



General Assembly Second Committee
Topic 2: The Role of Women in Development¹

10 October 2017

Throughout history, women have held subordinate roles in most societies. In recent decades, however, the ideological foundations of gender inequalities have been questioned, and the political, social, and economic effects of gender inequality have become better understood. Today, it is widely agreed that women “play a very crucial role in the development of society at all levels[, but]...they function from a subordinate position inherent in both traditional and state institutions.”²

To address this problem, the UN General Assembly (GA) has held four world conferences on women. The first was held in 1975 in Mexico City. The most recent was held in 1995 in Beijing, China. In 1985, at the Third UN World Conference on Women, held in Nairobi, Kenya, UN Member States established the goal of “gender mainstreaming.” In 1997, the UN Economic and Social Council, which reports to the GA, defined gender mainstreaming as follows:

Mainstreaming a gender perspective is the process of assessing the implications for women and men of any planned action, including legislation, policies or programmes, in all areas and at all levels. It is a strategy for making women's as well as men's concerns and experiences an integral dimension of the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes in all political, economic and societal spheres so that women and men benefit equally and inequality is not perpetuated. The ultimate goal is to achieve gender equality.³

To promote gender equality, the GA has created a number of committees and programs. Of these, two are of primary importance. The first is the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW), which was founded by the GA in 1946 and is the venue in which UN Member States negotiate and pass resolutions about how to improve the situation of women and girls worldwide. CSW reports to the GA through ECOSOC. The CSW consists of representatives of 45 states elected by the GA.⁴

The second main UN organization focusing on gender equality is UN Women, which was founded by the GA in July 2010. UN Women (short for UN Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women) is the part of the UN secretariat (bureaucracy) that is dedicated to helping the CSW, ECOSOC, and GA carry out their resolutions related to women. UN Women helps UN Member States uphold GA and Security Council resolutions related to women.⁵

¹ This background guide was written by Karen Ruth Adams and Jessica Lawson with contributions from Morgan Eichwald, Kedra Hildebrand, and Nicholas Potratz. Copyright 2017 by Karen Ruth Adams.

² Lotsmart Fonjong, “Fostering Women’s Participation in Development through Non-Governmental Efforts in Cameroon,” *Geographical Journal* 167, no. 3 (September 2001), p. 223.

³ UN General Assembly, “Report of the Economic and Social Council for 1997,” Report A/52/3.18, September 1997, Chapter IV, Item IA, <http://www.un.org/documents/ga/docs/52/plenary/a52-3.htm>.

⁴ UN Commission on the Status of Women (CSW), “Commission on the Status of Women,” <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/csw/>.

⁵ UN Women, “Frequently Asked Questions,” <http://www.unwomen.org/>.

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Development refers to the process of improving the quality of human life in the poorest countries of the world. Development has a number of aspects – political, economic, social, cultural, and environmental – and involves a number of fields, including governance, trade, finance, foreign aid, health care, education, human rights, and the environment.

In 2015, the GA established seventeen Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to attain by 2030. Two of the goals relate directly to women. They are SDG 5 on gender equality and SDG 3 on good health and well-being, which establishes targets for maternal and reproductive health. Other goals relate to women indirectly through the goal of gender mainstreaming. For example, to achieve SDG 4 on quality education, UN Members and organizations must consider the educational needs of both boys and girls. Similarly, to achieve SDG 17 on “partnerships for the goals” developed states must consider the needs of both men and women in deciding how to allocated foreign aid.⁶ As noted by the UN

Gender equality is not only a fundamental human right, but a necessary foundation for a peaceful, prosperous and sustainable world...Providing women and girls with equal access to education, health care, decent work, and representation in political and economic decision-making processes will fuel sustainable economies and benefit societies and humanity at large.⁷

History and Current Events

Although women have always played vital economic roles in the household, farm, and workplace, they have often been poorly educated, divorced from economic decision-making, and disenfranchised in civil and political realms. As a result, their ability to contribute to and benefit from economic development has been limited. Yet the role of women in child-bearing, child-rearing, and household management means that women’s inequality creates economic and health problems for the whole family, as well as for communities and nations. As a result, women’s rights are increasingly seen not only as important in themselves (because they are human rights) but also as instrumentally important (because they contribute to development).

