

The Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) is the principal global intergovernmental body exclusively dedicated to the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of women. A functional commission of the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), it was established by ECOSOC resolution 11(II) of 21 June 1946. The CSW is instrumental in promoting women's rights, documenting the reality of women's lives throughout the world, and shaping global standards on gender equality and the empowerment of women.

In 1996, ECOSOC in resolution 1996/6 (see p. 20) expanded the Commission's mandate and decided that it should take a leading role in monitoring and reviewing progress and problems in the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, and in mainstreaming a gender perspective in UN activities. (UNWomen.org)

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ENDING HARMFUL PRACTICES AGAINST WOMEN

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What are the Most Harmful Practices Against Women?

The Commission on the Status of Women was founded in June of 1946 with the goal of promoting gender rights, gender equality and the empowerment of women across both first world and third world countries. Since the formation of the Commission on the Status of Women, the rise of harmful practices against women, also known as Traditional Harmful Practices (THPs), has been a concern brought to the international spotlight. The spotlight of harmful practices against women has risen because the practices violate the human rights of women. Very common THPs include, but are not limited to, forced child marriages, prenatal sex selection, "honour" crimes, acid attacks and female genital mutilations. There have been international calls for resolutions to bring an end to these harmful practices against women and girls across all regions of the world.

Child Marriages

Although child marriages occur between both boys and girls, young girls are more likely to be forced to enter into a child marriage. UNICEF reports that 650 million girls and women in the world today were married as young children¹. A majority of young girls forced into child marriages are poor, uneducated girls who primarily come from rural families. Child marriages are wanted by parents of young girls because they see it as a chance to secure their daughter's future. Parents also see child marriages as a way to secure their family's economic future as they marry into financially stable families. They also see child marriages as a way to prevent

¹ "Harmful Practices," UNICEF, March 7, 2021, <https://www.unicef.org/protection/harmful-practices>.

premarital sexual relationships, which is often a cultural taboo. These child marriages most commonly occur in Southern Asia, Sub Saharan Africa, Latin America and the Middle East.

In recent years, the movement to end child marriages have gained momentum as the United Nations General Assembly and the Human Rights Council have pushed for countries to eliminate the practice of child marriages. They have pushed for this through the United Nations Population Fund- United Nations Children's Fund (UNFPA-UNICEF) Global Programme to End Child Marriage which had encouraged countries to empower women and young girls to strive to achieve their full potential, through education, connections with their community, and health. Child marriages put all of these at risk. The Programme goal is to empower young girls and women to direct their own future through their own ambitions, while encouraging states to enact laws to restrict and eliminate child marriages.

Female Genital Mutilation

Female genital mutilation (FGM) is the practice of removing, in its entirety or partially, women's external genitalia or for nonmedical purposes, injuring women's genital organs.² Medical experts state that the practice of female genital mutilation has no medical benefits to women and can lead to a series of short and long-term health problems and even death. Some of the health problems that are a result of FGM include infertility, continuous bleeding, infections and complications during childbirth. It is estimated that in nearly 30 countries approximately 200 million women and young girls have undergone genital mutilation occur to them. This number world wide could be higher as there are countries who do not report their data and this is only 30 countries. The World Health Organization reports that this Traditional Harmful

² GOOD PRACTICES IN LEGISLATION ON 'HARMFUL PRACTICES' AGAINST WOMEN," *United Nations Nations Unies* , May 26, 2009.

Practice most commonly occurs between infancy and age 15. The practice of female genital mutilation occurs worldwide, but is concentrated in the Middle East, Asia and Africa.

There have been international calls for the end of the harmful practice of female genital mutilation, including the World Health Organization, which condemns the procedure. Since 2008, UNICEF has partnered with the UNFPA under the UNFPA-UNICEF Joint Programme to Eliminate Female Genital Mutilation to help stage interventions to end female genital mutilation in at least 17 countries, most notably, Egypt, Kenya, Mali, and Somalia. This program is used to promote laws banning these practices in the countries, but there are continued challenges. Since the start of the program in 2008, 13 of the 17 countries have started creating laws that ban female genital mutilation, but only a small percent of these laws are actually enforced.

