THE 71ST SESSION OF MODEL UNITED NATIONS OF THE FAR WEST

GENERAL ASSEMBLY ISSUES BOOK

1.   Women and Sustainable Development
2.   Promoting Women's Political Leadership

The General Assembly is one of the six principal organs of the united nations and was established in 1945 under the Charter of the United Nations. The Assembly consists of all UN Member States and may discuss any questions or matters within the scope of the Charter or relating to the powers and functions of any organ provided for in the Charter. It may make recommendations to UN members or the Security Council or both on any such questions or matters, except disputes or situations in respect of which the Security Council is currently exercising its functions. (UN Handbook, 2017-18)

At Model United Nations of the Far West, the General Assembly considers two agenda items and also engages in a Special Session, the theme of which is determined by the President of the General Assembly. The title of this session is introduced in the weeks leading up to conference and tests delegates' ability to work on the basis on consensus. In addition to drafting and voting on its own resolutions, the General Assembly votes to approve the outcome documents of its subcommittees at the Closing Plenary Session on the final day of conference.

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WOMEN AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

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MUNFW 71st Session - General Assembly

The United Nations (UN) acknowledged and supported women's rights within Article 1 of their founding charter, which was signed in 1945. The next year, the Commission on the Status of Women was established. In 2010, a new body (UN Women) focusing on gender equality and women's empowerment was created, which strengthened and combined the UN's efforts in these fields.[1]

With the 2030 Agenda and the accompanying 17 sustainable development goals (SDGs), the focus of the UN's work was put towards sustainable development, which was defined as *"development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs".*[2] Sustainable development comprises three core elements: economic growth, social inclusion and environmental protection. Women and girls are an integral component of achieving these goals, as they *"represent half of the world's population and therefore half of its potential*".[3] An example of this potential was visible during the COVID-19 pandemic. During the crisis, countries led by women fared comparatively better than countries led by men. Women employed a more collective than individual approach and were able to communicate fact-based public health information in an effective and compassionate manner. Overall, female-led countries observed lower COVID-19 death rates and were commended for their successes.[4]

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[1] United Nations, "Gender Equality," Global Issues, accessed August 7, 2021, https://www.un.org/en/global-issues/gender-equality.

[2] United Nations, "The Sustainable Development Agenda," Sustainable Development Goals, accessed August 9, 2021, https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/development-agenda/.

[3] United Nations, "Gender Equality."

[4] UN Women, "COVID-19 and Women's Leadership: From an Effective Response to Building Back Better," 2020,https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2020/06/policy-brief-covid-19-and-womens-leadership.

In contrast to the valuable role women play on the global political stage as well as in local communities, they are still discriminated against and see their rights violated. In 49 countries, there is no legal protection from domestic violence. In 39 countries, daughters and sons do not have equal rights; and in 18 countries, husbands can legally prevent their wives from working. Women only represent 13% of the world's agricultural land holders and are underrepresented in managerial positions. Compared to men, they spend more time on unpaid domestic and care work. Besides the socio-cultural impacts, all these factors hinder women from earning an individual income, contributing to a country's gross domestic product (GDP), and from sharing their potential with their community.[5]

Sustainable Development Goal 5: Gender Equality

In 2015, the UN decided on 17 goals for sustainable development (SDGs).[6] Goal 5 was exclusively dedicated to gender equality. The following 9 targets were decided on to achieve gender equality:

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

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 exploitation

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

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[5] UN Women, "Turning Promises into Action: Gender Equality in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development," 2018, https://www.unwomen.org/-/media/headquarters/attachments/sections/library/publications/2018/sdg-report-gender-equality-in-the-2030-agenda-for-sustainable-development-2018-en.pdf?la=en&vs=4332; UN Women, "COVID-19 and Women's Leadership: From an Effective Response to Building Back Better."
[6] United Nations, "The Sustainable Development Agenda."

