

Commission on the Status of Women

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NOVEMBER 10-13, 2016 | MONTRÉAL, QUÉBEC



Commission on the Status of Women

Dear Delegates,

My name is Mahathi Ramesh and I am in my final year at McGill University, studying Psychology and Neuroscience. On behalf of your Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) Dais, including three outstanding Vice Chairs, Esli Chan, Samaa Kazerouni, and Fatima Sheikh, it is my privilege to extend a warm SSUNS welcome to all of you! We cannot wait to meet you in November and to spend what we know will be an amazing weekend together.

A question we may all be asking ourselves in recent times is “Why do we need feminism?” And the asking of this question does not make an individual sexist or inhumane; inquiry into important beliefs is necessary if we are to have meaningful discussion. Although many women worldwide now have the opportunity to express themselves and speak out against injustice, we need feminism because there are even more women that do not. Victim blaming, female genital mutilation, and consistent gap in pay in almost every sector and at every level are just a few varied examples of how an equal status for women hasn’t yet been ingrained in emic mentality. We need feminism because no matter how economically developed a nation is, it is, in some subtle, and sometimes not entirely subtle way, silently witnessing the oppression of half its population. The CSW stands on the principal tenet of gender equality and providing women worldwide the amenities and opportunities that they deserve. In this vein, we hope for detailed, inclusive, and balanced solutions that can address the very crucial problems that face today.

We, your dais, are very excited to present the following background guide to aid your research efforts into the extremely interesting topics we are going to deliberate during this year’s conference! As is vital to remember, this guide serves as an overview into the vast fields of inquiry we have chosen. In order to make the most of your time at SSUNS, we wholly encourage personal research into subtopics that you might find especially fascinating or engaging, especially due to the massive personal relevance that the topics have to every single individual. We are absolutely certain that your work will impress us and contribute profoundly to the committee’s discussion and progress!

Finally, if you have any questions or remarks between now and the conference, or if you just want to say hello, please don’t hesitate to reach out to any one of us and we’ll make sure to reply as soon as possible! Whether the questions are about the content of the guide, the reasons we chose these topics, or our favourite TV shows, we’d love to start speaking with you and to get the CSW ball rolling. Thank you for choosing our conference, take care of yourselves, and be kind to one another!

Warm Regards,

Your CSW Dais, SSUNS 2016

Mahathi Ramesh (Chair)
Esli Chan (Vice Chair)
Samaa Kazerouni (Vice Chair)
Fatima Sheikh (Vice Chair)



Topic 1: Women and Sustainability

The connection between women and sustainable development is immense. Gender inequalities extract high economic costs, leading to social inequalities, followed by environmental degradation all over the world. Women are often hit hardest by immense social, economic and environmental consequences of climate change. This background guide will focus on the environmental challenges that women face, as well as the plethora of changes that can be implemented to use women as agents for change to stop global warming. In particular, women are faced with challenges in regards to natural disasters, water and sanitation, food security and menstrual waste – all issues that can be overcome via sustainable development.

Women have been proven to be more vulnerable to the effects of climate change than men. There is a common responsibility for women to secure water, food and fuel for cooking and heating, resulting in a dependency on local natural resources for survival¹. Additionally, water is required for sanitation, an area where women and girls pay the heaviest price because of menstruation. Furthermore, there is an unequal access to resources and decision making for women in comparison to men, resulting in limited mobility from rural areas for these women².

Section 1: History

The relationship between women's rights and sustainability has been introduced in various international settings within the last twenty-five years. The principle 20 of the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development (1992) states the essentiality of women in achieving sustainable development. Subsequently, the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action called for governments to integrate gender concerns into policies and programs for sustainable development³. Three strategic objectives for government action in this regards include involving women actively in environmental decision making, integrating women's concerns into policies, and establishing means of assessing the impact of development and environmental policies on women⁴. The UN conference on Sustainable Development recognized the importance of gender equality and women's empowerment within economic, social, and environmental sustainable development, and resolved to promote the involvement of women in sustainability policies and programs⁵. According to the World Survey, a sustainable pathway must include an explicit commitment to gender equality in its conceptualization and implementation⁶. The Climate for Change project funded by the European Commission in 2004 – 2005 argues

¹ "Women, Gender Equality and Climate Change." *UN Women Watch*, 2010. Accessed May 25, 2016. doi:10.4324/9781849775274.

² Ibid.

³ UN Women. 2014. *Gender Equality And Sustainable Development*.

⁴ "Women and the Environment." Beijing+20. Accessed May 25, 2016. <http://beijing20.unwomen.org/en/in-focus/environment>.

⁵ UN Women. *Gender Equality and Sustainable Development*.

⁶ Ibid.



against assuming gender neutrality in climate change policy, both in developing, as well as industrialized countries⁷.

Section 2: Women's Role in the Environment

Women play distinct roles in the environment, including managing plants and animals, collecting water, fuel and fodder for domestic use and income generation, and overseeing land and water resources. It has been proven repeatedly that women are more environmentally conscious than men. For instance, women are more likely than men to buy recyclable, eco-labelled and energy efficient products, and in the developed world, women account for 80% of household purchases⁸. Furthermore, women tend to bear the burdens of climate change and the effects of extreme weather conditions⁹. Environmental changes have a negative impact on infrastructure and resource supply, which makes it more difficult for women to undergo daily tasks, as well as the upkeep of their homes. These changes bring about increases in the costs of energy, health-care and food, which disproportionately affect women (especially single mothers), even in developed countries. For instance, after Hurricane Katrina, those who struggled the most to recover were the women, who also happen to make up the majority of the poor in the USA¹⁰.