“Honour” Crimes

“Honour” crimes are crimes, primarily murder or domestic violence, perpetrated primarily by men against women and girls who are perceived to have brought shame or dishonor to their families. Women have been beaten, murdered and have disappeared as part of honor crimes. In 2000 the United Nation estimated that the number of yearly “honour” killings is approximately five thousand. It is possible that this number is inaccurate because there are potential “honour killings” that are unreported or not classified as “honour” killings. “Honour” killings have been documented all across the world, from South America to Asia to Africa and even parts of Europe³.

The average age of a female victim of an honor killing is age 23. There are a variety of reasons why an honor killing can occur, but they primarily revolve around the perception that the woman or girl brought shame to the family. A woman can be seen to have brought shame to the

³Veena Meeto and Heidi Safia Mirza, “‘There Is Nothing ‘Honourable’ about Honour Killings’: Gender, Violence and the Limits of Multiculturalism,” *Women's Studies International Forum* 30, no. 3 (2007): pp. 187-200, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.wsif.2007.03.001>.

family if she has been involved in an extramarital relationship or has had sexual relationship with someone who she is “not supposed to.” Some women have even been victims of honor crimes because they appear to be “too Western⁴.”

The United Nations has debated and attempted to pass resolutions, as recently as 2002 and 2004, to end honor crimes in these parts of the world. The United Nations states that an honor crime is a human rights violation.

Prenatal and Postnatal Sex Selection

Sex selection is the deliberate elimination of girls and women through abortion, infanticide and neglect both during pregnancy and after. Prenatal sex selection is the action of terminating a pregnancy because of the gender of the baby. If the decision is made the pregnancy would be terminated because the gender is undesired. Historically, births that are terminated due to prenatal sex selection are babies that are female and seen as the wrong sex. This practice commonly occurs in Asia, where male babies are a more desired outcome.

Another form that sex selection that can occur is called postnatal sex selection. Once a baby is born as an undesired sex (generally female), the baby is not given proper care. For example, in some countries, an unwanted female child will not be vaccinated deliberately, which can be deadly. . In addition, in postnatal sex selection, an undesirable female is not given adequate nutrition or health care.

The United Nations Population Fund states that there are three main reasons that families that commit gender-biased sex selection, including the preference of wanting a son over a daughter, a decline of fertility in the families and easier access to the technology and

⁴ Helba, C., Bernstein, M., Leonard, M., & Bauer, E. (2014). Report on Exploratory Study into Honor Violence Measurement Methods—Appendixes. *Annotation*.

medical facilities where the sex selection can be determined. This harmful practice skews the population of countries, leading to a greater number of men than women..

There have been international calls for the end of gender-biased sex selection . It has been called morally, ethically and legally wrong. The Beijing Platform for Action includes pre and post natal sex selection as violence against women. Some governments have started adopting new ways of data collection for statistics for pre and post natal sex selection, limiting the technology and supplies available for prenatal sex selection.

Acid Attacks

Acid attacks are a form of attack where acid is thrown on an individual. Acid attacks against girls and women most commonly occur because marriage refusal, sexual rejection to boys and men and denying sex. Acid attacks lead to immediate damage, disfigurement, pain and long-lasting medical complications. Although acid attacks occur against men, women are much more likely to have an acid attack committed against them. Each year there are approximately 1,500 acid attacks recorded and approximately 80 percent of them occur against women.⁵

Acid attacks have been recorded in Southern Asia, Africa, Europe and South America. The most acid attacks reported are in the United Kingdom which has the highest attacks per capita rate in the world. In Bangladesh, acid attacks have been committed against women in their own homes. There is a pattern that the victims in these attacks are from lower socioeconomic households. In India, it is believed that acid attacks are underreported and victims do not report out of fear that they will be attacked again. The Acid Survivors Trust International believes that 60 percent of acid attacks each year go unreported.

⁵ Acid Survivors Trust International.

In countries where acid attacks are occurring much more frequently, there have been some laws passed in order to decrease the number of acid attacks. In Columbia, a country with one of the highest acid attack rates per capita, the government has passed laws to monitor and regulate the sale of acid and chemicals, while increasing the penalty for chemical attacks. In Cambodia, laws aimed at acid attacks have also been passed and the number of attacks have significantly decreased from around 40 to single digits per year.