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 appropriate

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

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

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 laws

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

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 levels.[7]

The UN regularly reports on these targets to inform the public and the member states about positive and negative developments. The 2021 report shows that violence against women remains at a high level.[8] Nearly one in three women has suffered from violence at least once since the age of 15. The threat of domestic violence is expected to grow during the COVID-19

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[7] United Nations, "Goal 5: Achieve Gender Equality and Empower All Women and Girls," Sustainable Development Goals, accessed August 7, 2021, https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/gender-equality/.
[8] United Nations. Department of Economic and Social Affairs, "The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2021," 2021, https://doi.org/10.29171/azu_acku_pamphlet_k3240_s878_2016.

pandemic. Also, child marriages are expected to become more common again, due to economic unrest and school closures.

Little progress has been made on women's equal participation in decision-making. On a global average, women only hold 25.6 percent of seats in national parliaments. Mostly by use of quotas, 23 countries have achieved a female representation of 40 percent in their national parliaments. Women are also underrepresented in managerial positions (in 2019, 28.2 percent of managerial positions were held by women), although they make up 39 percent of the global workforce. Besides being part of the global workforce, women are also highly engaged in unpaid domestic and care work, where they spend about 2.5 times as many hours as men. Due to the pandemic, the amount of time women have spent on childcare has increased from 26 to 31 hours per week. This increase in time allotted to unpaid work may threaten their ability to work in paid jobs. Consequently, a decline in women's labor force participation has already been observed in Brazil, Chile, Costa Rica and Mexico.[9]

The SDG indicators from a gender equality perspective

In order to measure the goals' successes transparently, 232 indicators were added to the SDGs in 2017.[10] Forty of these indicators are gender-specific and are allocated to goals other than SDG 5. For example, the maternal mortality rate (indicator 3.1.1) and the adolescent birth rate (3.7.2) are gender specific indicators within SDG 3 (Good health and Well being). Another example are selected indicators for SDG 16 (peace, justice and strong institutions), e.g., sexual violence against girls (indicator 16.2.3) and women in public institutions (indicator 16.7.1).

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[9] United Nations. Department of Economic and Social Affairs.
[10] United Nations, "The Sustainable Development Agenda."

However, all SDGs and their indicators can and should be viewed from a gender perspective, since all goals are interwoven with women's lives and experiences.[11]

SDG 6 (clean water and sanitation) doesn't have a gender-specific indicator. However, the accessibility of clean water and sanitary facilities has a big impact on girls' lives, since they rely on access to these facilities in order to manage their periods safely and with dignity. One in four girls in Nigeria reported that she has missed school due to menstruation. Similar numbers were reported from Côte d'Ivoire (1 in 5) and Burkina Faso (1 in 7). Hence, girls' needs should be prioritized when planning sanitation and hygienic services in schools in order to give them the opportunity to get an uninterrupted education.[12]

A closer look at SDG 7 (Affordable and clean energy) demonstrates how the lack of clean energy resources impacts women's and girls' health. As women and girls perform considerably more domestic work, e.g., cooking, they are often exposed to toxic fumes from burning coal or biomass. This exposure to harmful household air pollution has led to 1.8 million premature deaths of women, mainly in Eastern and South-Eastern Asia, Central and Southern Asia and sub-Saharan Africa. Providing families and communities with clean energy resources could therefore reduce the number of premature deaths and chronic diseases attributed to hazardous fuels.[13]

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[11] UN Women, "Progress on the Sustainable Development Goals: The Gender Snapshot 2020," 2020, https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2020/09/progress-on-the-sustainable-development-goals-the-gender-snapshot-2020.
[12] UN Women.
[13] Ibid.