Women’s Rights as Human Rights

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) was unanimously adopted by the GA on December 10, 1948. The UDHR affirms that both men and women are entitled to certain inalienable rights, including the “right to social security and...to [the] realization, through national effort and international co-operation and in accordance with the organization and resources of each State, of the economic, social and cultural rights indispensable for...dignity and the free development of...personality.”⁸ In addition, the UDHR affirms that everyone has the right to employment and to equal pay for equal work.⁹ Moreover, both women and men are entitled to access to the instruments of social and cultural development, including education, health, scientific advancements, and the arts.¹⁰

⁶ UN Sustainable Development Knowledge Platform, “Sustainable Development Goals,” <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/sdgs>.

⁷ UN Sustainable Development, “Goal 5: Achieve Gender Equality and Empower All Women and Girls,” <http://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/gender-equality/>.

⁸ UN General Assembly, “Universal Declaration of Human Rights,” 1948, Article 22, <http://www.un.org/en/documents/udhr/>, accessed 6 January 2010.

⁹ “Universal Declaration of Human Rights,” Article 23.

¹⁰ “Universal Declaration of Human Rights,” Articles 25-27.

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As a GA resolution, the UDHR is a non-binding recommendation to UN Member States. In the 1970s, states that wished to make more binding commitments to the principles outlined in the UDHR drafted the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR). Each of these treaties addresses the human rights of women, both in development and in other spheres of life.

For example, Article 3 of the ICCPR mandates that states party to the Covenant “undertake to ensure the equal right of men and women to the enjoyment of all civil and political rights set forth.”¹¹ Guarantees mandated by the Covenant include the rights to physical integrity, liberty and security of person, procedural fairness, individual liberties, political rights, freedom from cruel and inhuman treatment, and non-discrimination. As of today, 169 of the UN’s 193 Member States have ratified and therefore become party to this treaty.¹²

Similarly, the ICESCR guarantees to all individuals the right to just and favorable conditions of work, to form and join trade unions, to social security, to the widest possible protection for families, especially in promoting maternal health, to an adequate standard of living, to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health, to education, and to take part in cultural life.¹³ Today, 165 states have ratified this treaty.¹⁴

In 1975, at the First World Conference on the Status of Women, states began to negotiate the first international treaty to specifically address the rights of women. The result of their negotiations was the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), which was adopted by the GA in 1979 and opened for signature in 1980. CEDAW clarifies what constitutes discrimination against women and calls for the establishment of national programs to eliminate such bias. CEDAW defines discrimination against women as “...any distinction, exclusion or restriction made on the basis of sex which has the effect or purpose of impairing or nullifying the recognition, enjoyment or exercise by women...of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural, civil or any other field.”¹⁵

States that ratify CEDAW agree to report at least every four years on the status of their efforts to comply with the treaty. Country reports are reviewed by the CEDAW Committee, which consists of 23 women’s rights experts from around the world. State parties also have the option to agree that individuals and groups can submit complaints to the CEDAW Committee about women’s rights abuses in their countries.¹⁶

¹¹ “International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights,” 1966,
<http://www.ohchr.org/EN/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/CCPR.aspx>.

¹² For ratifications, see UN Treaty Collection, “International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights,”
http://treaties.un.org/Pages/ViewDetails.aspx?src=TREATY&mtdsg_no=IV-4&chapter=4&lang=en

¹³ “International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights,” 1966,
<http://www.ohchr.org/EN/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/ICESCR.aspx>.

¹⁴ For ratifications, see UN Treaty Collection, “International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights,”
http://treaties.un.org/Pages/ViewDetails.aspx?src=TREATY&mtdsg_no=IV-3&chapter=4&lang=en

¹⁵ “Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women,” 1979, Article 1,
<http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/text/econvention.htm>

¹⁶ Office of the High Commissioner of Human Rights (OHCHR), “Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women,” <http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/cedaw/index.htm> For country reports, go to OHCHR, “Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women – Sessions,” <http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/cedaw/sessions.htm>. Search for your country’s name, and open the English (E) version of its most recent report.