Reinforcing women's roles in sustainable development will not only help to reduce climate change, but will put them in a role where they can manage the aftermath of natural disasters. In India, after the Boxing Day tsunami, a network of women's self-help groups provided for the practical needs of the local population such as sanitation and health care. In comparison to women who lean towards changes in consumption patterns and carbon reduction targets, men favour more technical solutions such as research on bio-fuels and carbon storage¹¹. Both solutions can be successful, but women's outlooks are often seen to guarantee change.

Additionally, the role of women in the government is important – when women are well represented on legislative bodies, corruption levels are seen to go down. Currently, women hold only 22% of legislative seats worldwide. Thus they do not have a large influence on environmental policy¹². Finally, the majority of professions with “green positions” are ones where women are minority workers, including construction and engineering. Solutions are required to recruit women for these jobs, with particular training towards sustainable development while ensuring equal pay and high labour standards.

⁷ Eyzaguirre, Jimena, 2008/09. *Canadian Women's Health: the Network*, 8.

⁸ Stevens, Candice. "Are Women the Key to Sustainable Development?" *Sustainable Development Insights*, April 2010. Accessed May 25, 2016. doi:10.1163/1872-5309_ewic_ewiccom_0223.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² "Facts and Figures: Leadership and Political Participation." UN Women. Accessed May 25, 2016.



Section 3: Food Security

The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the UN defines food security not only in terms of the access to and availability of food, but also in terms of resource distribution to produce food, as well as the purchasing power to buy food where it is not produced¹³. At the household level, subsistence farming is often an immediate means to food security. In sub-Saharan Africa, up to 80% of small-scale farming is carried out by women, while men dominate the larger commercial agricultural activities¹⁴. In spite of this, with the commercialization of the food industry, women's control over the means of agricultural production is becoming weaker¹⁵. Women own less than 2% of land, and their access to credit and agricultural extension services are much less than their male counterparts¹⁶. Additionally, most of the extension services provided to women focus on cash crops as opposed to food and subsistence crops, which is the primary concern of women farmers, and essential for food security¹⁷. Women play a pivotal role in three components of food security: production, distribution and utilization of food. It has been proven that if women farmers were given the same access to resources as men, women's agricultural yields could increase by 20 to 30%, national agricultural production would rise by 2.5 to 4%, and the number of malnourished people could be reduced by 12 to 17%¹⁸. In cases of crop failure, society often makes it easier for men to leave the farm in search of employment, leaving women behind to feed their families and make ends meet. It is also very common for women to have diminished assets for these situations, making them extremely vulnerable to future crises. This inequality usually exists because of social and economic institutions, for example discriminatory laws, social norms, and the gender discrimination in labour markets¹⁹. Sustainable food security is not possible without the agency and decision-making of women in food production, making it necessary to overcome the constraints they face within the agriculture sector.

It is important to improve women's access, ownership and control over land to contribute to greater investments in the land with more productivity. To do so, we must first understand the role differences in food and cash crop production, and different managerial and financial control over production, storage and marketing of agricultural products between men and women. This should be done via the collection and analysis of gender segregated data and studies. One such micro-level study in Sub-Saharan Africa has shown that women play a crucial role in many aspects of crop production, for instance in post-harvest work²⁰. Generally, there is a large data gap for sex-disaggregated

¹³ "Women and Sustainable Food Security." Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations. Accessed May 25, 2016. <http://www.fao.org/docrep/x0171e/x0171e02.htm>.

¹⁴ "Increasing Food Security." *CIDA*, 2013. Accessed May 25, 2016. doi:10.4324/9780203387931.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ "Women and Sustainable Food Security." Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Habtezion, Senay. *Gender, Climate Change and Food Security*. Issue brief. Edited by Lance W. Garner. 2012. Accessed May 25, 2016.

http://www.undp.org/content/dam/undp/library/gender/Gender%20and%20Environment/PB4_Africa_Gender-ClimateChange-Food-Security.pdf.

¹⁹ UN Women. *Gender Equality and Sustainable Development*.

²⁰ "Women and Sustainable Food Security." Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations.



data, which is only collected at the national level on a limited number of internationally comparable indicators. The FAO has developed an indicator set covering multiple determinants of food security and outcomes, but only 1 of the indicators is a gender indicator²¹.

The number of female-headed households is increasing significantly in rural areas in many developing countries as rural men migrate due to the lack of employment and other income-generating countries. In Sub-Saharan Africa, women run 31% of rural households. These households are generally among the poorer class, and have lower incomes than male-headed households.

