

Gia Marucci  
Chandler Gilbert Community College  
MUNFW 68<sup>th</sup> Session  
Commission on the Status of Women

### **Preventing Domestic Violence against Women**

In 1997, the World Health Organization reported that nearly 20% of women have been abused by a man in their lifetime. Since the organizations' existence, the United Nations Charter has promised to provide the right to life, liberty, and security of person. The United Nations Human Rights Council aims to provide protection for all persons in all nations. In 1993, the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women was adopted, ensuring the security of the integrity, dignity and equality of all women.<sup>1</sup> Since the 1990s, domestic violence has been recognized as a human rights issue and a health issue therefore research on the issue has expanded. Most recently, the issue has been delegated to not only the governments within Member States, but grassroots organizations and other international women's organizations. The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) was adopted in 1979 by the UN General Assembly and aimed to prevent discrimination against women, in all its forms. Rashida Manjoo, the current UN Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women directed attention to the correlation between discrimination and domestic violence by saying, "States must acknowledge that violence against women is not the root problem, but that violence occurs because other forms of discrimination are allowed to flourish."<sup>2</sup> Violence against women, or gender based violence, is now widely recognized as a serious human rights abuse, and increasingly also as an important public health problem that concerns all sectors of society.<sup>3</sup> The recommendations for ending domestic violence after the study was complete were as follows:

---

<sup>1</sup> General Assembly. A/RES/48/104. Resolution adopted by the General Assembly on 20 December 1993.

<sup>2</sup> UN Treaties on Domestic Violence. [www.stopvaw.org/un\\_treaties\\_and\\_conventions](http://www.stopvaw.org/un_treaties_and_conventions)

<sup>3</sup> L. Heise, Garcia-Moreno, *United Nations World Health Organization*.

strengthening national commitment and action, promoting primary prevention, involving the education sector, strengthening the health sector response, supporting women living with violence, sensitizing the criminal justice systems, and supporting further research and collaboration and increasing donor support.<sup>4</sup> The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) currently invests in counselling and legal services, mediation and rehabilitation for those affected by domestic violence.<sup>5</sup>

The General Assembly adopted the Intensification of Efforts to Eliminate all Forms of Violence Against Women in 2006, which reaffirmed the commitments to social development and gender equality in all states, and reaffirmed the commitment to empowering women and ending domestic violence.<sup>6</sup> In 2008, the United Nations Secretary-General announced the “Unite to End Violence against Women” campaign whose global mission was to end domestic violence against women. The campaign plans to do this through the adoption and enforcement of national laws, the implementation of multi-sectoral national action plans, the establishment of data collection systems and the establishment of local campaigns to engage civil society actors. Ban Ki-moon, former Secretary General of the United Nations, stated, “Break the silence. When you witness violence against women and girls, do not sit back. Act.”<sup>7</sup>

When figuring out how to best dissolve the problem of domestic violence, the UN first had to differentiate between types of violence. Intimate partner violence is defined by an intimate partner that intentionally causes physical, sexual or psychological harm, including physical aggression, sexual coercion, psychological abuse and controlling behaviors.<sup>8</sup> The forms of

---

<sup>4</sup> L. Heise, Garcia-Moreno, *United Nations World Health Organization*.

<sup>5</sup> “United Nations Secretary-General’s Campaign to UNiTE to End Violence against Women.” United Nations, [www.un.org/en/women/endviolence/who\\_undp.shtml](http://www.un.org/en/women/endviolence/who_undp.shtml)

<sup>6</sup> General Assembly. A/RES/61/143. Resolution adopted by the General Assembly on 19 December 2006.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>8</sup> “Violence against Women.” World Health Organization. [www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs239/en/](http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs239/en/).

intimate partner violence include physical violence, sexual violence, emotional abuse such as humiliation or insults, and controlling behaviors such as isolating a person from family and friends or restricting access to healthcare, financial resources or education.<sup>9</sup> A WHO multi-country study on women's health and domestic violence against women collected data on intimate partner violence from women in 10 countries. Among these women, 13-61% reported experiencing physical violence by a partner, 4-49% reported having experienced severe physical violence by a partner, 6-59% reported sexual violence by a partner at some point in their lives, and 20-75% reported experiencing emotional abuse acts from a partner in their lifetime.<sup>10</sup> Sexual violence is defined by the UN as any sexual act or attempt at a sexual act by the use of coercion, by any person regardless of their relationship to the victim. The World Health Organization has also made it a point to study women's attitude towards violence, which directly correlates with a woman's self-worth or idea of equality with members of the opposite sex.