Climate change

In recent decades, changes in weather patterns and catastrophes such as floods have started to transform landscapes and thus endangered the livelihoods of many regional communities.[14] These meteorological phenomena can be attributed to climate change and affect every region in the world.[15] Communities in the rural Global South are more threatened by these extremes, however, since they depend on agriculture, have fewer natural and economic resources, and weak social services.[16] Confronting these challenges requires high levels of resiliency and flexibility from communities, especially from women, as they are known to perform more climate-sensitive activities, such as water and fuelwood collection.[17] Their livelihoods often depend on agriculture and livestock, which makes them dependent on stable weather conditions.[18] During droughts, for example, women have to spend more time acquiring water, which leaves them with less time for education or income-generating activities.[19]

Overall, women are more vulnerable to climate change.[20] Hence, taking action on climate change, as called for in SDG 13, with the aim to reduce or prevent further changes in weather patterns and catastrophes, would benefit women directly on many levels.[21]

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[14] Julie Drolet et al., "Women Rebuilding Lives Post-Disaster: Innovative Community Practices for Building Resilience and Promoting Sustainable Development," Gender and Development 23, no. 3 (2015): 433–48, https://doi.org/10.1080/13552074.2015.1096040.
[15] Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, "Global Warming of 1.5 °C" (Geneva, Switzerland, 2018), https://www.ipcc.ch/site/assets/uploads/sites/2/2019/06/SR15_Full_Report_Low_Res.pdf.
[16] Nicholas Stern, The Economics of Climate Change (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge Uiversity Press, 2007).
[17] Lykke E. Andersen, Dorte Verner, and Manfred Wiebelt, "Gender and Climate Change in Latin America: An Analysis of Vulnerability, Adaptation and Resilience Based on Household Surveys," Journal of International Development 29, no. 7 (2017): 857–76, https://doi.org/10.1002/jid.3259.
[18] Elena Belcore, Alessandro Pezzoli, and Angela Calvo, "Analysis of Gender Vulnerability to Climate-Related Hazards in a Rural Area of Ethiopia," Geographical Journal 186, no. 2 (2020): 156–70, https://doi.org/10.1111/geoj.12321.
[19] Emmeline Skinner, "Gender and Climate Change: Overview Report. BRIDGE Cutting Edge Pack on Gender and Climate Change" (Brighton, 2011), https://gsdrc.org/document-library/gender-and-climate-change-overview-report/.
[20] Belcore, Pezzoli, and Calvo, "Analysis of Gender Vulnerability to Climate-Related Hazards in a Rural Area of Ethiopia."
[21] UN Women, "Progress on the Sustainable Development Goals: The Gender Snapshot 2020."

Women and health

Regarding health, women carry several different burdens. They are the backbone of the world's health systems, either as unpaid primary caregivers in their homes, community health care workers in remote areas, or as health care workers in hospitals or other formal settings.[22] Here, they are often underpaid and tend to fill lower-skilled jobs than men.[23] Even though most health care providers in the world are women,[24] they are underrepresented in managerial positions in global health.[25] At the same time, women are consumers of healthcare and rely on medical help, for example during child birth. Women in developing countries are often cared for, however, by community health workers, traditional birth attendants or untrained relatives.[26] By supporting and training these caregivers maternal and perinatal morbidity and mortality could be reduced effectively.

Another important aspect at the intersection of women and girls, health and sustainable development is reproductive health. By giving women the opportunity to control their fertility, women's autonomy and access to education and employment could be increased.[27] In addition,

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[22] Ana Langer et al., "Women and Health: The Key for Sustainable Development," The Lancet 386, no. 9999 (2015): 1165–1210, https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(15)60497-4.

[23] A. George, "Human Resources for Health: A Gender Analysis. Paper Commissioned by the Women and Gender Equity Knowledge Network" (Geneva, Switzerland, 2007), https://www.who.int/social_determinants/resources/human_resources_for_health_wgkn_2007.pdf.

[24] A George, "Nurses, Community Health Workers, and Home Carers: Gendered Human Resources Compensating for Skewed Health Systems," Global Public Health 3, no. sup1 (April 2008): 75–89, https://doi.org/10.1080/17441690801892240.