Section 4: Case Study - the Green Belt Movement in Kenya

The Green Belt Movement (GBM) is an environmental organization with a focus on empowering women in regards to environmental conservation, and with a wider aim towards improving livelihoods²². This was one of the first efforts to incorporate links between gender and natural resources within a grassroots environmental campaign²³. The GBM has found that climate change in Africa is disproportionately affecting vulnerable groups, namely women and children²⁴. In particular, the movement was founded as a response to overarching complaints from rural Kenyan women about streams that were drying up, unreliable food supplies, and the increasing distance to attain firewood for fuel and fencing. In Kenya, many rural people live on the margins of its remaining forests. Over 65% of the total Kenyan population relies on biomass energy, firewood and charcoal, for cooking and eating. As a result, the forests are hugely degraded and under threat, resulting in the aforementioned issues, with a disproportionate impact on women²⁵. In response, the GBM began encouraging women to grow seedlings and plant trees²⁶. This process binds the soil, stores rainwater, and provides food and firewood for these women²⁷. It works to combat desertification, restore soil health and protect water catchment areas²⁸. Additionally, they were provided with monetary compensation for their work²⁹. The movement has now expanded to include issues of food security. In particular, the production of native foods such as groundnuts has been abandoned in favour of fast-growing, more ecologically demanding crops for export such as coffee and tea³⁰.

²¹ UN Women. *Gender Equality and Sustainable Development*.

²² "Who We Are." The Green Belt Movement. Accessed May 31, 2016.
<http://www.greenbeltmovement.org/who-we-are>.

²³ United Nations Environment Programme. *Women and the Environment*. Accessed May 25, 2016.
<http://www.unep.org/PDF/Women/ChapterTwo.pdf>.

²⁴ *Integrating Climate Action and Communities Using the Landscape Approach*. Report. 2014. Accessed May 25, 2016.
http://www.greenbeltmovement.org/sites/greenbeltmovement.org/files/GBM%20Report%202014_0.pdf.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ "Who We Are." The Green Belt Movement

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ United Nations Environment Programme. *Women and the Environment*.

²⁹ "Who We Are." The Green Belt Movement

³⁰ United Nations Environment Programme. *Women and the Environment*.

Section 5: Menstrual Waste

Menstruation poses a unique challenge for women in developing nations in particular. Often, because of cultural taboos and a lack of systems, there are limited options for the disposal of menstrual waste³¹. Disposable sanitary napkins have a high content of LDPE plastic polymers, as well as a layer made up of polyacrylate³². This layer is very absorbent, meaning if a pad is flushed down the toilet, it will absorb water. It will continue to expand as it travels through the pipes and will result in clogged sewers. As a result, conservancy workers are forced to dive into the sewers and retrieve the waste by hand³³. Hepatitis B and C are known to survive in blood, so there is a risk that these soiled products contain these, and other infectious pathogens, which can then contaminate the water system. Additionally, in pits and landfills, with the current amount of menstrual waste being generated containing plastic and adhesive layers, it will take about 500 – 800 years for it to decompose³⁴.

There are many disposal methods that are being introduced so that women can practice proper hygiene while protecting themselves from the stigmas commonly associated with menstruation. The use of incinerators in a controlled environment (around 800 degrees Celsius) in schools and other institutions are practical³⁵. There have also been special latrines designed with a chute to dispose of the sanitary napkins, which then fall into a deep pit. A chemical agent was then added to the pit to ensure fast decomposition of the napkins³⁶. However, there was still a hesitation towards using these toilets because of the stigma of being associated with their use. Another alternative is reusable sanitary napkins, which have less chemical and plastic content. This reduces the burden of menstrual waste, but does not eliminate the issues of menstrual waste disposal³⁷. Furthermore, if the reusable sanitary napkins are not properly dried in the sun, they may become highly unhygienic. An ideal solution would be bio-degradable menstrual napkins with less chemicals and plastic. For instance, there is a napkin made of water hyacinth



Figure 1: Biodegradable Sanitary Pad made of Water Hyacinth

³¹ "World Environment Day 2015: Menstrual Waste Disposal and the Environment." June 05, 2015. Accessed May 31, 2016. <http://www.india.com/news/india/world-environment-day-2015-menstrual-waste-disposal-and-the-environment-409523/>.

³² Singh, Medhavi. "Disposal of Menstrual Waste: Trends, Laws and Solutions." Academia.edu. Accessed May 25, 2016. https://www.academia.edu/13235750/DISPOSAL_OF_MENSTRUAL_WASTE_TRENDS_LAWS_AND_SOLUTIONS?auto=download.

³³ Singh, Medhavi. "Disposal of Menstrual Waste: Trends, Laws and Solutions."

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid.



which is a natural fiber used for creating textiles (see Figure 1)³⁸.

Section 6: Case Study - The Indian Stigma Against Menstruation

A deeply engrained social stigma against menstruation in India is adversely impacting women and girls to whom menstruation is a natural part of their daily lives. Women feel such immense shame because of this phenomenon that they avoid proper disposal of menstrual waste. The disposal methods used to avoid this shame are often degrading to the environment. Generally, women in rural areas dispose of their waste in open defecation fields, garbage dumps or rivers because of a lack of proper disposal facilities as well as the shame that comes with such disposal within their households³⁹. They often bury their menstrual waste in a pit. Even with the implementation of proper facilities for menstrual waste disposal, women did not tend to use them because of a fear of being associated with them. A study done in West Bengal found that girls using pads in school carried the used ones home, which is extremely unsanitary⁴⁰.

Many institutions have started using incinerators for proper disposal of napkins, which is a relief for female students and workingwomen. Although this is a great alternative to disposing of sanitary pads in the open, incinerators may shift the pollution of water to air pollution, as the burning of pads below 800 degrees Celsius releases irritant gases and asphyxiants that can cause air related health and environment problems⁴¹. Incinerators are the most safe and effective when kept at a temperature above 800 degrees Celsius, but it is rare for that standard to be upheld. Incinerators are still not very prevalent, and are heavily promoted by NGOs and international organizations when used in a controlled environment. Another initiative taken in India is the use of special disposal bags where one can wrap a used pad with a newspaper and mark it with a red dot. Thus, when rag pickers find the dot, they will segregate the waste which can be later disposed according to government regulations for waste disposal⁴².