### **Factors associated with increased presence of violence**

Women that were previously married were more likely to experience violence than those that are married. In certain countries, the presence of formerly married women is low for cultural reasons. The absence of formerly married women does not make them immune to violence, but those that are unwed may be more willing to speak out because of the lack of fear or stigma. Women with lower education levels are also at an increased risk for violence, according to the World Health's Organization's report. Multiple international studies have mentioned the protective effects of women's education past secondary school. Women are empowered through education, and the opportunities that follow education, such as financial independence and

---

<sup>9</sup> WHO, and Pan American Health Organization. Understanding and Addressing Violence against Women. 2012.

<sup>10</sup> "Violence against Women." World Health Organization. [www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs239/en/](http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs239/en/).

information on legal literacies and the right to inheritance.<sup>11</sup> Additionally, large disparities in education is also a factor that increases a woman's chance to be exposed to violence. Around 65% of women with primary education or less are married younger, lack control of resources in their homes, and condone wife beating, as opposed to only around 5% of women that finish high school.<sup>12</sup>

Those who had experienced family violence before in their life are at higher risk to be the perpetrator for violence or to be a victim of violence. Marital discord and dissatisfaction are also associated with an increased risk for domestic violence.

### **Outcomes of Domestic Violence**

Victims of domestic violence are at substantial risk for mental health and physical health injuries. Bruises, lacerations, fractures and broken bones are all common injuries from those suffering from domestic violence. In addition to injury, "functional disorders" can also arise from domestic violence, such as chronic pain, asthma, and fibromyalgia. 40-70% of female murder victims were killed by their spouses or husbands.<sup>13</sup>

Poor mental health is also an outcome of domestic violence. Those that experienced domestic violence are more likely to be diagnosed with depression, anxiety and phobias. Thoughts of suicide and attempted suicides are higher in women that were abused than women that were not. Other mental health diseases that are attributed to the presence of domestic violence are poor self-esteem, physical inactivity, eating disorders, sleeping disorders, alcohol abuse, drug addictions and post-traumatic stress disorder.

---

<sup>11</sup> Noughani, Fatemeh, and Jamileh Mohtashami. "Effect of Education on Prevention of Domestic Violence against Women." Iranian Journal of Psychiatry, Tehran University of Medical Sciences, 2011. [www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3395941/](http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3395941/).

<sup>12</sup> "Education Plays Key Role in Advancing Women, Girls, and Communities, Report Says." World Bank. [www.worldbank.org/en/new/press-release/2014/05/14/education-key-role-women-girls-communities-report](http://www.worldbank.org/en/new/press-release/2014/05/14/education-key-role-women-girls-communities-report).

<sup>13</sup> "Violence against Women." World Health Organization. [www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs239/en/](http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs239/en/).

The sexual and reproductive health consequences of victims of sexual violence are ones that can be treated depending on their access to health care and financial resources of the victim. Victims of sexual violence are at an increased risk for sexually transmitted diseases, unwanted pregnancies and unsafe abortions. Difficulty seeking contraceptive use for the woman's partner or perpetrator of sexual violence is an indirect risk of the negative health outcomes of sexual violence.

## **Conclusion**

Empowering women through education could result in equality in financial resources in the home through a career and prevent victims of domestic violence from leaving the perpetrator due to inequalities. Local governments and Non-governmental organizations empowering women through financial support and activists assisting to bring policy change for empowering women could also decrease cases of domestic violence.

Programs that assist women with options and potential outcomes when facing domestic violence and further research on factors contributing to violence from the UN are vital to diminishing the number of victims of crimes of intimate partner violence, sexual violence, emotional abuse and physical abuse.

### **Questions to Consider**

1. What policies or committees does your country have in place to decrease domestic violence?
2. What research has your country published regarding domestic violence?
3. What programs does your country have in place for victims of domestic violence?
4. What is the awareness level of domestic violence or intimate partner violence in your country?
5. How much of your population is affected by domestic violence?
6. How does your country plan to contribute to the end of domestic violence?

## Bibliography

Education Plays Key Role in Advancing Women, Girls, and Communities, Report Says.” World

Bank, [www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2014/05/14/education-key-role-](http://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2014/05/14/education-key-role-)

women-girls-communities-report.

General Assembly. A/RES 48/104, Resolution adopted by the general assembly on 20 December 1993.

General Assembly. A RES 61/143, Resolution adopted by the General Assembly 19 December 2006.