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As of today, 189 states have ratified CEDAW. Among those that have not done so are Sudan, Somalia, Iran, and the United States.¹⁷ President Carter signed the treaty in 1980, but the Senate has never ratified it, due largely to opposition to Article 12, in which state parties agree to “take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in the field of health care in order to ensure, on a basis of equality of men and women, access to health care services, including those related to family planning.” According to a 2009 letter from the National Right to Life Committee to members of the Senate,

Since about 1995, Article 12 and other provisions have been creatively interpreted by official bodies, ranging from the European Parliament to the U.N. CEDAW Committee, to condemn limitations on abortion, on grounds that any restrictions on abortion are per se discrimination against women.¹⁸

Proponents of CEDAW, by contrast, argue that CEDAW leaves the details of domestic legislation establishing gender equality up to state parties.¹⁹

Lack of universal participation in CEDAW is not the only obstacle to gender equality. As is frequently the case in international law, many states that have ratified CEDAW have done so with the understanding that they will not carry out certain provisions. These understandings, which are known as “reservations,” must be articulated in writing at the time of ratification. For example, Saudi Arabia has said that, “In case of contradiction between any term of the Convention and the norms of Islamic law, the Kingdom is not under obligation to observe the contradictory terms of the Convention.” In addition, Saudi Arabia has said that “The Kingdom does not consider itself bound by paragraph 2 of [A]rticle 9 of the Convention.”²⁰ This provision states that “States Parties shall grant women equal rights with men with respect to the nationality of their children.”²¹ Other states with large Muslim populations have expressed similar reservations.

Self-defined exceptions such as these are contentious. For example, Austria stated that it objects to and will ignore Saudi Arabia’s reservation “concerning any interpretation of the provisions of the Convention that is incompatible with the norms of Islamic law” because “it does not clearly specify the provisions of the Convention to which it applies.” In Austria’s view, the Convention has entered “into force in its entirety ... between Saudi Arabia and Austria.”²² Austria has probably taken this position in the hopes that by participating in CEDAW, Saudi Arabia will soften its stance on women and that, if it does not, the fact that Saudi Arabia has signed but is not in compliance with CEDAW can be used to embarrass Saudi Arabia and pressure it to change.

In September 1995, 189 UN Member States attended the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing, China, which had the theme of “Equality, Development, and Peace.” At the end of the conference, they passed the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. The Declaration recognized that “the status of women...advanced in some important respects in the [preceding] decade but that progress [was] uneven, inequalities between women and

¹⁷ UN Treaty Collection, “Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women,” https://treaties.un.org/Pages/ViewDetails.aspx?src=TREATY&mtdsg_no=IV-8&chapter=4&lang=en.

¹⁸ National Right to Life Committee, “Letter to Members of the US Senate,” 25 March 2009. See also Austin Ruse, “This is No Time to Go Wobbly,” *Weekly Standard*, 27 April 2009, <http://www.weeklystandard.com/Content/Public/Articles/000/000/016/396tcoin.asp>

¹⁹ Christie Edwards, “Legal Issues Regarding Ratification of CEDAW and CRC,” Thomas Jefferson School of Law, presentation, <http://www.voicesofwomen.org/docs/Ratification-CEDAW-CRC.pdf>, accessed 7 October 2010. See also Michelle Goldberg, “Hillary’s Challenge,” *The American Prospect*, 16 July 2009, http://www.prospect.org/cs/articles?article=hillarys_challenge

²⁰ UN Treaty Collection, “Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.”

²¹ “Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women,” Article 9.

²² UN Treaty Collection, “Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.”