Section 7: Women as Agents of Change

Generally, the needs, interests, and constraints of women are not reflected in policymaking processes and laws because of the traditionally limited role of women in decision-making processes. The woman's perspective is very important for poverty reduction, food security and environmental sustainability, but yet is overlooked. Rural women with the right training and support can be 'green agents of change', with immense opportunity to implement clean energy technologies to provide climate change mitigation and adaptation benefits, and reduce emissions⁴³. Some of the most effective efforts to address climate change occur at the grassroots level, which is extremely disconnected from the political negotiations. Thus the action taken at these levels is seldom heard at a

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Singh, Medhavi. "Disposal of Menstrual Waste: Trends, Laws and Solutions."

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ *Integrating Climate Action and Communities Using the Landscape Approach.*



political level⁴⁴. Pushing for equal representation in decision-making positions will have a large impact on positive environmental decisions.

Conclusion

Gender equality is a fundamental human right. Thus, it is essential to overcome the systemic cultural and legal barriers constraining women from making even more contributions to agricultural production. Women have been shown to have a very close relationship with the environment, they sustain their livelihoods off of it, and in return it sustains them and their households. The social and economic barriers preventing women from having equal access to resources, and resulting in environmental degradation are outdated. Without proper education and access for women, there will be mass food insecurity in the future. Furthermore, there will be issues with water, fuel and sanitation. It is imperative to focus on the above issues when addressing women and sustainability.

Resources for Further Research

1. Commission on the Status of Women
2. The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
3. World Survey on the Role of Women in Development (2014): Gender Equality and Sustainable Development

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⁴⁴ Ibid.



Commission on the Status of Women

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http://www.unwomen.org/~media/headquarters/attachments/sections/library/publications/2014/unwomen_surveyreport_advance_16oct.pdf.



Topic 2: Elimination of Gender-Based Violence

The discussion of gender-based violence entails a wide variety of topics. The World Health Organization defines violence aimed towards women as “any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual, or mental harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life.”⁴⁵ Though these issues open a wide range of debate, the focus of our committee will rely strongly on the family structures of sexual violence, drawing on issues such as dowry-related violence, forced marriage, marital assault, and female infanticide.

Section 1: Specific Gender-Based Violence Issues

Forced Marriage and Dowry-Related Violence

In many regions of the world, traditional practices such as forced marriage are still prevalent. Forced marriage and dowry-related violence are more commonly found in developing countries, but remain a worldwide concern. UNICEF concludes that 48% of women in South Asia are married before the age of 18 and that 42% of women in Africa are also married before the age of 18.⁴⁶ Though arranged marriages stem from cultural and conventional practices, forced marriages today may be pursued to establish social alliances and alleviate economic burden through dowry-related agreements. Forced marriage may also take the form of child marriage, leading to bride abductions and child abuse.⁴⁷ Consequently, forced marriage has increased marital violence, forced pregnancy, and emotional distress on women.

Marital Assault and Consent

Consent is not only an issue in forced marriages but is prevalent in other family aspects such as marital assault. Marital assault is rooted in struggling family structures and there is not yet enough awareness about the issue in the international arena. Marital assault was not always considered a pertinent issue within the topic of sexual violence; a United States’ university research study revealed that only 50% of its male students were aware that marital assault and consent was an issue.⁴⁸ Emerging from an abuse of domestic power between the husband and wife, marital assault not only has psychological and physical impacts on women, but also affects the development of children, parent-child relationships, and perceptions of gender bias.

Section 3: Female Infanticide

Female infanticide is a tragically prevalent issue, and not only correlates to socioeconomic status, but also is instilled as a consequence of gender bias and abuse of power. It is a prevalent issue in South Asia, with strong ties to class systems, religion, and

⁴⁵ World Health Organization, *Violence Against Women*

⁴⁶ *Prevalence of Forced And Child Marriage*

⁴⁷ *Prevalence of Forced And Child Marriage*

⁴⁸ Raquel Kennedy Bergen, *Marital Rape: New Research and Directions*



poverty. A 2006 study in Bangladesh shows that 93% of families saw girls as “problems” and favoured the son over their daughters.⁴⁹ An unequal value and perception of males and females affects differentiations in birth and sex-selective abortions and moreover affects family roles, monetary responsibilities, and restriction from education. Female infanticide also ties in with other sexual violence issues, such as forced pregnancy, that creates a pressured environment in cases such as sex-selective abortion. These issues of sexual violence are not independent from one another. They act as an interconnected web of issues that overlap and often create a domino effect.