L. Heise, Garcia-Moreno, *United Nations World Health Organization*

Noughani, Fatemeh, and Jamileh Mohtashami. “Effect of Education on Prevention of Domestic

Violence against Women.” Iranian Journal of Psychiatry, Tehran University of Medical

Sciences, 2011, [www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3395941/](http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3395941/).

United Nations Secretary-General's Campaign to UNiTE to End Violence Against

Women.” United Nations, [www.un.org/en/women/endviolence/who\\_undp.shtml](http://www.un.org/en/women/endviolence/who_undp.shtml).

UN Treaties on Domestic Violence, [www.stopvaw.org/un\\_treaties\\_and\\_conventions](http://www.stopvaw.org/un_treaties_and_conventions)

“Violence against women.” World Health Organization, World Health Organization,

[www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs239/en/](http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs239/en/).

WHO, and Pan American Health Organization. Understanding and Addressing Violence against

Women. 2012.

Mark J Stoll III  
Chandler-Gilbert Community College  
MUNFW 68<sup>th</sup> Session  
Commission on the Status of Women

### **Closing the Gap in Providing Access to Women's Health Care**

The United Nations is built around four purposes or goals that strive to ensure international security as well as protect individual human rights, all while using the great forum that is the UN. The third purpose according the UN Charter is “to achieve international co-operation in solving international problems of an economic, social, cultural, or humanitarian character, and in promoting and encouraging respect for human rights and for fundamental freedoms for all without distinction as to race, sex, language, or religion.”<sup>1</sup> In regards to equitable access to health care for women, the international community is failing the third purpose of the United Nations as it continues to inadequately address the unique needs of physical and mental health of women. This deficit in access to care has led to 63.2 million unintended pregnancies in the developing world as women do not have access to effective contraception. Additionally, it is estimated that 100,000 maternal deaths could have been avoided if modern contraception methods were available in developing nations. This continued behavior of indifference violates the UN Charter as it does not respect the fundamental freedom of reproductive health of women. Several UN bodies have paid close attention to this issue over recent years including the Human Rights Council. The Sustainable Development Goals adopted by the General Assembly have highlighted the need to need for international reform of medical inequities. Goal three and five ensure good health and wellbeing and promoting gender equality. In addition to the United Nations, certain State actors have made improvements

---

<sup>1</sup> UN Charter

and to slowly closing this gap in Access to Women's Health Care. The natural and more encompassing step to achieve equitable access to health care would be to institute universal health care. According to the World Health Organization, "universal health coverage means that all people receive the health services they need without suffering financial hardship when paying for them. The full spectrum of essential, quality health services should be covered including health promotion, prevention and treatment, rehabilitation and palliative care."<sup>2</sup> The universal health care (UHC) debate has permeated throughout many international and multilateral forums and has many myths behind it. UHC does not mean government paid for insurance, that is simply not feasible, and no government could bare the load of nations medical costs. UHC deployed effectively would minimalize government involvement yet keep out of pocket costs to a bare minimum. The international community does not need to solve the problem of resistance to UHC to provide equitable access to a marginalized groups, women and girls. A narrow focused can be placed on women and girls to specifically target unique health care needs and combat maternal mortality rate.

## **United Nations**

In 2016, The Human Rights Council adopted A/HRC/RES/32/4 focusing on eliminating discrimination against women. The Council called up the international community to make high quality health care systems accessible, affordable, available, appropriate, and effective to women and girls.<sup>3</sup> The Council implored Member States to eliminate legal, administrative, financial and social barriers that hinder women's right to the full enjoyment of the highest

---

<sup>2</sup> Universal Health Coverage Fact Sheet, The WHO

<sup>3</sup> A/HRC/RES/32/4

attainable standard of physical and mental health. Although the Council was able to adopt the resolution without a vote, there is still significant disagreement on how to provide access to women's health care. Member States' governments stymie reform in the name of preserving culture and heritage. This problem permeates developed and developing states alike, but we do see greater maternal mortality rates in developing states due to the already high numbers of disadvantaged groups. Certain organizations are still able to make an impact in those regions, namely the World Health Organization, and the World Bank. The WHO can provide support through regional office that are uniquely situated to know not only know where health care needs to be, but where it is currently at in the region and what strategies will work best for that area. The World Bank can financially support government programs that plan to educate women on health care as well as subsidize health care services to lower financial and cultural barriers to entry.

## **Egypt**

In 2005, Egypt's Project Population sought "to motivate families to utilize family planning, contraception, and other health measures by highlight the negative affect that a high fertility rate will have on the local community via overpopulation." This tactic encouraged smaller family size and therefore increased contraception usage. This program not only focused on maternal figures, but paternal and other units of the family to help overcome the cultural and social barrier to equal health care services.