[25] Jennifer A Downs et al., "Increasing Women in Leadership in Global Health," Academic Medicine 89, no. 8 (2014), https://journals.lww.com/academicmedicine/Fulltext/2014/08000/Increasing_Women_in_Leadership_in_Global_Health.11.aspx.

[26] Lale Say and Rosalind Raine, "A Systematic Review of Inequalities in the Use of Maternal Health Care in Developing Countries: Examining the Scale of the Problem and the Importance of Context," Bulletin of the World Health Organization 85, no. 10 (October 2007): 812–19, https://doi.org/10.2471/blt.06.035659.

[27] Gita Sen, "The World Programme of Action: A New Paradigm for Population Policy," Environment: Science and Policy for Sustainable Development 37, no. 1 (February 1, 1995): 10–37, https://doi.org/10.1080/00139157.1995.9929209; UNFPA, "By Choice, Not by Chance: Family Planning, Human Rights and Development" (New York, 2012), https://guinea-bissau.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/EN_SWOP2012_Report_1.pdf.

appropriate birth rates for societies could reduce population growth and lead to changed consumption patterns and more environmental conservation due to a lessened strain on natural resources.[28] Smaller family sizes also provide women with the opportunity to participate in the workforce, which in turn increases the family income and benefits countries' economies.[29]

Acknowledging women's dual burden as both consumers and providers of health care as well as recognizing the importance of empowerment, education and access to reproductive health is an important example for sustainable development.[30]

Women in the workforce

While men hold the majority of jobs in the manufacturing industry, women in this industry are more likely to be employed in vulnerable jobs (e.g., self-employed or as a contributing family member).[31] This was observed in 26 out of 33 countries with available data; in 21 countries, the share was more than half. Furthermore, these jobs lacked appropriate working conditions and social protection. SDG 9 (Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure) promotes inclusive and sustainable industrialization, yet export-oriented industrialization strategies left women behind. In Asia and Latin America, for example, women's low wages enabled companies to become internationally competitive.[32] Recently, many developing countries were able to expand their service sector, but well-paid jobs in research and innovation remain dominated by men, while many women are stuck in informal work.[33]

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[28] Partha S. Dasgupta and Paul R. Ehrlich, "Pervasive Externalities at the Population, Consumption, and Environment Nexus," Science 340, no. 6130 (2013): 324–28, https://doi.org/10.1126/science.1224664.
[29] UNFPA, "By Choice, Not by Chance: Family Planning, Human Rights and Development"; Richard N. Cooper et al., The Demographic Dividend: A New Perspective on the Economic Consequences of Population Change, Foreign Affairs, vol. 82, 2003, https://doi.org/10.2307/20033592.
[30] Langer et al., "Women and Health: The Key for Sustainable Development."
[31] UN Women, "Progress on the Sustainable Development Goals: The Gender Snapshot 2020."
[32] UN Women, "World Survey on the Role of Women in Development 1999," 1999, https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/1999/1/1999-world-survey-on-the-role-of-women-in-development-globalization-gender-and-work.
[33] UN Women, "Turning Promises into Action: Gender Equality in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development."

Globally, however, patterns of informal work are slowly changing. Declines in unprotected or informal work are seen as progress. In Ecuador and Ethiopia, the rate of women working in unprotected employment has declined faster than the men's rate. In Mali, India and Cameroon, where 90 percent of workers work in unprotected work, the rates have changed very little.[34] Since the 2008/2009 Great Recession, informal employment has become more common in developed regions as well. In these countries, informal employment is characterized by temporary, on-call arrangements, or own-account work, whereby workers often don't enjoy the same benefits and stability as regularly employed workers. In OECD countries, women now make up two thirds of employees on involuntary temporary contracts.[35]

Besides inclusive and sustainable industrialization, SDG 9 also aims to foster innovation. Still, in most countries, women are underrepresented in research. Ratios of male to female researchers vary, with Thailand (56 percent) and Venezuela (55 percent) having the highest rates and countries such as Nepal and Togo (10 percent) with the lowest rates.[36] On a regional level, the highest rates of female researchers are observed in Australia and New Zealand (52 percent) and Latin America and the Caribbean (47 percent).