Section 4: Case Study on India’s Debate on Marital Assault

Marital assault and domestic violence are prevalent issues in India due to patriarchal, economic, and social norms. Though India introduced a new law in 2005 in hopes to protect women against domestic violence, progress was still insufficient.⁵⁰ The International Center for Research on Women reported 6 years later in 2011 that 20% of men in India have forced their wives into sexual intercourse or marital assault⁵¹. The debate on implementing regulations for marital assault arose once again in 2012 with the famous Delhi gang assault, with some officials and commissions arguing that marital assault should be criminalized, while others believed that marriage in India was intertwined with cultural patriarchal norms that enforced a superior position of men over women⁵². Those who reject marital assault as a criminal offence argue cultural perceptions of Indian marriage should not be framed in Western contexts that undermine the power of the husband in the family. Factors such as illiteracy, poverty, traditional beliefs, not only perpetuate the negative pre-existing aspects of patriarchy that lead to marital assault, but reinforce the continually suppressed voice that women should have in reporting marital assault. For the past 10 years in India, domestic violence, including marital assault, continues to be the most frequent report of violent crime in India.⁵³

Section 5: Past Actions

International conventions have highlighted the importance of women’s reproductive rights and role in the family as a part of women’s and human rights commissions. At the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women in India, women’s rights have been described in a holistic perspective, concerning private and public relation in a women’s life and considering the overall well-being of women apart from viewing women as an “instrument in society”⁵⁴. The convention noted social and biological discriminatory factors against women, issues of informed consent in countries such as Mexico, and the importance of family planning, showcasing a comprehensive strategy in resolving violence and discrimination towards women. It used an inclusive and holistic perspective that connected women’s health and domestic violence into a

⁴⁹ *Son Preference*

⁵⁰ Geeta Pandey, *100 Women 2014: Violence at Home is India’s ‘failing’*

⁵¹ Amrit Dhillon, *It’s Time for India to Make Marital Rape a Crime*

⁵² Amrit Dhillon, *It’s Time for India to Make Marital Rape a Crime*

⁵³ Geeta Pandey, *100 Women 2014: Violence at Home is India’s ‘failing’*

⁵⁴ *Rights to Sexual and Reproductive Health*



wider universal perspective that is crucial in creating an effective and sustainable resolution. In addition, The United Nations Commission on the Status of Women's 57th Agreement on the act to "End the Practice of Child, Early and Forced Marriage" focuses the international stage onto issues such as forced sexual intercourse, child brides, access to social support, and regulations on legal age for marriage⁵⁵.

Though many international conferences have convened with the goal of creating empowering and logical resolutions to violence against women, direct cultural addresses are often evaded due to traditional sensitivity in relation to marital assault, consent, and a women's role in the family. Nevertheless, the co-founder of Girls Not Brides, a global platform against child brides, states that "we have to take a stand against practices that cause girls harm and which do not represent our cultural values: culture is the best of the values that we as human beings cherish. What we need to challenge are the traditions and practices that have developed over time that are harmful to girls and women and which do not represent our values".⁵⁶

Section 6: Possible Solutions

Many international commissions have come to address the issue of violence and harmful practices against women; however, much of the framework is not binding and progress has been limited. These agreements may lack visibility compared to mainstream human rights issues, neglect a holistic and integral perspective in women's rights, or lack a specified and detailed mandate that is applicable to particular countries. A lack of accountability may also induce an unsustainable resolution.

However, many Nordic countries such as Finland, Denmark, and Norway, have found great success in negating violence against women. These countries have created a framework that supports the empowerment of women both at home and at work. With the gender gap closed at 80%, these countries have achieved high female labour force participation through factors such as lowering the salary gap between genders and in countries such as Norway, ensuring that 40% of women are on company boards or in leadership roles.⁵⁷ Equal family participation is reinforced and combined economically with labour roles as well through regulations such as state-mandated paternal leave in accordance to maternal leaves that promote a partnership in childcare, tax incentives and insurance funding, and post-maternity programmes. Increased leadership roles for women at work and a healthy family environment decreases violence against women in these countries and acts as a source of empowerment against harmful patriarchal norms, as well as voice for consent.

⁵⁵ CSW 57 Agreement: States Must Act to "end the Practice of Child, Early and Forced Marriage"

⁵⁶ CSW 57 Agreement: States Must Act to "end the Practice of Child, Early and Forced Marriage"

⁵⁷ Saadia Zahidi, *What Makes the Nordic Countries Gender Equality Winner?*



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Topic 3: Women in Education and Employment

“Everyone, without any discrimination, has the right to equal pay for equal work”,
 “Everyone has the right to education”, Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 1948.⁵⁸



Image: Plan International, Global movement⁵⁹



Image: UNDP⁶⁰

Education and employment are two fundamental factors needed for a community to advance. These two mechanisms are not only co-dependent, but form the basis of every sector of the society, whether social or economic. However, educational and employment opportunities are more available to men than for women. Gender discrimination needs to be eliminated from the system in order for worldwide communities to reach their full potential.

According to UNESCO, two thirds of the 774 million illiterate people in the world are female.⁶¹ UNICEF reports that of the 31 million girls of primary school age out of school, 17 million are expected to never enrol in school.⁶² There are many factors leading to the lack of education for women, including poverty, lack of parental education, cultural barriers, early marriage, lack of safety, domestic workload and gender based violence at schools. Girls begin to internalize the denial of their own right to education, which transfers into other areas of their life.

In terms of employment, women in rural areas who work for wages are more likely than men to hold seasonal, part-time and low-wage jobs. Women also receive lower wages for the same work.⁶³ Men's average wages are higher than women's in both rural and urban areas. Women's labour force participation has stagnated over the past 25 years. Gender gaps are wide and persistent; three quarters of men are in the labour force, compared to only half of women.⁶⁴ Differences in women's employment opportunities, gender pay gaps, and less access to social protection result in large lifetime income gaps.