United Nations Actions

The Commission on the Status of Women forty seventh session, which took place between March 3 through March 14, 2003, where they focused on “Women human rights and the elimination of all forms of violence against women and girls.” The United Nations Commission on the Status of Women’s fifty first session, which took place between 26 February through 9 March 2007, was focused around “The elimination of all forms of discrimination and violence against the girl child.” The fifty first session addressed violence against women as an emerging issue on the global stage.

The United Nations Commission on the Status of Women has passed a handful of resolutions addressing harmful practices against women.

Resolution 51/2 of 2007 addressed ending female genital mutilations. This resolution calls for a series of actions including, urging states to protect girls and women from female genital mutilations, to allocate resources to eliminate female genital mutilations.

Resolution 51/3 of 2007 addresses forced child marriages. In this resolution the Commission on the Status of Women called for states to enact legislation to make marriages be by two people with consent on both sides, develop a support system to ensure girls’ human rights are not violated by forced marriages

Resolution 52/2 of 2008 addressed ending female genital mutilation. This resolution urges states to pass and enforce legislation to prevent female genital mutilation, to review school curriculum for a zero tolerance for violence against women specifically female genital mutilations. The resolution also calls for states to develop a way to record all data of violence against women.

Resolution 54/7 of 2010 addressed ending female genital mutilation. The resolution calls for a variety of steps be taken including having states to prevent and eliminate female genital mutilations, condemns all harmful practices against women and urges states to develop support systems for women and girls who have fallen victim to genital mutilations.

Conclusion

Traditional Harmful Practices against women and girls occur in various forms across the international community. The World Health Organization, Acid Survivors Trust International, UNFPA, UNICEF United Nations Population Fund, United Nations Children's Emergency Fund and other organizations report that hundreds of thousands women are victims to harmful practices each year, while even more go unreported. The United Nations along with other countries have started making efforts to help bring awareness and an end to harmful practices and encourage other countries in the international community to help bring awareness and an end to harmful practices.

Questions to consider

1. How has the international community responded to combat traditional harmful practices against women and how effective were they?
2. Which of the harmful practices are the most common in most regions of the world and what patterns, if any, have contributed to them?
3. In countries where laws have been passed to help bring an end to harmful practices, the laws are often not being enforced. How can the international community help enforce these laws to help bring an end to harmful practices?
4. Should all harmful practices be viewed the same penalty wise and how can we enforce them in countries that do not follow the United Nations?
5. Which of these harmful practices against women are the most common in your country and how can you help to bring an end to them?

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EXPANDING WOMEN'S ACCESS TO ECONOMIC & FINANCIAL RESOURCES

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In a *2009 World Survey on the Role of Women in Development*, the Department of Economic and Social Affairs addressed the theme, “Women’s control over economic resources and access to financial resources, including microfinance.”⁶ The World Survey set to clarify women’s access to economic and financial resources by stating, “The importance of examining women’s access to economic and financial resources in a broad sense, including resources generated at national level through budgets, trade, and development assistance; financial services such as savings, credit, remittance transfers and insurance; employment; land, property and other productive resources; and social protection.”⁷

The United Nations declared the year 2005 as the International Year of Microcredit. “At a time when the clamour for financial inclusion was gaining momentum, the declaration brought microfinance from the periphery of finance and offered an estimated 2.5 billion people an opportunity to “grow thriving businesses and, in turn, provide for their families, leading to strong and flourishing local economies.”⁸ According to an article written by a global non-profit, the Asia Society’s *Center for Global Education*, microfinance loans serve nearly 20 million people living in poverty worldwide. Seventy-four percent of these microfinance loan clients are women.⁹

Sustainable Development Goal Five

The United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development includes 17 goals adopted by all member countries to “to end poverty, protect the planet and improve the lives and

⁶ Zukang, “2009 World survey.”

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Njiraini, “Microfinance.”

⁹ Clydesdale and Shah, “The micro-mystique”

prospects of everyone, everywhere.” The 71st session of MUNFW’s focus on “Expanding Women’s Access to Economic & Financial Resources” ties directly to the UN’s Sustainable Development Goal 5: achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls.”¹⁰ The 2030 Agenda further expands on this goal, including a number of sub-goals.”