The World Bank provides its take on how to close the gap in Egypt in the 2015 report, *A Roadmap to Achieve Social Justice in Egypt*. In the short term, a renewed focus is placed on disadvantaged groups in districts within the region that have high maternal mortality rates as well

as high fertility rates. Additionally, resources are sent to bad-outcome districts which include staff with specialized training in approaching the community with family planning options, maternal nutrition education, and high-risk pregnancy attendants. The staff training as shown success in discussing and encouraging family planning and contraception use, where otherwise there might be a negative reaction from the local community due to cultural or religious concerns. The report shows that emphasizing the need for family planning services as well as motivating those in the family unit whether paternal or grand-maternal figures to stay involved throughout and after the pregnancy will provide a significant positive change. These measures seek to help those disadvantaged overcome not a financial obstacle, but a cultural and social barrier to health care. As a result of these additions the contraceptive prevalence rate doubled as well as an average four-fold increase in the use of family planning clinics.<sup>4</sup>

## **Maldives**

The Maldives have taken a different approach to lower maternal mortality rate and fertility rate. In the region, there is a significant increase in physical abuse for women, especially during pregnancy. Abuse during pregnancy by intimate partners are not uncommon and has led to increased maternal mortality rate. “Of all cases where severe abuse injuries were sustained and those injuries needed immediate medical attention, only 11% were reported.” Of that 11% that sought medical attention, only 1 in 3 told the medical professional the true nature of those injuries.<sup>5</sup> Here the Ministry of Gender and Family saw a possible solution to the problem. Medical staff and professional were trained to look for indicators of abuse at places other than

---

<sup>4</sup> *Project Population*. (2005). Retrieved from The World Bank: <http://projects.worldbank.org/P005163/egypt-population-project?lang=en>

<sup>5</sup> The Government of Maldives Ministry of Gender and Family. (n.d.). *The Maldives Study on Women's Health and Life Experiences*.

trauma centers. antenatal and postnatal facilities were staffed with those trained to notice abuse. Additionally, Family Protection Units were established at major hospitals which aimed to strengthen the health sectors overall response to abuse. These units were allotted special examination space and privacy where cases of abuse were prevalent and encouraged victims to discuss cases of domestic violence to medical officials, where lack of privacy would have otherwise dissuaded them. These units are particularly important for equal access to health care because these abused women purposely avoid crucial health services because of the trauma visible to medical professionals. Without these units or some program similar, intimate partners are now a barrier to health care access. The Republic of Maldives admits that adding these units to all medical centers throughout the region would be a costly endeavor, but it has led to an increase in the overall percentage of reported maternal violence and is starting to decrease maternal mortality rate in the region.

### **African Region**

Africa has been highlighted by the World Health Organization as a region requiring specialized focus for a variety of cultural and political reasons. The Regional Office for Africa published a report in 2012, *Addressing the Challenge of Women's Health in Africa*. The report identified major focus areas in health reform that have elicited positive results in certain States. For example, a study conducted in 1990 in Uganda showed a decrease in public health services at public hospitals as they instituted user fees. These fees were hypothesized to place an undue burden on the individual if they wanted to utilize these supposed public services. Women were especially affected by user fees as comparatively an income for a woman was significantly less than a man. Conversely in 2001, Uganda showed a 50% increase in the same services when they

eliminated user fees for these services in 2001. Focusing on financial accessibility continues to move Uganda in the right direction.

Ghana showed another approach which hoped to circumvent geographical barriers to health care. Ghana utilized community health workers that went from location to location, otherwise cut off from most health services, and “provided essential services such as health education, immunization, family planning, skilled birth attendance, antenatal and postnatal care, and the treatment of minor ailments.”<sup>6</sup> Many Member States will find this approach inviting as it utilizes the local community and not out intervention to help fix the problem at home. Just this relatively simple change saw a 30% maternal mortality rate drop and a significant drop in over fertility rate in the region.