⁵⁸ The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 23, Article 26, 1948.

⁵⁹ <http://plancanada.ca/about-plan>

⁶⁰ <http://www.undp.org/>

⁶¹ 2012 EFA Global Monitoring Report; UNESCO Institute for Statistics database.

⁶² Millennium Development Goals, goal 3.

⁶³ FAO, 2011. “The State of Food and Agriculture: Women in Agriculture, Closing the Gender Gap for Development.

⁶⁴ Progress of the World's Women 2015-16



The problem has recently garnered a lot of global recognition and the focus is to raise levels of women's education in an attempt to improve the employment conditions. This is an effective tool to reduce poverty, infant mortality, malnutrition, sexual violence, gender gap, and over-population.⁶⁵ Improving life for women is improving life for all.

Section 1: Analysis of the Problem of Women and Education

Gender inequality in education affects all genders, but girls and women are often more disadvantaged. Poverty, minority status, disability, early marriage and pregnancy, gender-based violence, and traditional attitudes about the status and role of women are among the many obstacles that stand in the way of women's and girls' fully exercising their right to participate in, complete and benefit from education. The highest percentage of poor females with a minimal amount or complete absence of schooling is found in Niger, Pakistan, Somalia, Liberia, Mali, Burkina Faso, Guinea, Yemen, Benin, Cote d'Ivoire and Central African Republic.⁶⁶

Poverty

Poverty is considered to be one of the strongest barriers to education for girls. Since families are unable to fulfil other basic necessities of food and living, education becomes a far-fetched factor and is put to ignorance.

Social and cultural barriers

Cultural exclusion is the process in which individuals or entire communities of people are systematically denied full access to various rights, opportunities, and resources that are normally available to members of a different group and are considered fundamental to social integration within that particular group. The social and cultural exclusion of women continues the cycle of poverty that is experienced. There are many different forms of social and cultural barriers. For example, in some areas of Japan, women feel discouraged from taking maternity leaves due to the high-pressure environment that they work in.⁶⁷ Women across the world feel this discouragement and it contributes to the cycle of poverty for them and their children.

Economic demands

In many places, girls are overburdened with domestic work and child labour, and during their years of learning and development they are forced to work to meet the family's income needs.

<https://declara.com/content/va7zEm5J>

⁶⁵ Promoting Employment for Women as a Strategy for Poverty Reduction.

⁶⁶ EFA GMR's World Inequality Database in Education (WIDE).

⁶⁷ The Guardian; <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/nov/18/japanese-women-suffer-widespread-maternity-harassment-at-work>.

Lack of resources

Due to inappropriately allotted funds, the development of safe and well-equipped schools that meet a decent teacher-student in accessible locations is a goal that is yet to be achieved. These are all major factors preventing millions of children from attending schools particularly those with disabilities, malnutrition, illnesses and the ones who work around their household.

Cost of Education

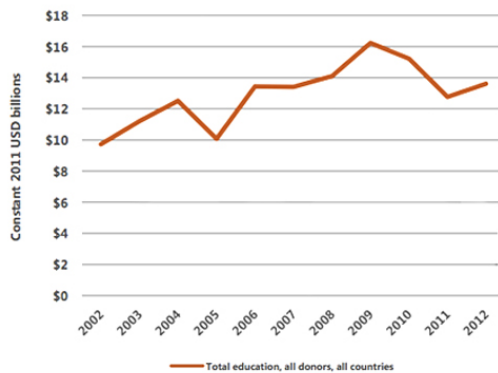


Image: The Global Partnership for Education⁶⁸

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights makes it clear that every child has the right to a **free** basic education, so that poverty and lack of money should not be a barrier to schooling. In many developing countries over the last few decades, governments have announced the abolition of school fees and seen impressive increases in the number of children going to school.⁶⁹ But for many of the poorest families, school remains too expensive and children are forced to stay at home. In many countries in Africa, while education is theoretically free, 'informal fees' force parents to pay for 'compulsory items', such as uniforms, books, pens, extra lessons, exam fees, or funds to support the school buildings.⁷⁰ In other places, the lack of functioning public (government) schools means that parents send their children to private schools that, even when technically 'low fee', are unaffordable for the poorest families who risk making themselves destitute in their efforts to get their children better lives through education.

Violence Against Women

A major manifestation of violence against women is in the form of honour killings. The concept of honour killing is more prevalent in developing countries, especially countries of Islamic persuasion.⁷¹

⁶⁸ <https://www.globalcitizen.org/en/content/10-barriers-to-education-around-the-world-2/>

⁶⁹ Global Citizen- 10 Barriers to education Around the World.

⁷⁰ Global Citizen- 10 Barriers to education Around the World.

⁷¹ Worldwide Trends in Honour Killings by Phyllis Chesler, *Middle East Quarterly* Spring 2010, pp. 3-11.

