

We remind delegates that they will need to have partially written a resolution on at least one of the topics discussed in their committees.

FORUM: Human Rights

ISSUE: Promoting gender equality

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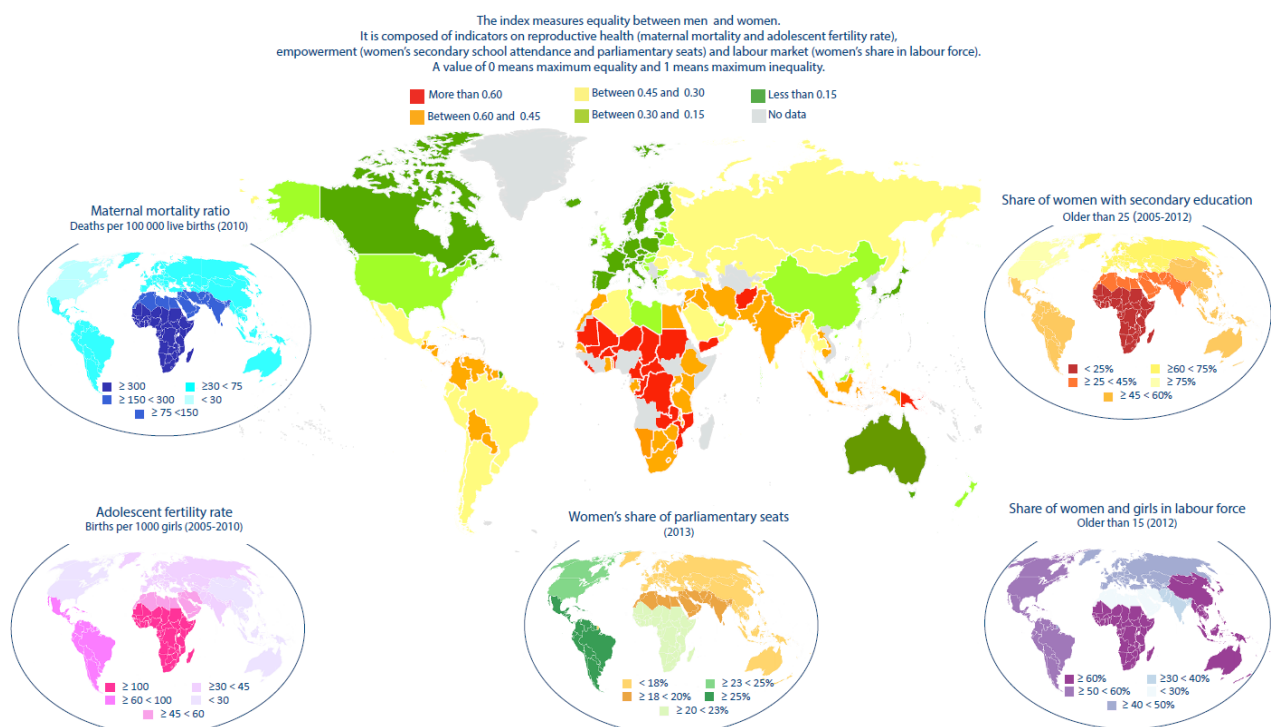
Introduction:

“Achieving gender equality requires the engagement of women and men, girls and boys. It is everyone’s responsibility.”

- Ban Ki-moon

Gender inequality is present in all societies, but it exists in different degrees. This difference in degree empowers men while it undermines women. It is, therefore, vital to promote gender equality, especially through the empowerment of women, in order to obtain a sustainable development and a society in which women and men enjoy the same opportunities, rights and obligations. Equality is achieved when men and women benefit from an equal share of power and influence; have equal access to education and the opportunity to fulfill their personal ambitions, talents and interests; share responsibility for the household matters and the children; and are completely free from coercion and gender-based violence both at home and at work.

Gender Inequality Index 2013



The Gender Inequality Index (GII) illustrates the degree of gender inequality around the world over time, taking into account health, political empowerment, economic participation and opportunity and educational attainment, four key aspects of the quality of life. The GII depicts the position of women in 155 countries and the component indicators highlight the areas in need of critical policy intervention to overcome the disadvantages imposed on women.