5.1 End all forms of discrimination against all women and girls everywhere¹¹

5.2 Eliminate all forms of violence against all women and girls in the public and private spheres, including trafficking and sexual and other types of exploitation¹²

5.3 Eliminate all harmful practices, such as child, early and forced marriage and female genital mutilation¹³

5.4 Recognize and value unpaid care and domestic work through the provision of public services, infrastructure and social protection policies and the promotion of shared responsibility within the household and the family as nationally appropriate¹⁴

5.5 Ensure women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making and political, economic, and public life¹⁵

5.6 Ensure universal access to sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights as agreed in accordance with the Program of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development in the Beijing Platform for Action and the outcome documents of their review conferences¹⁶

¹⁰UN General Assembly, “2030 Agenda.”

¹¹Ibid.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

5.a Undertake reforms to give women equal rights to economic resources, as well as access to ownership and control over land and other forms of property, financial services, inheritance, and natural resources, in accordance with national laws¹⁷

5.b Enhance the use of enabling technology, in particular information and communications technology, to promote the empowerment of women¹⁸

5.c Adopt and strengthen sound policies and enforceable legislation for the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls at all levels¹⁹

Macroeconomics and Women's Economic Empowerment

The *2009 World Survey on the Role of Women in Development* states that "macroeconomic policies have an impact on gender equality through markets and State interventions which distribute key economic and financial resources." For example, there is an unequal distribution of paid and unpaid work between genders, which can create issues for women to access economic opportunities. In order to tackle these inequalities, it is important to develop gender-responsive policies that take into account the "the distributional consequences of economic growth strategies and monetary, fiscal, trade and investment policies, as well as the specific constraints to women's economic empowerment."²⁰

To further address this vision of furthering women's economic empowerment, and with UN Women published a discussion paper in 2017 that highlighted five key components that restrict progress towards economic gender equality. These five key areas are

1. Narrow Definition of the Goals of Macroeconomic Policy²¹

¹⁷ UN General Assembly, "2030 Agenda."

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Zukang, "2009 World survey."

²¹ UN Women, "Macroeconomic and empowerment."

2. Gender Bias in Macroeconomic Analysis and Policy Making²²
3. Insufficient Focus on Employment Creation and Enhancement of Existing Livelihoods²³
4. Failure to Maximize Fiscal Space for Women's Economic Empowerment²⁴
5. Absence of Women's Collective Voice in Economic Decision-making²⁵

Access to Full Employment and Decent Work

While labor is the vast means for income, labor often creates a bridge between poor peoples earning wages. The share of employment has increased among women, labor intensive work still consists of poor pay and generally precarious conditions, which leaves women at a high disadvantage curating the major cause of poverty amongst women.²⁶ Achieving sustainable development for decent work is highlighted by the 2030 Agenda of Sustainable Development Goal 8 which aims to “promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all.”²⁷

Addressing single mothers and how they are particularly vulnerable to the crisis is imperative to reconciling access to full employment and decent work. Notably, part-time work may help to assist both women and men in aligning their work and family responsibilities. At the same time, part-time work, which is principally taken by women, can involve a wage-penalty and long-term impacts on pensions.²⁸

Addressing the constraints women face in the labor market requires a variety of interventions, including further development of women's potential to adapt to changing labor

²² UN Women, “Macroeconomic and empowerment.”

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Zukang, “2009 World survey.”

²⁷ UN General Assembly, “2030 Agenda.”

²⁸ Zukang, “2009 World survey.”

market conditions, support to minimize or eliminate unpaid work, gender-susceptible labor market regulations, and heightened response for collective action from responsible Members States, the private sector, and civil society.²⁹

Gender-neutral labor regulations can be instrumental in eliminating gender inequalities and discrimination, while ensuring access to decent work; preliminary, both can have unintended detrimental impacts. Gender-sensitive regulation that is properly enforced can protect vulnerable workers and help bridge the gap between gender inequalities. *The 2009 World Survey on the Role of Women in Development states*“ it is, however, increasingly difficult to ensure that all women benefit from labor market regulations because many women in developing countries work in the informal sector which remains beyond the reach of regulation.”³⁰

Access to Land, Housing and Other Productive Resources

On a global sphere, women continue to face discrimination in access to land, housing, property and other productive resources while maintaining limitations to technologies and services that could mitigate their work burdens. Unequal access to such resources limits women’s ability to ensure agricultural productivity, livelihood security, and food security – which is measurably linked to poverty, migration, urbanization, and increased risk of violence. Calling attention to the resource challenges women face in land, housing and other productive resources is imperative for addressing the short- and long-term crises of food and energy that climate change has created.