Section 3: Case Study

The following is a case study from Lahore, Pakistan in 2014. Over the last couple of decades, ‘honour killings’ have become a significant hurdle for the advancement of women’s rights. Laws that justify honour killings exist; such as in Pakistan, the normal penalty for murder is fourteen years while the penalty for an honour killing is seven years.⁷² However, earlier this year, a step in the right direction was taken by the Pakistani authorities in the Farzana Iqbal murder case.⁷³

Ms. Farzana was beaten with bricks and sticks outside the Lahore High Court in broad daylight. She was attacked by her relatives in response to her marriage to Mr. Iqbal, without her parents’ consent. Five months after the incident, the court ruled: “Ms Parveen's father, brother, cousin, and former fiancé were all found guilty of murder on Wednesday. Another brother got 10 years in jail”.⁷⁴

In addition, the Sunni High Council, in another positive move, deplored the attack and declared honour killings as “haram”.⁷⁵



Farzana Iqbal⁷⁶



Father of Farzana Iqbal⁷⁷

⁷² Honour killings in Pakistan and compliance of Law, http://www.af.org.pk/pub_files/1366345831.pdf.

⁷³ Dailymail-Honour killings in Pakistan and compliance of Law, http://www.af.org.pk/pub_files/1366345831.pdf.

⁷⁴ Four sentenced to death for Pakistan “honour killing”, BBC News.

⁷⁵ The Express Tribune- <http://tribune.com.pk/story/716363/farzana-iqbal-case-sunni-council-declares-honour-killing-haraam/>

⁷⁶ The Dailymail.

⁷⁷ The Dailymail.



Section 4: Women and Employment

Over the years women have made consistently less money than men. Partially due to gender norms that dictate the types of jobs women should conventionally work in, and partially due to gender discrimination within lines of work. South Korea and Japan have the largest percentage wage gap, where women earn 30% less than men, compared to the gender wage gap in Belgium, where women earn 9.3% less than men.⁷⁸ However, the issue of the gender pay gap isn't just a problem of fairness, it's also a problem of economic empowerment for women and their families. Due to the gender pay gap, women working full time are able to afford less education, housing, transportation, food, and health care for themselves and their families. For an average 40-year career, most working women in first-world countries would earn \$431,360 more if the gender pay gap didn't exist.⁷⁹ With that money, women could buy two houses, fourteen new cars, or feed a family of four for almost thirty-seven years. And most often, this cycle of poverty continues to the next generation and the generation after that. Therefore, it is in everyone's interest to end the cycle of poverty before it begins.

Education and Employment

The foundation of a successful strategy to combat this requires emphasis on the crucial link between education and employment. Educating girls from the primary level and making it easier for them to receive college degrees will automatically regulate the employment opportunities for them. It is a process that begins when a young girl enters her educational years to when she starts her career. A lot factors need to be taken into account for the effective implementation of this action plan. In the end, it is important to ensure that the process is made smoother from education to employment.

Section 5: Past Actions

The Beijing Platform for Action (PfA) has already been introduced above. On the 40th session of the UN Committee on the Status of Women, the governments of countries all over the world committed to enhance their efforts to alleviate the burden of poverty that women and girls disproportionately carry. In particular, the declaration recognizes the extent to which women in developing countries have been affected by poverty as a result of structural changes in the global economy, national macro-economic policies, and "the process of political, economic and social transformation" in general. Furthermore, as the declaration stresses, social and cultural biases against women in certain economic and public sectors and the "rigidity of socially ascribed gender roles" is a significant factor affecting women's welfare.⁸⁰

The PfA introduced four strategic objectives that both states and non-state actors pledged

⁷⁸ OECD.

⁷⁹ <https://nwlc.org/resources/the-wage-gap-the-who-how-why-and-what-to-do/>

⁸⁰ Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, 1995.



to incorporate in their agendas. These included the review and adoption of “macroeconomic policies and development strategies that address the needs and efforts of women in poverty”, the revision of legal and administrative practices to “ensure women’s equal rights and access to economic resources”, the provision of savings and credit mechanisms to facilitate women’s access to financial resources and institutions, and the development of “gender-based methodologies”.⁸¹

The introduction of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) at the Millennium Development Declaration in 2000 has seen moderate success in global efforts to eradicate poverty and gender discrimination, specifically in developing countries. Despite these positive developments, fifteen years after the introduction of the MDGs, women are still more likely to descend into extreme poverty than men. The situation of women strongly varies across regions. For example, in the Caribbean, the likelihood of women to live in poverty in contrast to their male counterparts has increased since 1997 until 2012 from a 108 to 100, 117 to 100 ratio, meaning that per 100 men there are now 117 women in poor households.⁸² Furthermore, women remain disadvantaged in labour markets and education in many regions in the world. According to the UNDP, women with the same level of education as men continue to have higher unemployment rates in many developing countries.

Lastly, women in developing countries suffer greater risks in terms of health and illness prevention, especially in terms of sexually transmitted infections, HIV/AIDS, and maternal health care. The MDGs have been criticized for not including gender perspectives and gender-specific targets and measures. However, gender has been included to a much larger extent in the seventeen Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), embedded in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development which has been adopted by the UN General Assembly last year as a follow-up agenda on the MDGs.⁸³ It includes 169 integrated targets for global sustainable development. The most relevant SDG, to this topic reads “ending poverty in all its forms everywhere, includes several points that include the spectrum of gender inequality”.⁸⁴ Specifically, SDG 1.4 states that “by 2030, [it will] ensure that all men and women, in particular the poor and the vulnerable, have equal rights to economic resources, as well as access to basic services, ownership and control over land and other forms of property, inheritance, natural resources, appropriate new technology and financial services, including microfinance”.⁸⁵ Reiterating the Beijing PfA, Target 1.b further stresses the need for gender-sensitive development strategies to “support accelerated investment in poverty eradication actions”.⁸⁶ SDG 5 also focuses on gender equality across all areas of private and public life. Most importantly, in connection to the topic of poverty, Target 5.a encourages all parties to “undertake reforms to give women equal rights to economic resources, as well as access to ownership and control over land and other forms of property, financial

⁸¹ The United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women, Beijing, China, September 1995.