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men...persisted, and major obstacles remain[ed], with serious consequences for the well-being of all people.”²³ In addition, the Plan for Action affirmed Member State commitment to the provision of equal opportunities in 12 “critical areas of concern,” namely:

1. Women and poverty
2. Education and training of women
3. Women and health
4. Violence against women
5. Women and armed conflict
6. Women and the economy
7. Women in power and decision-making
8. Institutional mechanisms for the advancement of women
9. Human rights of women
10. Women and the media
11. Women and the environment
12. The girl child²⁴

The Beijing Plan of Action was strongly influenced by economist Amartya Sen’s 1990 article showing that more than 100 million women worldwide are “missing” (have died or were never born) as the result of a worldwide culture of inequality, which encourages or looks the other way as female babies are aborted or abandoned and that restricts the access of girls and women to health care, education, employment, and property rights.²⁵

In GA Resolution A/RES/50/203 (1995), the GA endorsed the Beijing Declaration and Plan of Action and called on member states to implement it.²⁶

Women’s Rights and Development

In 2000, when the GA adopted the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), states agreed to work together to achieve specific targets by 2015. Developing countries agreed to report each year to the UN Development Programme (UNDP) on their progress toward meeting the goals, and developed countries agreed to develop trade relations and foreign aid policies that would enable developing countries to meet the targets. When the 2015 deadline passed, UN Member States agreed to a new set of 17 goals, known as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The SDGs are similar to the MDGs, though focused more on environmental protection and sustainability, in addition to social and economic development, as states continue to strive towards these goals.

SDG 5 aims to “Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls.” According to the UN,

Empowering women and girls to reach their full potential requires that they have equal opportunities to those of men and boys. This means eliminating all forms of discrimination and violence against them, including violence by intimate partners, sexual violence and harmful practices, such as child marriage and female genital mutilation (FGM). Ensuring that women have better access to paid employment, sexual and

²³ Fourth World Conference on Women, “Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action,” September 1995, <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/beijing/platform/declar.htm>

²⁴ United Nations, “Key Conference Outcomes: Outcomes on Gender and Equality,” <http://www.un.org/en/development/devagenda/gender.shtml>

²⁵ Amartya Sen, “More Than 100 Million Women are Missing,” *New York Review of Books* 37, no. 20 (20 December 1990).

²⁶ UN General Assembly, “Follow-Up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and Full Implementation of the Beijing Declaration and the Platform for Action,” Resolution A/RES/50/203, 1995, <http://www1.umn.edu/humanrts/resolutions/50/203GA1995.html>

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reproductive health and reproductive rights, and real decision-making power in public and private spheres will further ensure that development is equitable and sustainable.²⁷

With this in mind, states have established specific targets in these areas under SDG 5. These include eliminating “discrimination against all women and girls everywhere,” eliminating violence and FGM, recognizing the value of unpaid care and domestic work through the provision of public services, ensuring women’s participation in economic and political decision-making, access to reproductive health and rights, and access for women in economic life and in economic resources, such as property ownership, financial services, and inheritance.²⁸

While the world achieved some progress in these areas during the 2000-2015 MDG period, “gender inequality persists worldwide, depriving women and girls of their basic rights and opportunities.” As a result, the UN reports that activities to end gender inequality will “require more vigorous efforts, including legal frameworks, to counter deeply rooted gender-based discrimination.”²⁹

From 2005 to 2016, one in five women – in the 87 countries for which data was available – experienced physical or sexual abuse from an intimate partner. About 35 percent of girls worldwide underwent FGM between 2000-2015, meaning that at least 200 million girls were subjected to FGM during this time (though the exact number is unknown due to limited data). The practice of FGM is linked with problems such as severe pain, excessive bleeding, infections (including HIV), infertility, complications during childbirth and sometimes death.³⁰

Despite declines in both child marriage and adolescent³¹ childbearing, the latter of which often results from the former, approximately 27 percent of women aged 20-24 in 2015 had been married before their eighteenth birthday, and there were 44 live births per 1,000 girls aged 15-19 between 2000-2015. As the UN notes, reducing both of these is “integral to the health and well-being of adolescent girls and to their social and economic prospects.” Exacerbating women’s socioeconomic situation further, women continued to spend three times as many hours as men on unpaid domestic work between 2000-2016, held only one-third of senior- and middle-management positions in countries with available data, and constituted only about 23 percent of elected members in national parliaments across the globe in 2017.³²

SDG goal 4 aims to “ensure inclusive and quality education for all and promote lifelong learning.” Each of the targets for this goal focus on eliminating gender disparities in education. Thus, the targets seek to, among other things, ensure that both girls and boys have access to “early childhood development;” “free, equitable and quality primary and secondary education;” and “equal access for all women and men to affordable quality technical, vocational and tertiary education, including university.”³³

As researcher Isobel Coleman explains, educating women and girls has positive effects for all of society:

²⁷ United Nations, “The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2016,” 2016, <http://www.un.org.lb/Library/Assets/The-Sustainable-Development-Goals-Report-2016-Global.pdf>.