Access to Financial Resources

In 2007, approximately 154.8 million clients within informal financial institutions were reached, 106.6 million of whom were among the poorest when they took their first loan - 83.4

²⁹ Zukang, “2009 World survey.”

³⁰ Ibid.

percent were women.³¹ Microfinance allows women's access to economic and financial resources by successfully reaching poor women through innovative measures to address gender-specific constraints. There is a lack of consensus on the extent to which access to microfinance empowers women. While there is evidence that microfinance has a positive impact on income, there are limits to the income gains.³²

Social Protection

While efforts have improved for women in their security of livelihood various market fluctuations prove that markets can not be the sole reliance. These fluctuations have created uncertainty for women across the globe as many women are unable to insure themselves against contingencies arising from old age, ill-health, disability, unemployment and other life crises.³³ Often when job security is threatened, women resort to socially demeaning means of curating income such as domestic service and/or prostitution – inevitable exposing women to harmful risks.

A basic level of security for all individuals, especially women, should be part of the social contract between Member States and their citizens. While welfare regimes in developed countries may exist or be readily available, social protection towards formal employment for women in developing countries cease to exist.³⁴

³¹ Clydesdale and Shah, "The micro-mystique"

³² Saiesha, "How microfinance empowers women."

³³ Zukang, "2009 World survey."

³⁴ Antonopoulos, "Social protection for women."

Questions to Consider

1. How does decent work and economic growth work together?
2. Why is it important to emphasize women's economic empowerment?
3. What are the factors to be considered regarding women's economic development?
4. How do women's property rights matter for economic development?
5. How does gender affect a woman's financial stability?
6. How can social protection policies contribute to the promotion of gender equality?

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PARTICIPATION IN AND ACCESS OF WOMEN TO THE MEDIA, AND INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGIES

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The issue of women’s participation in and access to media and information and communication technology was one of the 12 critical areas of the Beijing Platform for Action, as well as a strategic objective. The Platform for Action drew attention to the global communication network, and its impact on private attitudes, behaviors, and public policies while calling for women’s empowerment through enhancement of their access, knowledge, skills, and use of information technologies. The Agreed Conclusions of the 47th session of the Commission on the Status of Women in 2003 declared that focusing on the “gender dimensions of information and communications technologies” was vital to combating and preventing the harmful impacts the digital revolution may have had on gender equality.³⁵ True then and today, media and information and communication technology (ICT) presents means for improving the advancement of gender equality and women’s empowerment; there is an increasingly greater need for efforts made by Member States, the United Nations, and other international organizations to increase women’s ability to access and participate in these areas of life, especially decision-making positions and processes that arise through ICTs.

United Nations Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 5’s purpose is to attain gender equality by 2030. This goal has several targets, including the elimination of violence, exploitation, and harmful practices against women and girls; access to sexual and reproductive healthcare; and providing women opportunities to participate in politics, economics, and public life. Sustainable Development Goal 5 also contains a target addressing inequality in access to

³⁵ Commission on the Status of Women, “Participation and Access of Women to the Media, and Information and Communications Technologies and Their Impact on and Use as an Instrument for the Advancement and Empowerment of Women Agreed Conclusions,” “PDF,” March 2003, 1.

information and communication technologies, SDG 5.b. This year's theme, "Because it's 2022: The empowerment of women and girls," provides us the opportunity to delve deeper into examining the gender inequality in women's access to and participation in both media and information and communication technologies, and how enhancing their ability to access and participate in these parts of public life boost their empowerment.