⁸² The World’s Women 2010, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, UN New York.

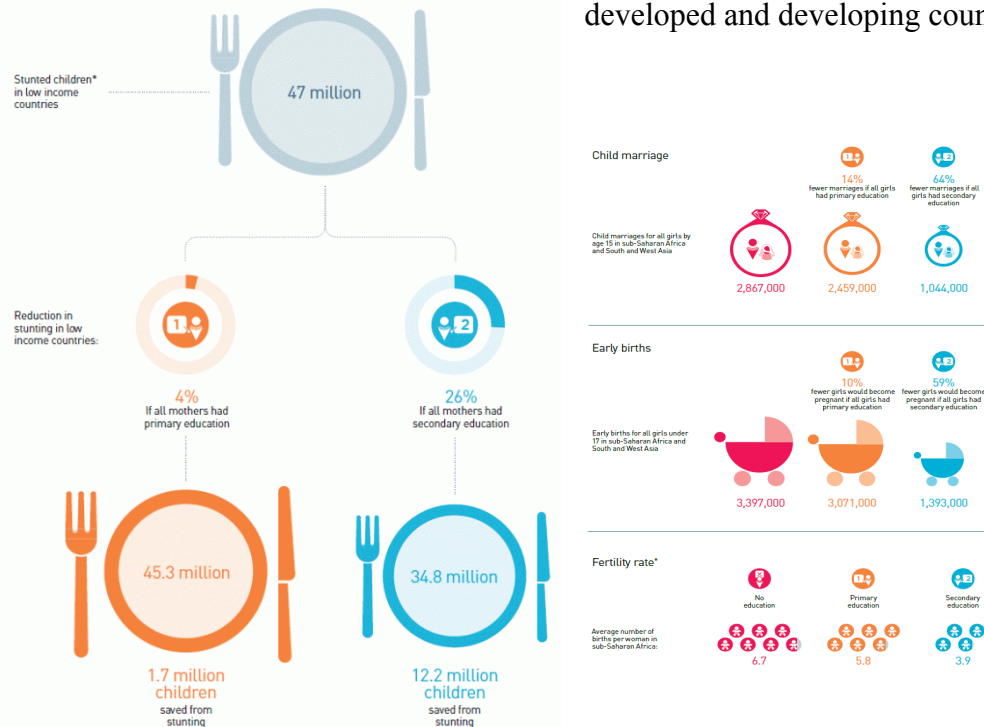
⁸³ Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

⁸⁴ Review of Targets for the Sustainable Development Goals: The Science Perspective.

⁸⁵ Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

⁸⁶ The Global Goals for Sustainable Development.

services, inheritance and natural resources, in accordance with national laws”.⁸⁷ This is important when considering that despite the high participation rate of women in agriculture, women remain far less likely to own or inherit land than men.⁸⁸ According to UN Women, only 20 per cent of landowners globally are women.⁸⁹ Many other cultural, social, and structural challenges continue to prevent the improvement of the welfare, health, and safety of women in both developed and developing countries.



For further information see EFA Global Monitoring Report Education Transforms.⁹⁰

One of the key steps in achieving gender equality is the empowerment of women. Poverty and lack of empowerment tend to go hand in hand, because an inability to meet basic needs diminishes the capacity to make meaningful choices. Since gender-related inequalities intensify poverty among women, women are more likely to be less empowered. Alternatives must exist in both developed and developing countries. Women who experience domestic violence often have no conception of any alternatives. Often, female opinions are not taken into account in family choices such as where to live, whom to marry, and when to have children. These strategic and important life choices have a strong impact on female livelihoods, yet women are often not empowered enough to make them. Making individual decisions results in self-sufficiency and the ability to earn income in more labour fields, which effectively decreases levels of poverty.

Another previous legislative action concerning female empowerment includes the United

⁸⁷ The Global Goals for Sustainable Development, Goal 5.

⁸⁸ Review of Targets for the Sustainable Development Goals: The Science Perspective.

⁸⁹ UN WOMEN: Facts and Figures: Economic Empowerment.

⁹⁰ UNESCO: Girls' education factsheet October, 2013.



Nations' Programme of Action for Gender equality, Equity, and Empowerment of Women.⁹¹ The Programme of Action covers a broad range of topic related to gender equality, and with respect to empowerment it suggests many different modalities for co-operations between the Programme and United Nations member states. This includes working with inter-agency working groups on gender equality and women's empowerment, training sessions in gender analysis and gender-sensitive programming, multi-donor coordination mechanisms, joint working sessions and planning meetings with national officials and representatives of NGOs and grassroots women's groups, standing advisory groups made up of gender experts from government, NGOs, and women's groups, and the establishment of national-level goals for gender equality and women's empowerment.⁹²

Further Research

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- <http://www.worlded.org/WEIInternet/>
- <http://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/girlseducation>
- <http://www.unicef.org/education/files/QualityEducation.PDF>

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⁹¹ ICPD Programme of Action- <http://www.un.org/popin/icpd/conference/offeng/poa.html>

⁹² ICPD Programme of Action- <http://www.un.org/popin/icpd/conference/offeng/poa.html>



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