## **Conclusion**

Providing equal access to health care for women is not a simple task. The international community has showed through United Nation resolutions that it is committed to human rights for all and is dedicated to its original pillars built in the UN Charter. Other NGOs have shown their commitment to equitable access to health care for years through financial and other resources sharing. An integrated approach between State actors, non-governmental organizations, and the UN system should be utilized. Examples in Africa emphasize the need to reduce financial obstacles to health services. Additionally, there is a trend in Egypt and Africa in using the local community to supplement health professionals. A remarkable success in Egypt and the Maldives revolves around education. Education is a theme in these regions as it helps to

---

<sup>6</sup> The African Regional Office of the World Health Organization. (2012). *Report of the Commission on Women's Health in the African Region*.

circumvent cultural barriers that stymie health professionals from providing critical services. In both the Egypt and Africa, local government utilized local community leaders while also welcoming help from NGOs like WHO and accepted financial sponsorship from the World Bank. Universal Health Care is a standard worth pursuing, however the international community can no longer hide behind the nuance, complexity and controversy of UHC while women and young girls are being marginalized, maternal mortality rate is unnecessarily high and fertility rates peak in some of the most densely populated regions in the world. Member State must work together with each other and other non-governmental organizations within the United Nations framework to take simple yet proven effective steps to close the gap in providing access to women's health care.

### **Questions to Consider**

1. What steps are your country taking to increase access to women's health care?
2. Has your country attempted to reduce financial obstacles with either Universal Health Care or some specific mechanism targeting women?
3. Does your country currently keep detailed records of maternal mortality rates?

## Bibliography

Council, H.R. (2016). Elimination of Discrimination against Women.

*Project Population*. (2005). Retrieved from The World Bank:

<http://projects.worldbank.org/P005163/egypt-population-project?lang=en>

The African Regional Office of the World Health Organization. (2012). *Report of the Commission on Women's Health in the African Region*.

The Government of Maldives Ministry of Gender and Family. (n.d.). *The Maldives Study on Women's Health and Life Experiences*.

The World Bank. (2015, Jan). A Roadmap to Achieve Social Justice in Health Care in Egypt.

UN Charter. (1945).

Universal Health Coverage Fact Sheet, The WHO

Mary Sullivan Hake  
Arizona State University '15  
MUNFW 68<sup>th</sup> Session  
Commission on the Status of Women

### **Empowering the Economic, Political, and Social Life of Women**

It is increasingly clear that when women and girls are empowered, humanity is empowered – evidence shows that “economies grow faster and families are healthier and better educated.”<sup>1</sup> As of 2014, 143 countries have constitutionally guaranteed equality between the sexes; however, 52 countries have yet to do so.<sup>2</sup> Persistent gender inequalities exist in virtually every country at the economic, political and social level. Yet, gender disparities are being reduced in many countries with successful policies being implemented by the United Nations, governments and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) by targeting root causes of inequality.

### **Economic Empowerment**

In order to empower women and girls, these gender imbalances need to be addressed. No country is immune from economic inequality, and while the economic gap has diminished significantly in developed countries, in many others “women have been forced to accept low pay and poor working conditions.”<sup>3</sup> The responsibility for the majority of unremunerated domestic work such as child and elder care, food preparation, environmental protection and community service falls primarily on women. When these contributions are not quantitatively measured, they are not valued on a national level. “Women’s contribution to development is seriously underestimated and thus its social recognition is limited.”<sup>4</sup> Other systematic obstacles to the

---

<sup>1</sup> *Beijing Declaration and Platform For Action*. UN Women. <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/beijing/pdf/BDPfA%20E.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> *Gender Equality: Why it Matters*. Retrieved July 14, 2017, from UN Sustainable Development: [http://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/5\\_Why-it-Matters\\_GenderEquality\\_2p.pdf](http://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/5_Why-it-Matters_GenderEquality_2p.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> *Beijing Declaration and Platform For Action*. UN Women. <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/beijing/pdf/BDPfA%20E.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> *Beijing Declaration and Platform For Action*. UN Women. <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/beijing/pdf/BDPfA%20E.pdf>

economic empowerment of women are the lack of equal access to education, health care, vocational training, land ownership, bank credit and markets.

Elimination of gender disparity in primary and secondary education is an ambition of the United Nations' Millennium Development Goals. "Increasing women and girls' education contributes to higher economic growth."<sup>5</sup> An example of the United Nations, governments and NGOs collaborating towards addressing equal access to education for girls is taking place in Nigeria, in the small, rural town of Toro. The UK Department for International Development (DFID) works to help the country achieve its part of the Millennium Development Goals by funneling money to the Girls Education Project. According to the DFID, more than 2000 Nigerian children under the age of 5 die every day from preventable diseases, and more than 100 women die every day from complications during pregnancy and childbirth.