Conclusion

Underrepresentation in research and overrepresentation in vulnerable, informal work exemplifies both the loss of potential and the harm women are subjected to. In order to achieve sustainable development, there is a need to find solutions to issues such as climate change and transforming habitats. Therefore, the global community can not afford to forgo half the world's potential. At the same time, wins in economic development should not be made by exploiting

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[34] UN Women, "Progress of the World's Women 2015-2016" (United Nations, 2015), https://progress.unwomen.org/en/2015/pdf/UNW_progressreport.pdf.
[35] UN Women.
[36] UN Women, "Turning Promises into Action: Gender Equality in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development."

women's work and should benefit women as well. Otherwise, these gains are not sustainable. Women are both enablers and beneficiaries of sustainable development, and all member states should work together closely to enable and empower women to fill these roles.

Although the goals are clearly defined, the abundance of issues and complexity of women's roles in sustainable development create a challenging environment for finding communal solutions. Hence, the global community should find effective ways to empower and enable women to reach their full potential and participate in economic development. This could be achieved by implementing gender-responsive financing, policies and programmes and gender-responsive processes and institutions in all regions of the world.

Questions to consider

1. What is the role of women's empowerment in sustainable development?
2. Have you observed setbacks in women's empowerment due to the COVID-19 pandemic? How can your country compensate for these negative developments?
3. What is your country's stance on quotas for women in public administration and government?
4. Do women in your country have unobstructed access to the labor market?
5. Is your country planning to implement the SDGs with special regard to gender-specific aspects?

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PROMOTING WOMEN'S POLITICAL LEADERSHIP

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In 1946, the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) was created with the goal of overcoming societal restraints to promote gender equality and empower women around the world. The role of the Commission was the following: "The functions of the Commission shall be to prepare recommendations and reports to the Economic and Social Council on promoting women's rights in political, economic, social, and educational fields. The Commission shall also make recommendations to the Council on urgent problems requiring immediate attention in the field of women's rights."[37]

Since the formation of the CSW, the United Nations has progressed by adopting a gender perspective when addressing issues faced by women and girls around the globe. The 1996 Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action gave the Commission a greater role in overseeing progress when it came to the UN's work regarding the empowerment of women.[38] Since this conference, the CSW has used a multi-year program to outline goals for the upcoming years. For the 2020-2024 period, themes include economic empowerment in the midst of climate change and disaster risk policies, empowering rural women and girls with the implementation of new technological advancements, and improving upon social protection systems and financial institutions with a gender focus.[39] For 2021, the Commission priority theme included the following: "Women's full and effective participation and decision-making in public life, as well as the elimination of violence, for achieving gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls. Review theme: Women's empowerment and the link to sustainable development."[40]

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[37] E/RES/11(II) - e - E/RES/11(II) -desktop. https://undocs.org/en/E/RES/11(II).
[38] "Commission on the Status of Women." UN Women. https://www.unwomen.org/en/csw.
[39] Ibid.
[40] "Commission on the Status of Women." UN Women. https://www.unwomen.org/en/csw.

When political processes have a lack of female representation, the empowerment of women and girls faces damaging side-effects.

The denial of proper education and healthcare for women and girls remains prevalent around the globe, with many women struggling from a lack of occupational opportunities and a disparaging wage gap. The effects of these gender limitations are evident regardless of country or socioeconomic class; however, rural women and girls in developing countries especially struggle to overcome societal barriers that prohibit women's empowerment. Many of these issues are brought on by the lack of women's representation in legislative structures around the globe.