²⁸ UN Sustainable Development, “Goal 5: Achieve Gender Equality and Empower All Women and Girls.”

²⁹ United Nations, “The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2017,” 17 July 2017, available at <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/report/2017/>.

³⁰ United Nations, “The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2017.”

³¹ “Adolescent” referring to girls between the ages of 15 and 19.

³² United Nations, “The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2017.”

³³ UN Sustainable Development, “Goal 4: Ensure Inclusive and Quality Education for All and Promote Lifelong Learning,” <http://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/education/>.

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Educated women have fewer children; provide better nutrition, health, and education to their families; experience significantly lower child mortality; and generate more income than women with little or no schooling. Investing to educate them thus creates a virtuous cycle for their community.³⁴

According to the UN, the world failed to achieve the original MDG to achieve universal primary education by 2015. In both 2013 and 2014, approximately 60 million children of primary school age and 60 million young people of lower secondary school age did not attend school. Most of these children and adolescents were girls.³⁵ Thus, UN Member States must continue to make progress on both ensuring access to education generally, and on ensuring access to education for girls specifically.

A number of countries and organizations have developed innovative and effective programs for increasing the access of women and girls to education. For example, one strategy has been to offer stipends or tuition vouchers for girls to attend high school (students in many developing countries must pay to attend public school).³⁶

Finally, SDG 3 establishes several targets related to maternal health and ensuring that women have access to contraception and family planning. Achieving these goals is vital to ensuring that women have healthy, prosperous lives and the ability to make decisions about their economic well-being. Improving family planning specifically will also complement efforts to reduce adolescent births, as set out in SDG 5.

According to the UN, despite progress since 2000, approximately 303,000 women died during childbirth in 2015. In order for the world to meet its 2030 target, progress in reducing maternal mortality will need to double for the next 13 years. This could be achieved if women had better access to “antenatal care during pregnancy and skilled care during childbirth, as well as care and support in the weeks after childbirth.” In 2017, 78 percent of women who were married or in a union had access to family planning through modern contraception. This marks a significant improvement since 2000, particularly for areas such as Sub-Saharan Africa, where the percentage of women has increased from 31 to 50 percent. Still, the vast differences between areas such as Sub-Saharan Africa (50 percent) and Eastern and South-Eastern Asia (89 percent) demonstrate that much work remains to provide women with access to contraceptive products and services, particularly in the world’s least developed countries.³⁷

Poverty, Foreign Aid and the International Financial Crisis

Gender discrimination is a complex phenomenon with deep social and cultural roots. Yet political and economic factors also prevent the full realization of the SDGs related to women in development. Here we focus on three: poverty, the failure of developed countries to meet the aid targets they promised under the original MDGs (which now persists as a challenge under the SDGs), and the international financial crisis.

According to the UN, “Poverty is the main cause of unequal access to education, particularly for girls of secondary-school age. Women and girls in many parts of the world are forced to spend many hours fetching water, and girls often do not attend school because of a lack of decent sanitation facilities.”³⁸

In the Millennium Declaration (2000), UN Member States called on developed countries to reduce world poverty by granting “more generous development assistance, especially to countries that are genuinely making an

³⁴ Isobel Coleman, “The Payoff from Women’s Rights,” *Foreign Affairs*, May/June 2004.

³⁵ United Nations, “The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2017,” and “SDG Report 2016.”

³⁶ Simeen Mahmud, “Female Secondary School Stipend Programme in Bangladesh,” Background Paper for the Education for All Global Monitoring Report, 2003/2004, <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0014/001468/146803e.pdf>.