The Girls Education Project is funded by the DFID with the goals of getting one million more girls into school by 2020, to improve the quality of education, and, importantly, to ensure the "deployment of more than 10,000 female teachers to rural areas where the predominance of male teachers deters many parents from sending their girls to school."<sup>6</sup> Resistance also stems from the perception that there is little value to education, particularly for girls, and many parents simply cannot afford the costs associated with sending their children to school. With the help of the Girls Education Project, a group of women (under the auspices of the Mothers' Association at the Gyezmo primary school) discuss school attendance – if a student drops out, they visit that student's home. If the parents do not have the money to send their child to study, the association will use "the little money [they] do have to help those girls buy pencils and other materials they

---

<sup>5</sup> *UN Women*. (2014). Retrieved June 30, 2017, from Facts and Figures: Economic Empowerment: <http://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/economic-empowerment/facts-and-figures>

<sup>6</sup> Unicef At a glance: Nigeria. (2014, June 16). Retrieved July 08, 2017, from UNICEF: <http://www.unicef.org/education/nigeria>

need,” says Hadiza Ahmadu, the chair of the association.

Adequate health care provisions and appropriate education on hygiene practices can aid in the economic welfare of girls and women. In many countries, lack of access to affordable sanitary products and local customs combine to keep girls from attending school for one week out of every month during their menses. This is a major contributor to girls falling behind in their studies and leads to high dropout rates. Low educational opportunities is a root cause of economic inequality, as it confines women to menial and low paying jobs.

Kenya Self-Help Project, an NGO dedicated to addressing this issue, distributes what it calls ‘Dignity Kits’ in 23 schools in Kendu Bay, Nigeria. “Over 2,050 adolescent girls in partner schools receive Dignity Kits containing underwear and locally-made reusable sanitary supplies.”<sup>7</sup> The partner schools have also constructed gender-sensitive latrines to ensure girls have secure and private facilities. These measures have reduced absenteeism in schools by 70 percent, reduced the dropout rate by 98 percent, and have reduced pregnancy to zero percent.<sup>8</sup>

## **Political Empowerment**

Despite representing half the global population, women are woefully underrepresented politically. They comprise less than 20 percent of the world’s legislators, and, as of July 2013, there are 37 states in which women account for less than 10 percent of parliamentarians in single or lower houses.<sup>9</sup> Women face a myriad of obstacles to political participation in their countries. Structural barriers come in the form of discriminatory laws and institutions, including a lack of

---

<sup>7</sup> Kenya Self-Help Project Girls Empowerment. (n.d.). Retrieved July 21, 2017, from Kenya Self Help: <http://www.kenyaselfhelp.org>

<sup>8</sup> Kenya Self-Help Project Girls Empowerment. (n.d.). Retrieved July 21, 2017, from Kenya Self Help: <http://www.kenyaselfhelp.org>

<sup>9</sup> *Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment*. (2016, February 18). Retrieved July 17, 2017, from USAID: <https://www.usaid.gov/what-we-do/gender-equality-and-womens-empowerment>

education, financial resources and support.

The political empowerment of women is “fundamental to ending extreme poverty and promoting resilient democratic societies. According to USAID, when women play an active role in civil society and politics, governments tend to be more open, responsive and transparent. When women are at the negotiating table, peace agreements are more durable.”<sup>10</sup> Still, women are largely absent from local and national decision-making structures. Without the active participation of women and their perspective at all levels of decision-making, equality, development and peace are elusive goals.

A change of attitude in regard to gender stereotypes is necessary to reverse the dearth of political engagement of women, and is needed at all levels. Women may be discouraged from participating in the political arena by a lack of family support which reinforces discriminatory attitudes and practices that place the burden of child care and other family responsibilities disproportionately on them. Equal access to education should be expected from local governments to ensure girls are participating to their best ability. Engaging more women in civil society through increased participation in the formal work force is a natural avenue towards political opportunity.

Governmental assistance was instrumental in Kabul, Afghanistan with the launch of the largest women’s empowerment program in USAID history – Promote. “Promote will serve as the stepping stone between education and careers for thousands of Afghan women driven to serve as political, civil society and private sector leaders.”<sup>11</sup> Progress is being made in several countries

---

<sup>10</sup> *Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment*. (2016, February 18). Retrieved July 17, 2017, from USAID: <https://www.usaid.gov/what-we-do/gender-equality-and-womens-empowerment>

<sup>11</sup> Lewa, J. (2015, March 6). *From Kenya to Kabul: Women as Decision Makers, Entrepreneurs, and Leaders*. Retrieved July 18, 2017, from USAID.gov: <https://blog.usaid.gov/2015/03/from-kenya-to-kabul-women-as-decision-makers-entrepreneurs-and-leaders/>

with assistance from the United Nations, specifically UN Women, by providing training for women candidates, voter and civic education and supporting “gender equality advocates in calling on political parties, governments and others to do their part in empowering women.”<sup>12</sup>