As of January 15, 2021, women comprised only 25% of parliamentarians in all national legislative bodies. In only four countries do women make up at least half of representatives in legislative bodies, and currently, women are the Heads of State and Government for just 22 countries. An astounding 119 countries have never had a woman Head of Government.[41] In local governments, women account for 33.6% of all representatives. These political gender gaps are likely to persist until 2063, as the rate of women representatives is slowly increasing over time. However, this glacial pace of improvement, when it comes to women's political representation, has wide-reaching effects; policies that specifically target women are less likely to be remedied, meaning it is difficult to complete the other priority themes, such as economic empowerment and social protection systems, without first addressing the lack of women in government positions.

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[41] "Facts and Figures: Women's Leadership and Political Participation: What We Do." UN Women. https://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/leadership-and-political-participation/facts-and-figures.

Sustainable Development Goal Five

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development outlines 17 goals for addressing poverty-related issues in the context of economic struggles, inequality, and climate change. Sustainable Development Goal Five specifically addresses the inequalities faced by women and girls and emphasizes the importance of women's voices in decision-making. The following nine targets and indicators demonstrate what gender equality would look like by 2030:

5.1: End all forms of discrimination against all women and girls everywhere

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 exploitation

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

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 appropriate

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

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

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 laws

5.b: Enhance the use of enabling technology, in particular information and

communications technology, to promote the empowerment of women

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 levels[42]

Global Statuses of Women and Girls

Currently, there is not a single country that has complete gender equality. According to a

report released by the United Nations titled "The World's Women 2020: Trends and Statistics,"

fewer than 50% of working-aged women hold occupational positions, a figure made more

staggering by the unsavory impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic.[43] When it comes to household

labor, women contribute approximately three times as many hours every day completing

domestic work compared to men. In Northern Africa and Western Asia, this gap is even more

pronounced, with women spending seven times the number of hours on household labor

compared to men. With so many women required to engage in domestic chores, their role in the

labor market is severely compromised, as is their ability to engage in legislative processes. In a

subsection entitled "No Cracks in the Glass Ceiling," the UN reports, "In political life, while

women's representation in parliament has more than doubled globally, it has still not crossed the

barrier of 25% of parliamentary seats in 2020. Women's representation among cabinet ministers

has quadrupled over the last 25 years, yet remains well below parity at 22%."[44] It is difficult to

achieve progress in government with so few women involved in political life, a problem

exacerbated by the excessive amount of unpaid labor women are undertaking in their own

homes.

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[42] "Goal 5 | Department of Economic and Social Affairs." United Nations. https://sdgs.un.org/goals/goal5.
[43] "The World's Women 2020: Trends and Statistics." United Nations, United Nations, www.un.org/en/desa/world's-women-2020.
[44] Ibid.

Currently, only four countries have achieved 50% or higher women's representation in their national parliaments. These nations are Rwanda, Cuba, Bolivia, and the United Arab Emirates. Another 19 nations have reached at least 40%, with nine of these countries located in Europe. In the regions of North Africa, Western Asia, and Oceania, women make up less than 17% of the national parliaments. The Pacific Islands have the lowest female representation, with a mere 6% of women making up their legislative bodies.[45]

The gender gap in a nation's decision making can have severe consequences. Reports found that having more women in parliament allowed for greater communication between political parties during sessions. With more women in government, there was a focus on improvement for women's issues. In India, local councils led by women placed a higher emphasis on clean drinking water projects, and a higher representation of women in Norway's parliament led to more childcare coverage, allowing for more women to engage in the labor market.[46] Without proper political representation, there will be a continuation of limited progress for women in areas such as economic development, healthcare, and domestic work. Tracking the current disparities in women's political leadership around the world is important for specifying areas of the world where there needs to be a greater emphasis on women's empowerment and their role in government.

COVID-19 Impacts on Women

The pandemic has had wide-reaching effects in every country, particularly impacting at-risk women and girls. Numerous shutdowns around the world only added to limiting the economic progress and financial opportunities for women and girls. A byproduct of this was a halt in young girls' educations and fewer women engaging in workforce opportunities due to expectations that they would remain at home and attend to childcare and other responsibilities.

