both sustainability and human development.

Stronger accountability and democratic processes, in part through support for an active civil society and media, can also improve outcomes. Successful approaches rely on community management, inclusive institutions that pay particular attention to disadvantaged groups, and cross-cutting approaches that coordinate budgets and mechanisms across government agencies and development partners.

Beyond the Millennium Development Goals, the world needs a post-2015 development framework that reflects equity and sustainability; Rio+20 stands out as a key opportunity to reach a shared understanding of how to move forward. Integrating equity into policies and programmes and that empower people to bring about change in the legal and political arenas hold enormous promise. Growing country experiences around the world have demonstrated the potential of these approaches to generate and capture positive synergies.

Today's spending on low-carbon energy sources, for example, is only 1.6 percent of even the lowest estimate of need, while spending on climate change adaptation and mitigation is around 11 percent of estimated need. Hope rests on new climate finance. While market mechanisms and private funding will be vital, they must be supported and leveraged by proactive public investment. Closing the financing gap requires innovative thinking.

Beyond raising new sources of funds to address pressing environmental threats equitably, we should look for reforms that promote equity and voice. Financing flows need to be channelled towards the critical challenges of un-sustainability and inequity, and not exacerbate existing disparities.

Providing opportunities and choices for all is the central goal of human development. We have a collective responsibility towards the least privileged among us today and a moral imperative to ensure that the *present is not the enemy of the future*.

Human development, which is about expanding people's choices, builds on shared natural resources. Promoting human development requires addressing sustainability locally, nationally and globally. This should be done in ways that are equitable and empowering. We need to ensure that poor people's aspirations for better lives are fully taken into account in moving towards greater environmental sustainability. It should enable people, communities, countries and the international community to promote sustainability and equity so that they are mutually reinforcing.

We need to find ways to jointly advance sustainability and equity. Our line of debate should support the broader human development agenda, which seeks to understand the actions and strategies people can use to expand their freedoms and capabilities. It should be noted that while we recognize that many factors could impede or enhance the sustainability of human development, we limit our focus to environmental sustainability. The debate will focus on what people, communities, societies and the world can do to ensure that processes respect distributive justice between and across generations while expanding capabilities wherever possible.

Environmental degradation stunts people's capabilities in many ways, going beyond incomes and livelihoods to include impacts on health, education and other dimensions of well-being. *Sustainable human development is the expansion of the substantive freedoms of people today while making reasonable efforts to avoid seriously compromising those of future generations.*

## **WEB LINKS**

[http://www.un.org/esa/sustdev/documents/WSSD\\_POI\\_PD/English/POI\\_PD.htm](http://www.un.org/esa/sustdev/documents/WSSD_POI_PD/English/POI_PD.htm)

[http://www.unrisd.org/80256B3C005BCCF9/\(httpAuxPages\)/52B8B9CA2197847380256B65004C9CC9/\\$file/bp3.pdf](http://www.unrisd.org/80256B3C005BCCF9/(httpAuxPages)/52B8B9CA2197847380256B65004C9CC9/$file/bp3.pdf)

<http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=40285&Cr=human+development&Cr1=>

<http://www.unfpa.org/pds/sustainability.htm>

<http://www.un.org/esa/sustdev/documents/agenda21/english/Agenda21.pdf>