The following are a few recent results of UN Women’s success:

- The 2013 elections in Kenya saw a more than 20 percent rise in the number of women legislators. UN Women contributed to this by running Campaign for Women in Leadership which encourages voters to elect women, and provided training to almost 900 female candidates.
- In 2012, UN Women worked with The National Database and Registration Authority in Pakistan to register more than 40 million women to vote, which represents 86 percent of the female population – an increase from 44 percent just four years earlier. The collaboration also resulted in a system to collect voter data by sex and will aid in identifying obstacles to women’s civic rights.
- Women in Zimbabwe gained 35 percent of legislative seats in their July, 2013 elections, compared to only 17 percent in 2008; moreover, this contributed to a new constitution which is strong on women’s rights. Credit for this constitution and breakthrough goes to the *Group of 20*, a lobbying group for gender equality that is comprised of activists, politicians and scholars supported by UN Women.<sup>13</sup>

---

<sup>12</sup> *Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment*. (2016, February 18). Retrieved July 17, 2017, from USAID: <https://www.usaid.gov/what-we-do/gender-equality-and-womens-empowerment>

<sup>13</sup> *Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment*. (2016, February 18). Retrieved July 17, 2017, from USAID: <https://www.usaid.gov/what-we-do/gender-equality-and-womens-empowerment>

## Social Life

Many of the same impediments to the economic and political empowerment of women also inhibits their social standing, namely, conscious or unconscious biases and attitudes regarding girls' inherent worth that deprives them of equal opportunity and education. Changing the traditional roles for men and women in the family, as well as society is necessary to attain full equality between men and women. This is not new information, as the Convention of the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) was adopted and ratified by the General Assembly in 1979. The document asserts:

“that discrimination against women violates the principles of equality of rights and respect for human dignity, is an obstacle to the participation of women, on equal terms with men, in the political, social, economic and cultural life of their countries, hampers the growth of the prosperity of society and the family and make more difficult the full development of the potentialities of women in the service of their countries and of humanity.”<sup>14</sup>

Women and girls' empowerment is imperative to the expansion of economic growth as well as promoting social development. Gender equality is essential to all aspects of creating and maintaining a healthy society, “from reducing poverty to promoting the health, education, protection and well-being of girls and boys.”<sup>15</sup>

The United Nations Sustainable Development Goal number 5 for Gender Equality promotes investing in educational programs for girls, encourages girls to stay in school and for

---

<sup>14</sup> *Convention of the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women*. UN Women. Retrieved July 17, 2017, from UN Women: <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/text/econvention.htm>

<sup>15</sup> *Gender Equality: Why it Matters*. Retrieved July 14, 2017, from UN Sustainable Development: [http://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/5\\_Why-it-Matters\\_GenderEquality\\_2p.pdf](http://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/5_Why-it-Matters_GenderEquality_2p.pdf)

them to advocate for their right to “access sexual and reproductive health services.”<sup>16</sup> Goal 5 also calls on boys to “work alongside women and girls to achieve gender equality and embrace healthy, respectful relationships.”<sup>17</sup> This is exemplified through the United Nations HeForShe Initiative - a solidarity campaign for the advancement of women initiated by UN Women. “HeForShe invites people everywhere to come together as equal partners to craft a shared vision of a gender equal world and implement specific, locally relevant solutions for the good of all of humanity.”<sup>18</sup> Its goal is to engage men and boys as agents of change by encouraging them to take action against negative inequalities faced by women and girls. Furthermore, they also advocate for public sector reforms to aid in the transformation of “norms, policies, and practices that shape government planning, budgeting and performance monitoring”<sup>19</sup> by adopting gender equality as a key objective. Some examples of success are evidenced in Morocco and Rwanda.

In Morocco, UN Women began advocating that gender equality be addressed in the planning and budgeting in 2002. With significant investments in training and the publication of the *Handbook for Integrating Gender in Planning and Budgeting* in 2007, the budget now includes “a new family aid law that extends benefits to poor women undergoing divorce” and “an increase in resources for health care for women giving birth, maternal mortality declined.”<sup>20</sup>

Similar activities are taking place in Rwanda where the Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning, in collaboration with the Ministry of Gender and Family and UN Women, now have a national program for “gender-responsive budgeting.” This program includes training,

---

<sup>16</sup> *Gender Equality: Why it Matters*. Retrieved July 14, 2017, from UN Sustainable Development: [http://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/5\\_Why-it-Matters\\_GenderEquality\\_2p.pdf](http://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/5_Why-it-Matters_GenderEquality_2p.pdf)