Beijing Platform For Action And Previous United Nations Actions

The Beijing Platform for Action emphasized the need for women's empowerment through the enhancement of their access, knowledge, skills, and use of information technologies. The Platform for Action stated actions taken by governments should:

Support women's education, training and employment to promote and ensure women's equal access to all areas and levels of the media (para. 239 (a)); . . . Promote women's full and equal participation in the media, including management, programming, education, training and research (para. (c)); . . . Encourage the development of educational and training programmes for women in order to produce information for the mass media, including funding of experimental efforts, and the use of the new technologies of communication, cybernetics space and satellite, whether public or private (para. (a)); . . . Encourage the participation of women in the development of professional guidelines and codes of conduct or other appropriate self-regulatory mechanisms to promote balanced and non-stereotyped portrayals of women by the media (para. 241 (d)). . . Train women to make greater use of information technology for communication and the media, including at the international level (para. 242 (b)).³⁶

³⁶ The Fourth World Conference on Women, "Fourth World Conference on WOMEN, BEIJING 1995," United Nations (United Nations, September 1995), <https://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/beijing/platform/media.htm>.

These clauses of the Platform for Action then inspired the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women and the General Assembly to tackle the issue.

The Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) issued two agreed conclusions regarding the issue of women's access to and participation in media and information and communication technology (ICT). At their 40th session, the CSW issued Agreed Conclusion 1996/2, concerning women and media. This conclusion emphasized the significance of supporting the equal participation of women "in all areas and all levels of media work, as well as in media advisory, regulatory and monitoring bodies; to strengthen the role of women in global communication networks; and to reduce barriers to women's involvement in information technology development."³⁷ The 47th session of the CSW also addressed the issue. The Commission agreed that it was necessary to focus on the "gender dimensions of information and communications technologies" because the digital revolution had the potential to harm progress made on gender equality.³⁸

The General Assembly of the United Nations discussed the issue at its 23rd special session in June 2000 while reviewing progress made on the Platform for Action. The session acknowledged the increased opportunities for women to add to knowledge-sharing, networking, and e-commerce generated by ICT³⁹. It also indicated there were limitations to these opportunities, such as poverty, illiteracy, lack of access, computer illiteracy, and language barriers, that have prevented women from using these technologies, like the Internet. During the session, the General Assembly suggested several actions could be taken to assure women would benefit from ICT pertaining to education, training and entrepreneurship opportunities, and

³⁷ Commission on the Status of Women, "Participation in and Access of Women to the Media, and Information and Communication Technologies and Their Impact on and Use as an Instrument for the Advancement and Empowerment of Women Report of the Secretary-General," 4.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 1.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 4.

equal access as producers and consumers of technology through public and private partnerships.⁴⁰

When discussing women's participation in and access to media and information and communication technologies, it is important to consider the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the United Nations. While many of the seventeen goals and their targets are indirectly related to this issue, only one of the goal's targets addresses it directly. SDG 5 addresses the issue of gender equality, and the target of SDG 5.b is to, "[e]nhance the use of enabling technology, in particular information and communications technology, to promote the empowerment of women."⁴¹ The indicator for this target is determined by examining the share of individuals, by sex, who own a mobile telephone.⁴²

In 2020, the United Nations Statistical Commission issued a report reviewing the progress of both Member States and the United Nations in regards to gender equality. The report declared that:

The Advisory Group on Gender Indicators (chaired by Jordan) will revisit the 80 Sustainable Development Goal indicators previously identified by the Group as gender-relevant and the 54 indicators prioritized by UN-Women, following potential changes that could result from the 2020 comprehensive review of the Sustainable Development Goals. Once agreed, the list of gender-relevant Sustainable Development Goal indicators will be officially submitted by the Group's co-chairs (Finland and Japan) to the Inter-Agency and Expert Group on Sustainable Development Goal Indicators to contribute to its work stream on data disaggregation.⁴³

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ "Goal 5 | Department of Economic and Social Affairs," United Nations (United Nations), accessed July 26, 2021, <https://sdgs.un.org/goals/goal5>.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Statistical Commission, "PDF," March 2020.

This review will include reexamining the targets and indicators associated with the issue of women's participation in and access to media and information and communications technology.