³⁷ United Nations, “The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2017.”

³⁸ UN Department of Public Information, “Fact Sheet: Goal 3.”

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effort to apply their resources to poverty reduction.” At the 2002 Monterrey Conference on Financing for Development and the 2005 World Summit on Sustainable Development, a target of 0.7 percent of gross domestic product (GDP) was established.³⁹ According to the UN Development Programme (UNDP), if all developed countries had spent this amount on official development assistance (ODA), there would have been sufficient funds to achieve the MDGs by the target date of 2015.⁴⁰ This target has been reincorporated into the SDGs. Specifically, SDG 17, Partnerships for the Goals, stipulates that developed states should contribute 0.7 percent of their GDP to achieve the goals.⁴¹

For the purposes of the SDGs, developed countries are defined as members of the Development Assistance Committee of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), which includes the 30 richest countries in the world (measured in terms of GDP per capita). In 2007, before the international financial crisis began, just five of these countries (Denmark, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Norway, and Sweden) met or surpassed the 0.7 percent target, and “for developed countries as a group, official development assistance was just 0.28 percent of their combined gross income.”⁴² With the economic downturn, contributions fell and unemployment rose.⁴³ Despite the economic recovery and developed country commitments to meet the 0.7 percent target, in 2016, ODA still fell short of the 0.7 percent goal, as OECD countries were only contributing 0.32 percent of their GDPs. Germany did, however, join the five countries above in achieving the 0.7 percent goal in 2016.⁴⁴

Previous Committee Work on This Topic

From 1946, when it created the Commission on the Status of Women, to the present, the GA has paid considerable attention to the broad goal of gender equality and the particular need for women to participate in and benefit from economic development.

One of the GA’s most important recent actions came in 2008, when it passed a resolution drafted by the GA-2 entitled, “Eradication of Poverty and Other Development Issues: Women in Development.” In this resolution, the GA asserted that women are essential to sustainable development and noted the effects of globalization on women. According to the resolution, UN Member States are

aware that, while globalization and liberalization processes have created employment opportunities for women in many countries, they have also made some women, especially in developing countries and in particular in the least developed countries, more vulnerable to problems caused by increased economic volatility.⁴⁵

³⁹ This target dates back to General Assembly Resolution 2626 (October 1970). OECD, “The 0.7% ODA/GNI target - a history,” <http://www.oecd.org/dac/stats/the07odagtarget-ahistory.htm>. See also MDG Gap Task Force, “Official Development Assistance (ODA),” http://www.un.org/esa/policy/mdggap/mdggap_matrix_oda.html

⁴⁰ MDG Gap Task Force, “Official Development Assistance (ODA),”

⁴¹ United Nations, “The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2017.”

⁴² United Nations, “Millennium Development Goals Report 2008,” p. 45, http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/2008highlevel/pdf/newsroom/mdg%20reports/MDG_Report_2008_ENGLISH.pdf.

⁴³ UN Department of Public Information, “UN Takes a Stand on Global Aid, Trade and Debt Commitments, as G20 Prepares to Meet,” press release, 16 September 2009, http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/pdf/Press_release_MDG_Gap_2009.pdf

⁴⁴ United Nations, “The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2017.”

⁴⁵ UN General Assembly, “Eradication of Poverty and Other Development Issues: Women in Development,” Resolution A/RES/62/205, 10 March 2008, <http://www.un.org/en/ga/62/resolutions.shtml>

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The resolution also urged states to address women's needs across a variety of areas, from medical improvements to civil rights and employment opportunities. The resolution framed the issue as a pressing concern for the maintenance of international peace and security, arguing that "peace is inextricably linked to equality between women and men and to development."⁴⁶

Also in 2008, the GA asserted in Resolution 62/206, that "gender equality is of fundamental importance for achieving sustained economic growth, poverty eradication and sustainable development." In this resolution, Member States noted that "investing in the development of women and girls has a multiplier effect, in particular on productivity, efficiency and sustained economic growth, in all sectors of the economy."⁴⁷