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>18</sup> HeForShe, from UN Women: <http://www.heforshe.org/en/our-mission>

<sup>19</sup> *Engaging in Public Sector Reform*. Retrieved June 30, 2017, from UN Women: <http://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/governance-and-national-planning/engaging-in-public-sector-reform>

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*

workshops and mentoring. Civil society groups and parliamentarians have attended conferences on holding the government accountable for the allocation of budgeting commitments.<sup>21</sup> With gender-sensitive plans and the participation of women in the decision-making process, assisted by UN Women and UN Capital Development Fund, women in Tanzania have better access to clean water and are economically empowered by securing contacts for water service delivery. Also, Mozambique has a program that trains women in electrical and mechanical skills for the development of solar energy systems.<sup>22</sup>

## **Conclusion**

While there has been significant progress in the economic, political and social empowerment of women over the past several decades due to the creation and adoption of documents such as CEDAW, The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, and the establishment of UN Women, there is still much more to do. The policies and goals outlined in the above documents need to be better executed. Women and girls are still suffering from discrimination in every part of the world. Changing attitudes, without imposing foreign values, that girls and women are valuable assets to the family, community and economy is critical to overcoming the biases which still exist. The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action calls on governments to:

“Commit themselves to establishing the goal of gender balance in governmental bodies and committees, as well as in public administrative entities, and in the judiciary... setting specific targets and implementing measures to substantially increase the number of

---

<sup>21</sup> *Engaging in Public Sector Reform*. Retrieved June 30, 2017, from UN Women: <http://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/governance-and-national-planning/engaging-in-public-sector-reform>

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

women with a view to achieving equal representation... in all governmental and public administration positions.”<sup>23</sup>

It is imperative to provide women and girls with equal access to education, health care, justice, and the opportunity to participate in political and economic decision-making processes. The implementation of gender equality policies which promote economic, political and social empowerment of women and girls will provide a foundation for sustainable economies, promote peace, and benefit civil society as well as humanity at large.

---

<sup>23</sup> *Beijing Declaration and Platform For Action*. UN Women. <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/beijing/pdf/BDPfA%20E.pdf>

### **Questions to Consider**

- 1) Is your country one of the 143 that constitutionally guarantees gender equality? If so, what policies are being implemented to ensure equality?
- 2) Are cultural attitudes and religion in your country obstacles to achieving parity?
- 3) What are some of the systemic and endemic obstacles to achieving gender equality in your country? Is there a public policy solution to these challenges?
- 4) Are indigenous women recognized and afforded equal access to participation in policy making?
- 5) Is there consistent implementation of a comprehensive public policy to prevent violence against girls and women and punish perpetrators?

## Bibliography

“Beijing Declaration and Platform For Action.” UN Women.

<http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/beijing/pdf/BDPfA%20E.pdf>

“Convention of the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.” UN Women.

Retrieved July 17, 2017, from UN Women:

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

“Engaging in Public Sector Reform.” Retrieved June 30, 2017, from UN Women:

<http://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/governance-and-national-planning/engaging-in-public-sector-reform>

“Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment.” (2016, February 18). Retrieved July 17, 2017,

from USAID: <https://www.usaid.gov/what-we-do/gender-equality-and-womens-empowerment>

“Gender Equality: Why it Matters.” Retrieved July 14, 2017, from UN Sustainable

Development: [http://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/5\\_Why-it-Matters\\_GenderEquality\\_2p.pdf](http://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/5_Why-it-Matters_GenderEquality_2p.pdf)

HeForShe, from UN Women: <http://www.heforshe.org/en/our-mission><sup>5</sup> UN Women. (2014).

Retrieved June 30, 2017, from Facts and Figures: Economic Empowerment:

<http://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/economic-empowerment/facts-and-figures>

“Kenya Self-Help Project Girls Empowerment.” (n.d.). Retrieved July 21, 2017, from Kenya Self

Help: <http://www.kenyaselfhelp.org>

Lewa, J. (2015, March 6). *From Kenya to Kabul: Women as Decision Makers, Entrepreneurs,*

*and Leaders*. Retrieved July 18, 2017, from USAID.gov:

<https://blog.usaid.gov/2015/03/from-kenya-to-kabul-women-as-decision-makers-entrepreneurs-and-leaders/>

“Unicef At a glance: Nigeria.” (2014, June 16). Retrieved July 08, 2017, from UNICEF:

<http://www.unicef.org/education/nigeria>