The Disparities In Access To Information And Communication Technologies

Despite the overwhelming growth in technology and expansion of the Internet, there is still a significant disparity in ICT participation and access between developed and developing states and gender. On the progress of achieving SDG 5.b, the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs reported in 2021 that “in the 66 countries and territories with data for 2017 to 2019, mobile phone ownership among women was on average 8.5 percentage point lower than for men.”⁴⁴ A 2021 report from the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) found that over half the global population does not have Internet access.⁴⁵ The ITU stated that:

The digital gender gap continues expanding in many developing countries, creating a specific need to support digital gender equality. Globally, women and girls use the Internet 12.5 per cent less than men and boys. Only 15 percent of women in Least Developed Countries (LDCs) used the Internet in 2019, compared to 86 per cent in the developed world.⁴⁶

The disparity between both the developed and developing world and gender will result in billions of people being left out of the growing technology industry, higher education, and numerous other opportunities ICT offers the world. In May of 2021, BBC NEWS reported that “[t]he

⁴⁴ “Goal 5 | Department of Economic and Social Affairs,” United Nations (United Nations), accessed July 26, 2021, <https://sdgs.un.org/goals/goal5>.

⁴⁵ “Bridging the Gender Divide,” ITU, accessed July 31, 2021, <https://www.itu.int/en/mediacentre/backgrounders/Pages/bridging-the-gender-divide.aspx>.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

so-called digital gender gap is most noticeable in Africa, where the ITU estimates that 37% of men have internet access but only 20% of women."⁴⁷

Information and communication technologies offer not only access to unlimited information via the Internet but also numerous educational and economic opportunities for women. Europe is seeing a rise in its technology industries and higher education. However, a 2020 report from the European Parliament discovered of the roughly 1.3 million people studying ICTs within the European countries from 2018 Eurostat data, "girls and women were largely in a minority, accounting for only 17 % of all ICT students in the EU."⁴⁸ The gender disparity was found not only in higher education but also among adolescents. It was reported that:

73 % of boys aged between 15 and 16 feel comfortable using digital devices that they are less familiar with, compared with 63 % of girls in the same age bracket who are less confident, despite the fact that they possess the skills to outperform boys in digital literacy; whereas gender stereotypes greatly influence subject choices; whereas very few teenage girls in EU Member States (less than 3 %) express an interest in working as an ICT professional at the age of 30; whereas teachers and parents can deepen gender stereotypes by discouraging girls from pursuing a career in ICT; whereas eliminating gender-specific expectations about professions and fostering female role models in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) and ICT can encourage girls to study ICT⁴⁹.

⁴⁷ James FitzGerald, "The Women Fighting for Digital Equality," BBC News (BBC, May 21, 2021), <https://www.bbc.com/news/technology-57193791>.

⁴⁸ Maria da Graça Carvalho, "Report on Closing the Digital Gender Gap: Women's Participation in the Digital Economy," [europarl.europa.eu](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/A-9-2020-0232_EN.html) (European Parliament, December 2, 2020), https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/A-9-2020-0232_EN.html.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

As more jobs will require digital literacy and some form of e-skills,⁵⁰ there will be a greater need to encourage and empower women and girls to enter into ICT programs and STEM fields. The European Parliament's 2020 "Report on Closing the Digital Gender Gap: Women's Participation in the Digital Economy," found there was a decreasing trend in women entering into ICT programs for higher education, and women only account for 22% of AI professionals across the globe.⁵¹

Women's Access And Participation In Media

Media has greatly impacted women, whether it be through print, radio, television, film, or social media. As media continues to grow, the need for women to participate in and have access to decision-making regarding media becomes more necessary. The majority of today's media portrayals of women lack "gender sensitivity,"⁵² resulting in stereotypical and negative depictions of half the global population. According to "Role of media in accelerating women empowerment" by Ananta Narayana and Tauffiqu Ahamad, this reaffirms that "women's traditional roles can be equally limiting."⁵³ The lack of gender sensitivity in media limits the scope of women's empowerment through the media; if women are only depicted filling traditional gender roles, then society will limit the ability of women to challenge their traditional gender roles, such as seeking higher education, working in certain fields, and participating in politics. Narayana and Ahmad assert the need for women to have access to decision-making in media to counteract the destructive media portrayals of women globally.⁵⁴

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ananta Narayana and Tauffiqu Ahamad, "(Pdf) Role of Media in Accelerating Women Empowerment," ResearchGate (International Journal of Advanced Education and Research , February 1, 2016), https://www.researchgate.net/publication/303998838_Role_of_media_in_accelerating_women_empowerment, 16.