Definitions of Key Terms:

Gender : refers to the socially constructed roles, behaviours, activities and attributes that a given society considers appropriate for men and women. In most societies there are differences and inequalities between women and men in responsibilities assigned, activities undertaken, access to and control over resources, as well as decision-making opportunities. Gender is part of the broader socio-cultural context, and other important criteria for socio-cultural analysis include class, race, poverty level, ethnic group and age.

Sex : refers to the biological differences between men and women, which are universal and determined at birth. These differences tend to differentiate humans as males and females.

Social norms : the rules for how people should act in a given group or society, and are often different for women and men. Any behaviour that is outside these norms is considered abnormal.

Gender equity : refers to the process of fairness in the way men and women are treated. To ensure fairness, the different life experiences and needs of men and women are taken into consideration to compensate for women's historical and social disadvantages, and establish a level playing field. Equality cannot be achieved without equity.

Gender equality : refers to the equal rights, responsibilities and opportunities of women and men. It is not only a fundamental human right, but is also a necessary base for a prosperous, peaceful, sustainable world. It implies that the interests, needs and priorities of both women and men are taken into consideration, recognizing the diversity of different groups of women and men. Equality does not mean that women and men will become the same but that women's and men's rights, responsibilities and opportunities will not depend on whether they

are born male or female. Gender equality is not a women's issue but should concern and fully engage men as well as women.

Women's empowerment : refers to increasing and improving the social, economic, political and legal strength of women, in order to make them confident enough to claim their rights, such as complete control over their lives, both at home and at work; the ability to make their own decisions and choices; and their right to have equal access to education, social and economic justice and health.

Feminism : by definition, refers to the belief that women and men should have equal social, political and economic rights and opportunities.

Background Information and Overview:

Until the end of the 19th century, women were always treated as the inferior sex and were excluded from participating in many aspects of the public life, especially in what regarded politics, education and some professions. The history of the movement for gender equality is the history of the changing relationship between men and women, and not a 'pro-woman' movement like it's often distortedly represented.

Gender equality was rarely discussed during the 19th century and it was only in the 20th century that women started speaking up about it. Australia, Britain, New Zealand and the United States of America were the first countries that started actively trying to close the gender inequality gap, establishing new traditions and feminist mothers that would inspire the future generations. The Suffragettes, in England, led by Emmeline Pankhurst, and Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B Anthony in the US were key pioneers of the first-wave of feminism. Their objective was to acquire equality in property, economic and voting rights, which were achieved in early 20th century, in many countries across the world. After World War II, the second-wave of feminism started. Feminists broadened their objectives and started targeting discrimination in employment opportunities, pay and education, reproductive rights and the role of women in the family and household. In late 1980's, feminists called for greater awareness of equality issues of the previously marginalized female identities, such as women from minority backgrounds,

bisexual, lesbian and transgender women and women from the lower social classes. This was the third-wave of feminism.

In September of 2000, representatives of 189 Member States of the United Nations established an international agreement in order to defeat poverty. The UN set out 8 Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) to reduce global poverty and improve the lives of women and girls substantially by 2015. However, even though the world has made great progress towards gender equality and women's empowerment with the MDGs, women and girls still suffer from discrimination and violence in all parts of the world. So, the UN set out the Global Goals, in the end of 2015, in order to end poverty, protect the planet, and ensure prosperity for all so that a sustainable development is obtained. This is a reinforcement of the MDGs and another opportunity for the world to listen to the voices of girls and women and put them first in policies and plans, by providing women and girls with equal access to education, healthcare, employment, and representation in political and economic decision-making processes.

Major Countries and Organizations Involved:

All countries are involved in this matter as gender equality has not been completely achieved everywhere. The three countries where gender equality is very high are Iceland, Norway and Finland and the three countries where gender equality is very low are Yemen, Pakistan and Syria.

UN Commission on the Status of Women : In 1946, the Commission on the Status of Women was established as the first global intergovernmental body solely dedicated to the promotion of gender equality and women's empowerment. The Member States agree on actions to speed up the achievement of women's rights and empowerment. Their mission is "to raise the status of women, irrespective of nationality, race, language or religion, to equality with men in all fields of human enterprise, and to eliminate all discrimination against women in the provisions of statutory law, in legal maxims or rules, or in interpretation of customary law".