In July 2010, the GA founded UN Women to consolidate four previously-separate UN agencies devoted to women's issues into one. The purpose of UN Women is to provide technical support to states wishing to uphold GA resolutions related to women and wishing to think of new ways to help women and girls. In addition, UN Women is charged with holding states to the standards articulated in GA and Security Council resolutions.⁴⁸ In 2013, UN Women estimated that:

If women's paid employment rates were raised to the same level as men's, the United States' gross domestic product would be an estimated 9 per cent higher, the euro zone's would climb by 13 per cent and Japan's would be boosted by 16 per cent. In 15 major developing economies, per capita income would rise by 14 per cent by 2020 and 20 per cent by 2030.⁴⁹

With the creation of UN Women, some states and organizations devoted to women's rights have begun to push the GA to hold a fifth world conference on women in 2020.⁵⁰ Others remain wary. According to many women's advocates, states' commitment to gender equality has deteriorated since the last conference was held in Beijing in 1995. They worry that delegates to a fifth conference on women would re-open debate on the desirability of the 12 goals in the Beijing Platform of Action instead of focusing on how best to achieve them.⁵¹

Every five years, the GA-2 mandates that the UN Secretary-General release a World Survey on the Role of Women in Development. The Secretary-General released the most recent report in 2014. The survey "asserts the central role of gender equality in charting the rationale and the actions necessary to achieve sustainable development." Thus, it argues that empowering women is vital to sustainable development, not to mention achieving the SDGs. It uses three criteria to evaluate policies and investments seeking to address gender equality. These are:

⁴⁶ UN General Assembly, "Eradication of Poverty and Other Development Issues: Women in Development."

⁴⁷ UN General Assembly, "Women in Development," Resolution A/RES/62/206, 10 March 2008, <http://www.un.org/en/ga/62/resolutions.shtml>

⁴⁸ UN Women, "Frequently Asked Questions," <http://www.unwomen.org/>

⁴⁹ UN Women, "Facts and Figures: Economic Empowerment," <http://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/economic-empowerment/facts-and-figures>

⁵⁰ "A Call to Action in Support of a United Nations Sponsored Fifth World Conference on Women," <http://5wcw.org/>, accessed 7 October 2017.

⁵¹ Lydie Err, "Promoting a United Nations 5th World Conference on Women," Parliamentary Assembly, Council of Europe, Document 10643, 6 July 2005, <http://www.assembly.coe.int/nw/xml/XRef/X2H-Xref-ViewHTML.asp?FileID=11206&lang=en>. See also "Fifth World Conference on Women and the 2005 CSW Review of the Beijing Platform for Action," Discussions by NGOs at the 47th Session of the Commission on the Status of Women, 3-14 March 2003, <http://www.cwgl.rutgers.edu/about-110/staff/70-policy-a-advocacy/cwgl-activities-at-the-un/193-commission-on-the-status-of-women-csw-march-2003>.

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- Whether they support women's capabilities and their enjoyment of life
- Whether they reduce, rather than increase, women's unpaid care work
- Whether they embrace women's equal and meaningful participation as actors, leaders, and decision-makers⁵²

Each year, the UN General Assembly passes several resolutions related to the role of women in development, including topics such as eliminating violence against women, protecting women migrant workers, CEDAW, and women in development generally, among others. Two resolutions from recent years are prominent among these. The first was Resolution 70/212, which established the International Day of Women and Girls in Science to be observed on February 11 of each year as a means of raising awareness of the role and contribution of women in science. The second was Resolution 71/170, the most recent resolution related to women in development, which calls upon states to eliminate violence against women in achieving the SDGs, and which formulates a clear definition of violence against women.⁵³

Conclusions

UN Women is ready to move forward on issues of gender equality. Yet, as part of the UN bureaucracy, UN Women can only on matters referred to through by the GA and Security Council, and it can only assist states when they seek its help. Given this, what initiatives should the GA develop and endorse to promote women's human rights and include women in the work and benefits of development? As you develop your country's position on this issue, consider the following questions:

- What is the economic situation of women and girls in your country? Consider, among other things, educational attainment, mortality rates, and access to health care and employment.
- What are the rights and responsibilities of women and girls in your country? What historical, religious, cultural, and other influences do they reflect?
- Has your country ratified the ICCPR, ICESCR, and/or CEDAW? If not, why not? If so, is it in compliance with them?
- If you are representing a developing country, what has been its progress on the MDGs and SDGs related to women and development? What remains to be done?
- If you are representing a developed country, how has it helped and/or hindered progress on the MDGs and SDGs related to women and development? Is it meeting the aid target?
- How have women and girls in your country been affected by the economic crisis?
- Should the GA sponsor a fifth world conference on women? If so, what should its agenda be?

Recommended Reading

Coleman, Isobel. "The Payoff from Women's Rights." *Foreign Affairs*, May/June (2004): 1-5. Available at <http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/59896/isobel-coleman/the-payoff-from-womens-rights>.

This article was written before the GA's 10 year review of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action in 2005. It discusses the role of women in development and the accomplishments of particular countries.

"Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women" (CEDAW). 1979. Available at <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/text/econvention.htm>

It is important to understand CEDAW's provisions and to find out if your country has ratified it and is in compliance (see footnotes 16 and 17). To determine if your country has ratified other human rights treaties, see footnotes 12 and 14.

⁵²UN Women, "The World Survey on the role of women in development 2014 [webpage]," 2014, <http://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2014/10/world-survey-2014>.

⁵³ For these and other resolutions on the topic, see UN General Assembly, "General Assembly Resolutions," <http://www.un.org/en/sections/documents/general-assembly-resolutions/>, accessed 7 October 2017.

Montana Model UN High School Conference

Grossman, Anna, et al. "Global Overview and Regional Summary." In *Beijing Betrayed*. Women's Environment and Development Organization. March 2005. Available at <http://www.wedo.org/library/media-type/pdf/beijing-betrayed-2005>

In this report, the non-profit Women's Environment and Development Organization (WEDO) criticizes UN Member States' implementation of the Beijing Declaration.

Kristof, Nicholas D. and Sheryl WuDunn. *Half the Sky*. (New York: Random House, 2010). Excerpt available at <http://www.randomhouse.com/book/95840/half-the-sky-by-nicholas-d-kristof-and-sheryl-wudunn#excerpt>

This book offers vivid case studies related to the economic and other rights of women and girls in developing countries and explores issues such as prostitution and forced labor. For video clips from a related PBS documentary, go to <http://www.pbs.org/independentlens/half-the-sky/>.

United Nations. "Women." <http://www.un.org/en/sections/issues-depth/women/index.html>.

This topic page from the UN provides a brief overview of the topic of gender equality and women as it relates to the UN's work. It also has some links to UN activities and organizations, such as Women's Day.

United Nations. "The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2017." 17 July 2017. available at <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/report/2017/>.

This website, and associated document provide insights into the progress and necessary actions to achieve the SDGs as they relate to women in development. Also see the SDG website for more information, available at <http://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/>.

UN Women. "What We Do." Available at <http://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do>

This site provides general information, detailed reports, and policy advice about the human rights and opportunities of women and girls worldwide. Search on your country's name. For details on how the topic of women in development relates to sustainable development, also see the UN women World Survey on the role of women in development 2014, available at <http://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2014/10/world-survey-2014>.

"Woman Stats Project." Website. Available at <http://www.womanstats.org/>

This academic site offers a variety of data on the status of women in particular countries.

World Bank Group. "GenderStats." Available at www.worldbank.org/genderstats

This website compiles socioeconomic data on women from individual states and several international organizations.

World Economic Forum. "Global Gender Gap 2016." Available at <http://reports.weforum.org/global-gender-gap-report-2016/>.

This recent report ranks more than 100 countries according to gender equality in government and corporate leadership. It is an excellent source for finding out more about your country, as well as the challenges faced by women worldwide.

World Bank. Girls' Education. <http://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/girlseducation>. Accessed 10 October 2017.

This topic page from the World Bank discusses the importance of educating girls. It also includes links to pages that discuss strategies, research, and current programs related to the advancement of girls' education.