⁵³ Ibid, 17.

⁵⁴ Ibid, 16-19.

The lack of gender sensitivity and sexism in media impacts women not only socially but also politically. According to “The effect of media sexism on women’s political ambition: evidence from a worldwide study” by Amanda Haraldsson and Lena Wängnerud, there is evidence of a significant relationship between sexism in media and the ratio of parliamentary candidates that are women.⁵⁵ They report data from the Global Media Monitoring Project, which found that “the higher the level of media sexism, the lower the share of women candidates.”⁵⁶ Haraldsson and Wängnerud define media sexism as:

the (re)production of societal sexism through under- and misrepresentation of women in media, leading to a false portrayal of society through a gendered lens. Media sexism both reflects sexism in society (media reproducing sexism) and portrays a more gender-segregated picture than reality (media producing sexism), such that media is a good measure of societal sexism but also makes society more sexist than it would be otherwise.⁵⁷

The misrepresentation of women in the media decreases the likelihood for them to have political ambitions. The treatment of women candidates in the media is not equal to that of their male counterparts; their competency, qualifications, chances of winning, and potential influence are often questioned.⁵⁸ The consequences of media sexism and gendered reporting during campaigns are a lack of focus on women’s political agendas except for women’s issues, less overall coverage than their male counterparts, a concentration on their appearances and

⁵⁵ Amanda Haraldsson and Lena Wängnerud, “The Effect of Media Sexism on Women’s Political Ambition: Evidence from a Worldwide Study,” Taylor & Francis (Feminist Media Studies, March 4, 2015), <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/14680777.2018.1468797>.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

families.⁵⁹ The bias against women results in women being dissuaded from entering into politics and a lack of women politicians.

Looking Forward

The media is riddled with a lack of gender sensitivity and sexism. While there are still increasing inequalities in information and communication technology, the international community has historically taken steps to attempt to reduce the gaps. As we draw closer to 2030, the need to address and meet the targets of the 2030 Agenda and Sustainable Development Goals becomes greater.

The ever-expanding technology sector supplies a multitude of opportunities for women to learn, access information, own technologies like mobile phones, and participate in knowledge-sharing. However, despite all of the progress the world is making, women are 8.5% less likely to own a mobile phone than men.⁶⁰ Internet usage is also, on average, 12.5% less among women and girls in comparison to men and boys.⁶¹ In the future, it is expected 90% of jobs will require some degree of digital literacy and e-skills,⁶² but girls between the ages of 15 and 16 feel 10% less confident in using technology they are not familiar with and less than 3% showed an interest in ICT programs and career fields.⁶³

Women are missing from decision-making positions regarding both ICT and media, which has exacerbated traditional gender stereotyping, a lack of gender sensitivity in media, and media sexism. This impacts not only societal views towards women but their political ambitions and aspirations as well. The media's treatment of women candidates is not equal to that of men. Women running for political offices often have their qualifications, potential influence, chances

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ "Goal 5 | Department of Economic and Social Affairs."

⁶¹ "Bridging the Gender Divide."

⁶² Maria da Graça Carvalho.

⁶³ Ibid.

of winning, and competency called into question.⁶⁴ Media sexism has resulted in women's campaigns having less overall coverage than men's, a lack of focus on women's political agendas except for women's issues, and a concentration on their appearances and families.⁶⁵

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. How does unequal access to media and information and communication technology, particularly for women and girls, affect your state? What measures could your state take to help states more affected?
2. Are there gender gaps in the field of information and communication technology in your state? What steps has your state taken to reduce them?
3. What has your state done to help with the promotion of the status of women within its territory? What about around the world?
4. Have the international responses been effective in combating the issue of media and information and communication technology inequality? Why or why not?
5. Are there any kinds of political, economic, and security conditions necessary to ensure that participation in and access to information and communication technology are available to women in your state?
6. How can efforts be accelerated to achieve the goal of gender equality by 2030?

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⁶⁵ Ibid.

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