UN Women : In 2010, the UN General Assembly created the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, otherwise known as UN Women, in order to accelerate the progress on meeting the needs of women and girls around the world. The main roles of UN Women are to support the Commission on the Status of Women in formulating policies, global standards and norms, help the Member States to implement these standards by providing suitable technical and financial support to those that ask for it and lead and coordinate the UN system's work on gender equality. This organization also works in order to eliminate all discrimination against women and girls, empower women and achieve gender equality.

Timeline of Events:

1946 : The Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) is established.

1948 : The Universal Declaration of Human Rights is the first global recognition that there are basic civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights that are fundamental to all human beings, both female and male.

1954 : The Convention on the Political Rights of Women is established by the General Assembly.

1975 : During International Women's Year, International Women's Day (8th March) starts being commemorated. However, it is only two years later that the UN officially formalizes the day. In the same year the first World Conference on Women takes place in Mexico.

1979 : The UN General Assembly adopts the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW).

1993 : Following the World Conference on Human Rights, in Vienna, the General Assembly adopts the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women, which serves as a compliment to CEDAW in order to eliminate violence against women.

1995 : The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action is adopted by 189 State Members as a progressive model for women's empowerment.

2000 : At the Millennium Summit, 189 Member States establish an international agreement in the form of eight time-bound goals (Millennium Development Goals), designed to reduce global poverty by 2015. Each goal is linked to advancing women's rights, but Goal 3 directly calls for promotion of gender equality and women's empowerment.

2010 : The UN General Assembly creates the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, otherwise known as UN Women.

2014 : Goodwill Ambassador Emma Watson launches the HeForShe campaign, which calls on men and boys to collaborate in achieving gender equality.

2015 : Even though the world has made large progress in reducing global poverty and improving the lives of women and girls, there are still many gender gaps that exist and need to be tackled through a new set of goals. So, the UN set out the Global Goals in order to reinforce the MDGs and empower women.

Relevant UN Treaties and Events:

Convention on the Political Rights of Women : In 1954, the General Assembly adopts the Convention on the Political Rights of Women in order to set a basis international standard for women's political rights.

Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) : In 1979, the UN General Assembly adopted the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) which is the most thorough international instrument to protect women's human rights. It defines what can be considered as discrimination against women and tries to come up with solutions for said discrimination. As of 2015 with 189 States Parties, it is the second most ratified UN human rights treaty after the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women : In 1993, the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women is adopted as a compliment to CEDAW, in efforts to eliminate violence against women. It defines 'violence against women' as "any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life". The Declaration also states that all Member States should condemn violence against women and should not appeal to any custom, tradition or religious consideration to avoid their obligations with respect to its elimination.

Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action : It was adopted in 1995, as a progressive model to enhance women's empowerment. It outlines objectives and actions in efforts to advance women's rights.

Previous Attempts to Solve the Issue:

As aforementioned, gender inequality has already been attempted to be solved with the Millennium Development Goals. MDG3 set out to promote gender equality and empower women. The goal was to eliminate gender inequality in all levels of education and literacy, wage employment and national parliaments.

Even though it has helped to boost political will and encourage more development groups to invest in resources to promote gender equality, there's still a lot of progress to be made in order to reduce, and eventually close gender gap, especially in terms of health, education and politics around the world. For example, there's still 800 women who die everyday from preventable pregnancy-related causes; 1 in 3 women experience physical or sexual violence; women hold only 22% of parliamentary seats and account for more than 60% of the world's illiterate population.

The reason why MDG3 was not successful was because in some countries the gender inequality was too high for it to be possible to be decreased or even become zero in the time span of 15 years.

Possible Solutions:

Even though international cooperation seems to be a good solution for advancing gender equality, economic empowerment, such as actively promoted savings and credit societies in both rural and urban areas by the government, is frequently highlighted as the best way to improve women's social status. In addition, improvements on women's education, health and empowerment are also emphasized as a good route to the progression of women's rights. Overall, if the rights of women are protected and opportunities for women are promoted, women's economic and social development will be enhanced. Furthermore, an increasing awareness of the crucial role of women in development and their participation in decision-making activities are needed so that a sustainable development is achieved.

It would be in all countries' interest to promote gender equality as it has been proven that it's the best solution to eradicate extreme poverty and achieve economic growth.

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