[45] "Facts and Figures: Women's Leadership and Political Participation: What We Do." UN Women. https://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/leadership-and-political-participation/facts-and-figures.
[46] Ibid.

In April 2020, the United Nations released a report addressing the negative impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on women. Aside from the economic impacts, there has also been an increase in domestic violence, as more women are stuck in abusive homes due to lockdowns. As more health services and resources are directed to mitigating the effects of the pandemic and treating COVID-19 patients, women's healthcare programs, including sexual and reproductive health services, are no longer as accessible.[47]

Cases of human trafficking have risen over the course of the pandemic, posing a threat to women's safety in many countrie. COVID-19 has limited the ability of non-governmental organizations and government authorities to do their job, and as travel was restricted around the globe, trafficking rings exploited modern technology and went farther underground.[48] Economic and social crises were exacerbated by the pandemic, prompting an increase in illegal crime. Due to the potential for spreading infections, "non-essential" investigations were shut down, limiting the ability of officials to help victims.[49] Although trafficking affects everyone, 71% of victims are women and girls.[50] As the main targets of trafficking operations, it is important that women be a part of the legislative process in protecting victims. Having women involved in the justice system and in the policy-making arena can promote the welfare of women around the world.

In order to correct the negative impact of COVID-19 on women's empowerment progress, the United Nations has outlined three priorities for promoting women's equality and initiating COVID-19 recovery. The first priority states the following: "Ensure Women's Equal Representation in all Covid-19 Response Planning and Decision Making. Evidence across

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[47] "Policy Brief: The Impact of Covid-19 on Women." United Nations. https://www.unwomen.org/-/media/headquarters/attachments/sections/library/publications/2020/policy-brief-the-impact-of-covid-19-on-women-en.pdf?la=en&vs=1406.
[48] "Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Trafficking in Persons." UNODC. https://www.unodc.org/documents/Advocacy-Section/HTMSS_Thematic_Brief_on_COVID-19.pdf.
[49] Ibid.
[50] "Report: Majority of Trafficking Victims Are Women and Girls; One-third Children – United Nations Sustainable Development." United Nations. https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/blog/2016/12/report-majority-of-trafficking-victims-are-women-and-girls-one-third-children/.

sectors, including economic planning and emergency response, demonstrates unquestioningly that policies that do not consult women or include them in decision-making are simply less effective, and can even do harm. Beyond individual women, women's organizations who are often on the front line of response in communities should also be represented and supported."[51] This priority directly correlates with the role of women in legislative bodies and is at the forefront of confronting inequality and aiding in COVID-19 recovery. The voice of women is integral when it comes to addressing education concerns, economic strains, unpaid domestic work, and healthcare issues because it is women who are primarily affected by these side-effects of the ongoing pandemic.

In a growing world filled with people of diverse backgrounds all facing unique struggles, governments cannot continue refusing to represent 50% of the population. Women need to be at the forefront of tackling not only issues related to their health but also justice, economic reform, education, and equal access to basic necessities. Men share a duty to assist in the empowerment of women as well; women's issues are human issues. An informed electorate of all genders must promote women's equality in government. Women and girls deserve opportunities to determine their own futures. To do so, they need to be involved in government decision making.

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[51] "Policy Brief: The Impact of Covid-19 on Women." United Nations. https://www.unwomen.org/-/media/headquarters/attachments/sections/library/publications/2020/policy-brief-the-impact-of-covid-19-on-women-en.pdf?la=en&vs=1406.

Questions to Consider

1. What is the impact of women's inequality in your country?

2. What steps has your state taken to reduce women's lack of legislative representation?

3. What approach is your country implementing to achieve the metrics outlined in Sustainable Development Goal Five?

4. How does your country plan to address the effects faced by women in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic?

5. What is the current status of women's legislative roles in your country?

6. How can more women in legislative positions improve conditions in your country?

7. How do economic opportunities and education impact women's ability to engage in government in your country?

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